

A report to the Gatsby Foundation

National Careers Service and Further Education co-
location research

June 2024

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Executive summary

The National Careers Service (NCS) provides independent information and advice through its website, telephone and webchat services, and delivery of face-to-face careers support for adults aged 19+. The government funded service is delivered through a network of prime and sub-contractor organisations across England. In Sir John Holman's recent recommendations for a strong, all age careers system the importance of strengthening relationships between adult careers advisers and local colleges was highlighted¹. Co-location of NCS face-to-face provision within Further Education (FE) colleges has been suggested as one potential approach to strengthening such relationships.

This qualitative research explored the extent and nature of NCS and FE college co-location across England, including the delivery models used and key benefits, challenges and enablers. Interviews with staff at 16 colleges and 5 NCS prime contractor organisations were completed between October 2023 and April 2024.

Extent of co-location

Of the 16 colleges that took part in the research, 11 had an NCS adviser or advisers co-located. There was no clustering around certain geographic areas evident and college co-location was a practice that all NCS prime contractors engaged in.

How co-location works

Most commonly, a college will work with an NCS prime contractor to facilitate an NCS careers adviser attending the college on a regular basis, such as one day per week. Nine examples of this delivery model were found. In contrast, there were two examples of colleges delivering NCS provision as a sub-contractor, with several NCS advisers employed full time by the college. Across both models, the support offered by NCS advisers typically involves 1:1 careers appointments but can also include the delivery of employability skills workshops.

Instances of co-location ranged from NCS advisers strongly embedded within the college, including colleges delivering as sub-contractors or those where NCS advisers visited multiple days per week, to those who attended fewer than one day a week. Within these examples, there was also a range in terms of whom the NCS advisers worked with, from targeted work with specific learner groups (such as ESOL students) to support offered to all adult learners, prospective learners and in some cases, other members of the public.

Benefits of co-location

For colleges, working with the NCS was commonly viewed as helping to fill gaps in capacity for meeting the careers support needs of adult learners. Colleges where NCS advisers work with prospective learners and other members of the public also tended to see the partnership as an opportunity to better fulfil their role in supporting the wider community.

Prime contractors saw working with colleges as an important avenue for reaching a wide group of people in need of careers advice. Their work with colleges is evidently part of an

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-system-letters-from-sir-john-holman-and-robert-halfon>

array of relationships formed with different organisations to deliver NCS support within their region, such as job centres, charities, libraries, local authorities, and training providers.

Enablers and challenges

The different delivery models of colleges and NCS contractor organisations create certain sticking points when attempting to work together to co-locate services. For example, the outcomes-based funding model of the NCS means that prime and sub-contractors must consider the risks of not engaging with sufficient volumes of customers or meeting and evidencing outcomes when deciding to dedicate resource towards working with a given college.

All interviewees stressed the importance of ensuring the partnership is mutually beneficial. It needs to add value for the college, whether through meeting the needs of learners or prospective learners and/or increasing the college's reach within the local community, as well as providing reliable delivery volumes for the NCS contractor to ensure financial viability. Similarly, the NCS adviser building relationships with the internal careers team and curriculum staff seems to facilitate the adviser having more opportunities to promote the service. This gives them greater capacity to influence delivery volumes, rather than relying heavily on the college to generate referrals.

Conclusions

This research suggests NCS and FE co-location is not a common practice, with the 11 instances found representing less than 10% of colleges in England. The examples identified through the research have enabled a typology of ways of working to be mapped, highlighting varied levels of engagement between NCS prime contractors and colleges and different groups supported.

The individuals benefiting from co-located NCS provision appear to be mostly existing learners of FE colleges, although colleges delivering NCS provision as sub-contractors tend to have a greater focus on the service reaching prospective learners or other members of the public. There are clearly challenges around aligning the different ways of working between NCS contractors and colleges. However, strong working relationships between NCS managers, advisers and college staff can help to ensure that partnerships are mutually beneficial for all involved.

1. Introduction

The National Careers Service (NCS) provides independent information and advice on careers, skills and the labour market through its website² and (for those aged 13+ in England) telephone and webchat support services. The NCS also provides face-to-face careers support for adults aged 19+, through a funded network of public, private and voluntary sector organisations. This network is made up of prime contractors for each of the 9 English regions, who deliver the service directly and through sub-contracted organisations such as local authorities, training providers, charities and community organisations.

A 2022 report from the Social Market Foundation found a lack of awareness of the NCS amongst adults taking part in the research³. A possible reason for this is that face-to-face NCS provision for adults is targeted at specific groups. The priority groups that NCS prime and sub-contractors are encouraged to target provision towards (as of June 2024) are:

- 18–24-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
- Low-skilled adults without a Level 3 qualification.
- Adults who have been unemployed for more than 12 months.
- Single parents with at least one dependent child living in the same household.
- Adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Adults aged 50 years and over who are unemployed or at demonstrable risk of unemployment.

Relatedly, a recent evidence review of adult careers guidance commissioned by Gatsby⁴ also suggested that there was a lack of consistency in the availability and quality of adult careers guidance across England.

Sir John Holman, in his role as the government's Independent Strategic Adviser on Careers Guidance, set out recommendations to government for a strong, all age careers system; the importance of strengthening relationships between adult careers advisers and local colleges was noted⁵. NCS co-location within Further Education (FE) colleges, that is, NCS advisers delivering face-to-face support on college campuses - is one potential approach to strengthening such relationships. A 2020 survey conducted by the Association of Colleges (AoC) asked colleges about this issue, finding that in 9 of the 47 colleges that responded, the NCS was co-located⁶.

² <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>

³ <https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fulfilling-its-potential-April-2022.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/career-guidance-for-adults.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-system-letters-from-sir-john-holman-and-robert-halfon>

⁶ <https://d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/AoC-Survey-on-Careers-Education-Information-Advice-and-Guidance-March-2020-Report-June-2020.pdf>

This exploratory research aimed to gather insight into the extent and nature of co-location across England, as part of a wider programme of research that Gatsby is conducting around how the adult careers guidance system can be improved and strengthened. Sitting below this wider aim were the following research questions:

- What is the extent of co-location of NCS provision happening within FE colleges across the UK?
- How is co-located provision organised – what delivery models are used and who is involved?
- What are the key enablers to co-locating provision?
- What are the key challenges/barriers to co-locating provision?
- What are the benefits of co-location?

1.1 Method

This was a qualitative study involving online interviews with staff at FE colleges and NCS prime contractors. Interviews took place between October 2023 and April 2024. Invitations to participate in the research were shared:

- With careers leaders at colleges identified through a review of college websites (further information below).
- With members of the National Association for Managers of Student Services.
- Through the NCS prime contractor monthly bulletin.

In addition, interviewees from colleges where co-location was taking place made introductions, via email, to relevant staff at the NCS prime contractor with which they were working.

To recruit colleges to participate in the research, an initial review of websites was completed to identify colleges that may be working in partnership with the NCS. Using the Association of Colleges' list of general FE colleges in England, the careers advice, information and guidance webpages of 164 colleges were reviewed. Any references to NCS were noted in a database. Colleges where the careers webpage signposted to in-person, webchat or telephone NCS support or referenced NCS services being offered at the college or a partnership with the NCS, were invited to participate in the research via an email sent to the college careers leader. A total of 21 colleges were identified this way, with careers leaders at 9 of these colleges agreeing to take part. The remaining 7 colleges that took part in the research were reached via the National Association for Managers of Student Services.

A total of 27 interviews were completed with staff at 16 colleges and 5 prime contractor organisations. Table 1.1 shows the types of organisations that took part in the research.

Table 1.1: Organisations participating in the research

Organisation type	Number
Colleges delivering a NCS contract	2
Colleges working with a NCS provider	9
Colleges that have considered working with an NCS provider or worked with one in the past	5
NCS providers (prime or sub-contractors)	5
Total	21

Source: York Consulting fieldwork data 2024

At colleges, the staff member interviewed was typically the careers leader or careers and employability manager. For the prime contractors, a mixture of NCS careers advisers as well as area and regional managers were interviewed. The fieldwork included prime contractors and colleges within 8 out of the 9 English regions.

The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- Extent of co-location in England, including findings from the website review and geographic spread of co-location examples found.
- How co-location works; delivery models, dimensions of engagement between NCS contractors and colleges and who is supported and how.
- Challenges and enablers of co-location.
- Benefits of co-location.
- Case studies of five colleges: Leeds City College, Leicester College, City of Bristol College, Middlesbrough College and Coventry College.
- Conclusions.

2. Extent of co-location

The review of college careers websites aimed to provide an initial indication of where partnerships between NCS contractors and FE colleges may exist, whilst the interviews with colleges and prime contractors sought to generate more robust evidence of where co-location was happening.

As shown in Table 2.1, over half (51%) of college careers webpages made no mention of NCS, whether that be the website, phone or webchat service, or in-person provision, and 36% signposted to the NCS website only. Of the remaining colleges, 13 (7%) referenced either in-person NCS support, NCS services being offered at the college or a partnership with the NCS, indicating possible co-location. These colleges, along with those signposting to the NCS phone or webchat service, were invited to participate in the research via an email sent to the college careers leader.

Table 2.1: References to NCS on college careers webpages

Reference to NCS	Number	%
No mention of NCS	84	51%
Signposts to NCS website only	59	36%
Signposts to NCS support – phone or webchat only	8	5%
NCS support offered at college	7	4%
Signposts to NCS support – in person	4	2%
Mentions partnership with NCS (no further info)	2	1%

Source: YCL review of college websites November 2023

It is worth noting that the website review was primarily conducted as part of the research sampling strategy. Whilst it does give an indication of where colleges may be working with NCS contractors, the findings may not provide an accurate picture of how colleges promote the NCS website and services for the following reasons:

- Only public facing college websites were reviewed, meaning college intranets or internal communication channels were not included.
- Not all colleges that work with NCS contractors will have information about this on their website (this was the case for some of the colleges that took part in the research).
- Information on college websites may be out of date.

Through interviews with college staff and prime contractors who responded to the invitation to participate in the research, **11 examples of NCS and FE co-location were identified.** Because only a sub-section of colleges was invited to participate, and because not all those invited responded, this is not a comprehensive view of all instances of co-location. However, having spoken to the prime contractors for 8 out of the 9 English regions, we are confident that we have captured most instances.

Additionally, this figure does not present a full picture of all instances of partnership working between colleges and NCS providers. In some regions, NCS contractors mentioned working

with colleges to provide ad hoc support through employability skills workshops, but we have not classed these as instances of co-location.

Of the 11 instances of co-location found, there is no clustering around certain geographic areas evident and college co-location was a practice common to all the prime contractors.

3. How co-location works

Across the 11 instances of co-location explored through this research, two main delivery models are used:

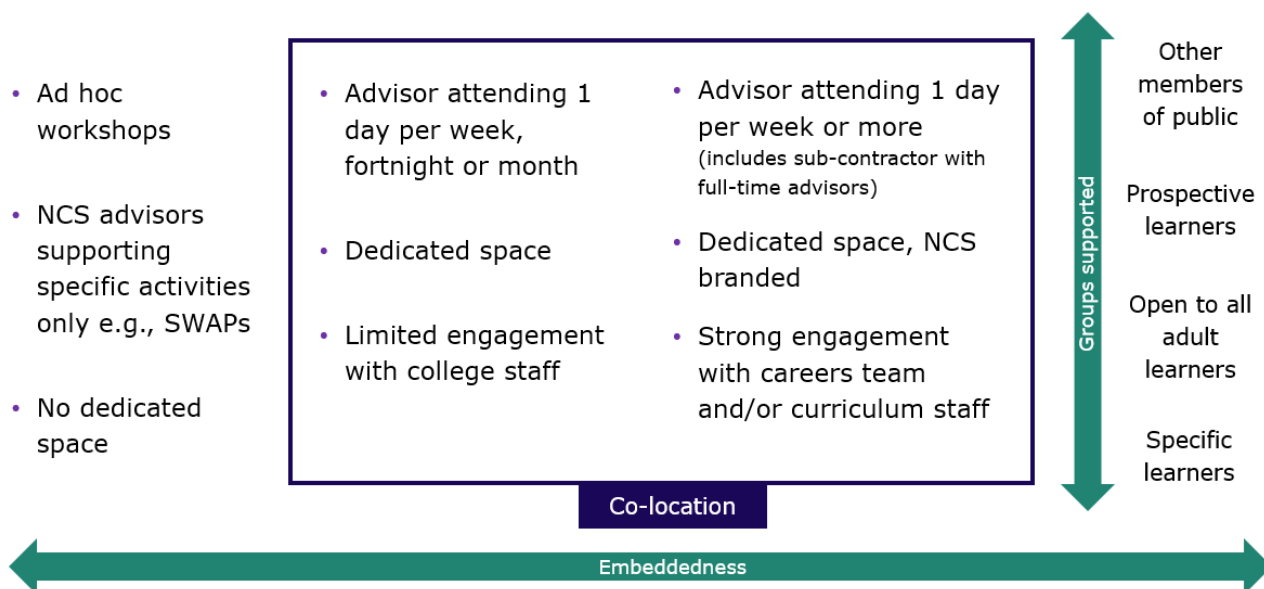
- Most commonly, a college will work with an NCS prime contractor to facilitate an NCS careers adviser attending the college on a regular basis. Nine examples of this delivery model were found.
- Less commonly, a college will deliver NCS provision as a sub-contractor. The research found two examples of this delivery model: Leicester College and the Colchester Institute, both sub-contracted by Futures for You.

For both models, the support offered by NCS advisers typically involves 1:1 careers appointments but can also include the delivery of employability skills workshops. In some cases, advisers also have a presence at college events such as careers fairs, open days and enrolment. The case studies appended to this report provide further detail on what these different models of co-location look like in practice.

Dimensions of engagement

Amongst these instances of co-location, different levels of engagement between the NCS contractor and the college were evident, both in terms of how embedded the NCS provision was within the college and the range and type of individuals the provision sought to engage. Figure 3.1 illustrates these dimensions of engagement.

Figure 3.1: Dimensions of NCS & FE college engagement



At the lower end of the spectrum were colleges engaging with NCS contractors on an ad hoc basis to provide employability skills workshops or support for specific, short-term activities. This included providing employability support for Sector-based Work Academy Programmes delivered by the college, where an NCS adviser would deliver employability support such as CV support and interview preparation for those on the 6-week programmes. Due to the ad hoc nature of this partnership work, we have not classed this activity as co-location.

At the mid-level of the embeddedness spectrum, an NCS adviser visits the college on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis, mainly to deliver 1:1 careers appointments but sometimes employability skills workshops as well. The support could be targeted at specific groups, such as ESOL or maths and English resit learners, or promoted to all adults at the college, and in some cases, prospective learners. The adviser typically has a dedicated room booked for delivering 1:1 support, either within the college careers centre or within the specific department they are visiting, but the space is not identified through NCS branding. Engagement with college staff is typically limited to liaising with the internal careers team around the logistics of delivering the support.

With higher levels of embeddedness, an NCS adviser (or multiple advisers) attends college for 1 day per week or more, and there may be NCS branding to identify the space where 1:1 support is delivered. In these instances, the NCS adviser or advisers tend to have greater engagement with college staff. For example, NCS advisers delivering or receiving training with college staff or liaising directly with curriculum tutors about delivering support to their students and promoting the offer. In some cases, NCS advisers also provide careers and employability support for activities such as Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPS) and Skills Bootcamps. Unsurprisingly, at the far end of this spectrum sit colleges operating as NCS sub-contractors, where multiple, full-time NCS advisers are employed directly by the college.

The groups supported by the NCS advisers appear to demonstrate a different dimension of co-location, which does not map neatly onto how embedded NCS advisers are within a college. For example, one college has NCS advisers attending multiple days per week, with strong relationships with the internal careers team and curriculum staff, but the advisers generally work with targeted groups of learners. Another college has an NCS adviser visiting one day per fortnight, so relatively low engagement, but the adviser supports any adult learners in need of support as well as receiving referrals for prospective learners who have contacted the college enquiries team. Those at the top right corner of these axes – engaging with the full spectrum of individuals (including prospective learners and other members of the public) and with multiple full-time advisers working at the college – were only those colleges that operate as NCS sub-contractors.

Amongst prime contractors, the way in which they worked with colleges in their region tended to span the full spectrum of engagement shown in Figure 3.1 (except sub-contracting delivery to colleges, of which there were only two instances). For a given prime contractor, there may be some colleges in their area they do not work with at all, those they deliver ad hoc support to and others where they have an adviser visiting on a regular basis. The extent of this engagement seemed to primarily depend on the relationships that area and regional managers had with college staff, a factor which is discussed further in Chapter 5: Challenges and enablers.

Practical aspects

Interviewees described practical aspects of the how co-located NCS services are delivered:

- **Space:** Finding a private meeting space that is available on a regular basis was cited as a challenge for some, but not insurmountable. Most used offices in the college careers hub or library, or rooms within the curriculum department that the adviser was visiting. In terms of meeting prospective learners or other members of the public, there were some concerns that having non-learners on site could be a safeguarding issue. However, colleges where

NCS advisers regularly met with non-learners did not seem to view this as a barrier. Usually, the private meeting space was near to the reception area so the adviser could easily meet an individual and sign them into the college before their appointment. Where the potential for a drop-in service for non-learners was discussed (compared to pre-arranged appointments), college staff felt this would be much more challenging to facilitate and may require significant planning and investment in space.

- **Appointment booking:** Approaches to appointment bookings differed; in some cases, the college managed the bookings, either through an internal booking system on the college intranet or through curriculum tutors (where an adviser was visiting a particular cohort of learners). Other colleges signposted learners and prospective learners to schedule face-to-face appointments using the NCS phone line.
- **Access and IT:** Some NCS advisers were treated more like college staff members, with an IT log in and/or access to the college Wi-Fi, as well as a college ID card allowing entrance through access gates, whereas others were treated more like external visitors. Generally, those in the former group tended to be advisers who attended the college more frequently, although there were exceptions to this.

4. Benefits of co-location

Many college staff reported that the size and capacity of their internal careers team had been reduced in recent years and that, partly because of this reduction, the focus of these teams tended to be on providing support for 16 – 18 learners. Recruiting qualified careers advisers was also highlighted as an ongoing challenge. In this context, working with the NCS was viewed as helping to fill gaps in capacity for meeting the careers support needs of adult learners. In addition, NCS advisers were viewed by some as having specific expertise and experience in working with adults and meeting their varied needs, which internal careers teams that focused predominantly on 16 – 18 learners lacked. For some colleges, the independence and impartiality of the NCS advisers were valued and seen to complement their internal careers team well.

College staff tended to view their work with the NCS as one of many partnerships they have with external organisations, such as universities and employers, that they utilise to support learners' careers support needs. Colleges where NCS advisers work with prospective learners and other members of the public also tended to see the partnership as an opportunity to better fulfil their role in supporting the wider community.

Prime contractors saw working with colleges as an important avenue for reaching a wide group of people in need of careers advice. Their work with colleges is evidently part of an array of relationships formed with different organisations within their region, such as job centres, charities, libraries, local authorities, and training providers. These partnerships support the promotion of the service and help prime contractors reach a variety of individuals in need of support, including those in priority groups such as individuals without a level 3 qualification. Whilst for some prime contractors, the proportion of priority group customers reached through colleges is typically lower than those reached through other organisations, college partnerships were nonetheless viewed as important for supporting their awareness of and connection to local education, training and skills provision.

Certain groups were highlighted as benefiting from the NCS services co-located within FE colleges:

- Many colleges targeted NCS support towards ESOL learners, as a group in need of support but who it was felt may be harder to reach through other avenues. In general, colleges were seen as a good place to reach a wide variety of individuals who are taking steps to progress their learning and who therefore may require careers support, but who may not typically attend other places where the NCS has a presence such as job centres.
- Where NCS advisers supported prospective learners and/or new learners enrolling at the college, this was seen as crucial for ensuring learners are on the right course. It was felt this not only helped the individual make an informed decision on what could be a significant investment of time and money but may also improve college retention rates. Some interviewees also felt it was positive for prospective learners to attend a careers appointment at a college, so they could experience what it might be like to study there.
- In some cases, co-location provided opportunities to raise awareness of the NCS offer amongst a wider audience at college events. For example, supporting 16 – 18 open days or careers fairs can mean NCS advisers reach parents who may need careers support.

In addition to these beneficiary groups, college staff and NCS advisers were seen to benefit from the partnership through knowledge and practice sharing. For example, some college staff mentioned that NCS contractors tend to be good sources of local Labour Market Information (LMI) and NCS advisers valued the opportunity to better understand the qualification offer at the college.

Working with colleges was also seen to support the professional development and retention of NCS advisers, through providing opportunities to work with a wider range of individuals with varied support needs.

5. Enablers and challenges

Enablers and challenges of co-location are discussed together, as key enablers tended to be things that helped colleges and NCS contractors overcome the challenges they faced.

Different delivery models

The different careers delivery models of colleges and NCS contractor organisations create certain sticking points when attempting to work together to co-locate services.

A key difference is in how the two services are funded. In contrast to FE colleges, NCS uses an outcomes-based funding model, whereby funding for prime and sub-contractors is dependent on the numbers of individuals engaged (including increased payments when engaging with priority groups) and outcomes resulting from the support provided⁷. This means that prime and sub-contractors must consider the risks of not engaging with priority groups and/or meeting and evidencing outcomes when deciding to dedicate resource towards working with a given college. In practical terms, this means that an adviser needs to engage with a certain number of adults each day they attend a college, otherwise the partnership is not sustainable from a financial perspective. This presents a challenge as the adviser is, to a large extent, reliant on the college to generate interest in and engagement with the support offer. However, in several cases this risk was mitigated by the adviser working closely with the college careers team and curriculum staff, which encouraged college staff to promote and refer to the service and enabled opportunities for the adviser to speak to learners directly.

NCS contractors also face challenges gathering the required outcomes evidence from individuals they support. A few colleges shared destinations data with the NCS contractor to support the collection of outcomes evidence, but this was not a common practice.

NCS careers advisers

In some instances, colleges would have desired greater flexibility in delivery of 1:1 support from NCS advisers as they felt their approach contrasted too much with how the college's internal careers advisers tended to support learners. Differences in terminology also posed challenges when trying to integrate the two services, for example, reference to 'customers' from NCS advisers as opposed to 'learners' or 'students'. In one example, a college careers leader invited the NCS adviser to attend Saturday open days to support prospective students, but the NCS contractor was unable to change their planned pattern of availability.

It is worth noting that these challenges were described by a minority. Several college staff praised the flexibility of the NCS adviser as being key to making the arrangement work, with some also highlighting the distinctness and independence of the NCS service from the college careers team as a benefit rather than a barrier.

Expectations around the qualification level of the NCS adviser was also a sticking point in some instances. Some colleges stipulate a level 6 qualified career adviser should support learners, whereas NCS advisers are qualified to a minimum of level 4 in advice and guidance. There were examples of compromises on both sides to resolve this issue, i.e., the NCS contractor providing a level 6 adviser or a college accepting support from a level 4 qualified adviser.

⁷ Evidence of career management outcomes, including acceptance of the career and skills action plan and completion of a customer satisfaction questionnaire, and a learning or job outcome, including evidence of commencing sustainable employment or accredited learning, or achieving career progression.

Relationships

From the prime contractors' perspective, it was sometimes difficult to establish relationships with colleges to enable co-location. This could be due to the college not needing or wanting the support offer, but even where the college was motivated to make the partnership work, setting up the arrangement appears to take a long time. One prime contractor said that establishing a co-located service at one college recently took around 18 months. Factors that contributed to delays ranged from co-ordination and communication through to needing senior college staff agreement and negotiations around aspects of delivery.

In terms of initiating these partnerships, there were a couple of examples where local employment and skills groups had facilitated building relationships between colleges and NCS contractors. In some cases though, college relationships with prime contractors were historic and interviewees were unsure how they were initially formed.

All interviewees stressed the importance of ensuring the partnership is mutually beneficial. It needs to add value for the college, whether through meeting the needs of learners or prospective learners and/or increasing the college's reach within the local community, as well as providing reliable delivery volumes for the NCS contractor to ensure financial viability. Establishing and maintaining good working relationships appears to be key to ensuring the arrangement works for both parties. Senior college leaders and operational managers who are motivated to make the partnership work and see the value in having external support was viewed as a key enabler.

Similarly, the NCS adviser building relationships with the internal careers team and curriculum staff seems to facilitate the adviser having a greater influence over the promotion of the service and therefore delivery volumes, rather than relying heavily on the college to generate referrals. The extent to which the adviser can build these relationships appears to depend in part on how willing the college is to allow access to staff beyond the careers manager, but also on how regularly the adviser is attending the college. Perhaps unsurprisingly, where an NCS adviser attends a college multiple days a week, they tend to have greater engagement with the internal careers team and other college staff. The skill and motivation of the NCS adviser was also viewed as important; if college staff can see the benefits they bring to learners, they are more likely to engage with the adviser and promote the service.

Given the importance of relationships at all levels, turnover of NCS contractors, advisers or college staff was cited as a barrier to establishing and maintaining NCS and college partnerships.

6. Conclusions

This research suggests NCS and FE co-location is not a common practice, with the 11 instances found representing less than 10% of colleges in England. Despite this, instances of co-location are spread across the country and not unique to any one region or prime contractor. The examples identified through the research have enabled a typology of ways of working to be mapped, highlighting varied levels of engagement between NCS prime contractors and colleges and different groups supported.

Where co-location does happen, colleges typically utilise the NCS as an external resource to fill a gap in capacity for meeting the careers support needs of adult learners. This generally involves an NCS adviser visiting the college on a regular basis to deliver 1:1 careers appointments and employability skills workshops. The case studies appended to this report provide further detail on what these different types of co-location looks like in practice.

The individuals benefiting from co-located NCS provision appear to mostly be existing learners of FE colleges, particularly targeted groups such as ESOL students. Whilst several examples of NCS support being delivered to prospective learners and wider members of the public were found, existing learners were still the main group that the service was promoted to. Where a college delivers NCS provision as a sub-contractor, there appears to be much more of a focus on the co-located service reaching prospective learners or other members of the public.

It is evident that colleges are one of several types of organisations that prime contractors form partnerships with to reach people in need of NCS support, including those from priority groups. There are clearly challenges around aligning the different delivery models and ways of working that NCS prime contractors and colleges have, including ensuring that the partnership works for the prime contractor within the outcomes-based funding model of the NCS. However, strong relationships between NCS managers, advisers and college staff appear to mitigate these challenges and help to ensure that the partnership is mutually beneficial for both organisations.

Appendix A: Case studies

Case study: City of Bristol College

The college serves approximately 14,000 learners across four campuses, delivering vocational, technical, academic and professional courses up to level 6.

NCS partnership

The college's Careers and Employability Manager had previously worked for an NCS prime contractor delivering NCS support at other colleges, so was aware of the potential benefits of such a partnership. Since 2023, the college has worked with the local NCS provider – Seetec – to deliver 1:1 careers support to adult ESOL learners.

Support provided

The NCS adviser attends two days per week, visiting two out of the four college campuses. Currently, the adviser has capacity for up to seven appointments per day.

- **Groups supported:** The NCS adviser currently supports ESOL learners, mainly with CV writing. This was previously done by the internal careers team but capacity was limited, so there was a gap in support for ESOL learners. The college may look at expanding the support offer to other learner groups in the future.
- **Promotion:** The Careers and Employability Manager emails the ESOL tutors with information about when the NCS adviser will be attending. They have a shared document for tutors to book ESOL learners in for the available appointment slots.
- **Space:** There is a dedicated room booked at each campus for the 1:1 appointments.
- **Staff involved:** The Careers and Employability Manager works with the ESOL tutors to promote the offer and book in appointments.

Case study: Leeds City College

A large general FE college with around 20,000 students delivering vocational, technical and professional education across the main campuses in Leeds. The college is part of Luminate education group which includes Keighley College and Harrogate College, amongst others.

NCS partnership

The college has worked with the local NCS provider – Education Development Trust (EDT) – for the past five years (prior to that they worked with a different NCS provider). The partnership has grown over time, from just one NCS adviser working with ESOL learners on one campus, to three NCS advisers working across two campuses. The team is comprised of a lead NCS adviser, who spends approximately 75% of their time working for the college, and two NCS advisers, one of whom spends about 50% their time at the main college campus whilst the other attends Keighley College 1 day per week.

Support provided

The support provided comprises a mixture of employability skills workshops and group sessions in addition to 1:1 careers advice appointments. The college previously struggled to generate enough referrals for 1:1 appointments and there was a high no-show rate. The lead NCS adviser therefore worked with tutors to develop bespoke employability skills workshops, which give the learners an opportunity to meet the NCS adviser before deciding to sign up to a 1:1 appointment. Due to the college being spread across multiple buildings and campuses, the advisers take a very flexible approach to 1:1 appointments, delivering these mostly over the telephone.

- **Groups supported:**

- Workshops are delivered to English and Maths GCSE resit learners, ESOL learners and adults on childcare, health and social care, and accounting courses.
- Any 19+ referrals that the internal college careers teams receive from college staff tend to go to the NCS advisers. The only exception is those wanting advice about HE or specific college courses, which remain with the internal careers team.
- The NCS advisers generally do not support prospective learners. This was trialled in the past, however, the no show rate was high (around 50%) and they struggled to fill all the available appointments.

- **Promotion:** The offer is promoted to tutors via Google Chats and other internal communication channels. Posters are also displayed in classrooms with a QR code to the 1:1 appointment sign-up form. A lot of the promotional work is done by the NCS lead adviser himself, who communicates with tutors and visits classes to promote the offer. The college also advertises the NCS phoneline for 'out of hours' support.

- **Staff involved:** The college Careers Learning Manager oversees things operationally and liaises with the NCS careers advisers. Subject department staff work directly with the NCS lead adviser to plan employability workshops, including suggesting target groups and relevant topics. The NCS advisers have log in details for the college computers and their own college ID badges.

Case study: Coventry College

Coventry College is the sole general further education provider in Coventry, delivering vocational, technical and professional learning to around 5,000 learners.

NCS partnership

The college had worked with the local NCS provider – Prospects – in the past, but this work was primarily focused on the delivery of employability workshops for specific skills programmes. Since early 2023, Prospects has worked with the college more regularly, with an NCS adviser visiting every fortnight to deliver 1:1 careers appointments to adult learners. This arrangement came about after the college looked to expand their adult careers guidance offer but struggled to recruit an additional careers adviser. After a meeting of the West Midlands Colleges Employment Group, which includes representatives from DWP, NCS providers, and local employers, the careers leader reached out to Prospects to discuss working together more closely around 1:1 support.

Support provided

The NCS adviser attends the college every other Wednesday, offering 1:1 careers appointments to any learners or prospective learners over 19 and ad hoc employability workshops. The NCS adviser also delivers wrap around employability support as part of the college's Into Employment Programmes, funded by West Midlands Combined Authority, and has visited the college during enrolment to support prospective learners and recently attended the college careers fair.

- **Groups supported:** Current and prospective adult learners are referred to the NCS adviser if in need of careers support.
- **Promotion:** Via the college intranet, where learners can book appointments.
- **Space:** The NCS adviser has a dedicated room in the library for private appointments, next door to the college's careers advice office. The adviser has their own college access card for letting external visitors through (usually prospective learners) once they have signed in at reception.
- **Staff involved:** The college careers leader works with Prospects from a strategic perspective, with the two internal careers advisers liaising with the NCS adviser day to day.

Case study: Leicester College

A large general FE college delivering technical, vocational, professional and higher education qualifications and training to around 13,000 learners.

NCS partnership

The college has delivered NCS provision as a sub-contractor with Futures for You – the NCS prime contractor for the East Midlands and Northamptonshire - for over 10 years.

Support provided

The college employs a team of five staff to deliver the NCS contract: two careers advisers, one senior adviser and two admin staff. The advisers offer scheduled 1:1 appointments and drop-in support, in addition to delivering employability skills sessions for students. The NCS advisers also attend student enrolment events and other events where they can engage not only young people, but parents who may be looking to upskill or change careers.

- **Groups supported:** The service is open to existing and prospective adult learners, as well as the wider community in Leicester. Advisers also deliver employability skills sessions to targeted groups of learners, such as ESOL students.
- **Promotion:** The service is promoted via the college website and to students through internal channels. Those making enquiries to the college about courses are signposted to the NCS advisers. The college also works in partnership with community organisations to promote the NCS support offer.
- **Space:** NCS advisers are available for appointments and drop-ins at the college's careers hub, located on their city centre Abbey Park campus. The NCS advisers have also recently built a presence at the college's City Skills Centre, which mainly delivers short courses in compliance areas such as health and safety. The centre is located next to Leicester train station and the college hopes that by building an NCS presence there, it may encourage members of the public to drop in for careers support.
- **Staff involved:** The college careers leader manages the team of 5 NCS staff in addition to a team of 4.5 full-time equivalent 14 – 19 careers advisers, including a SEND specialist. The location of NCS advisers within the college also enables collaboration with and referrals to other student services, such as welfare and safeguarding, and external support services. This means individuals with additional support needs, such as mental health issues, homelessness or disability, can be provided with more comprehensive support.

Case study: Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough College is the largest education and skills provider in Teesside, serving a total of 13,000 students, including 9,000 adult learners. The college offers technical, vocational, professional and higher education qualifications and training.

NCS partnership

The college had an existing relationship with Education Development Trust, offering ad hoc careers and employability support. The partnership then developed such that for the past 2 years they have had an NCS adviser co-located at the college's adult and community building, providing 1:1 appointments and delivering employability skills workshops. Many of the adults at the college are completing entry level IT, maths and English qualifications. The college would struggle to provide these adult learners with the level of support they require without the partnership with the NCS, due to limited capacity that tends to be focused on 16 – 18 learners.

In a recent Ofsted report, the NCS partnership was highlighted as a key part of the college's careers support offer and the college was recently awarded the CEC's Excellence in Careers award.

Support provided

The NCS adviser attends the college four days a week, although additional advisers will be brought in at peak times. The adviser provides 1:1 careers support to adult learners and delivers employability skills workshops (e.g. CV writing). They also deliver training, either on their own or jointly with the internal careers team. During summer enrolment events, new learners are also directed to the adviser for impartial careers guidance, to ensure that the college is the right choice for them and if not, direct them towards other provision.

- **Groups supported:** The support is open to all current adult learners. The NCS adviser also provides dedicated employability support and specific skills provision such as SWAPs and Skills Bootcamps.
- **Promotion:** The NCS adviser visits all adult courses (usually at the beginning, middle and end of the courses) to promote the 1:1 support offer and deliver employability skills workshops.
- **Space:** The NCS adviser has been allocated a dedicated, branded space in the adult and community building. Having an adviser on site has allowed them to better integrate within the careers team and wider college, which has helped them to better understand the breadth of courses on offer and the needs of the students.
- **Staff involved:** The college careers leader and assistant director for quality oversee the partnership from a strategic perspective. The NCS adviser is viewed as very much part of the college careers team and has built relationships with curriculum staff for the purpose of promoting the offer and delivering workshops.