Careers Unit

A “Single Source” of Government-Assured Careers Information
Careers advice for citizens

The Identified Challenge

There is no single place to get government-backed, comprehensive careers information in England. There are several actors across government providing careers information and these activities are not well joined-up and lead to a confusing customer journey.

In addition, the language and terminology describing skills and occupations is inconsistent. The provision of labour market information has gaps (such as local granularity) and can also be out-of-date.

These challenges make the careers landscape confusing, fragmented, and unclear. Young people and adults do not have the requisite information to make the right decisions for their career and education. It also negatively impacts the economy which operates below its potential output.

The Policy Background

It is important to ensure that people of all ages and backgrounds can access clear, consistent, and relevant careers guidance, underpinned by relevant and up-to-date labour market information.

Expanding on our Skills for Jobs White Paper commitment (para 97) and tied to the wider work of Sir John Holman, former Independent Strategic Advisor on Careers, we are progressing work at pace to develop a single source of government-assured careers information.
The careers infrastructure is fragmented and can be confusing for customers.

The Government is committed to ‘updating the National Careers Service website to become a single source of government-assured careers information for young people and adults’.

This commitment feeds into the broader goal of creating an ‘all-age careers system’.
Initial research has shown inconsistencies in language used by different key stakeholders when describing careers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)</th>
<th>The National Careers Service</th>
<th>The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terms to describe careers</td>
<td>11 ‘Careers’ categories broken down into ‘unit groups’ or ‘occupations’</td>
<td>Explore Careers includes 25 Job categories broken down into ‘linked role profiles’</td>
<td>15 occupational ‘routes’, further divided into pathways which group together different ‘roles’/‘occupations’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of inconsistent terminology of a career category</td>
<td>Agriculture, horticulture, and animal care</td>
<td>Animal Care</td>
<td>Agriculture, Land Management and Production Pathway; Animal Care and Management Pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information provided about a career/job profile</td>
<td>Tasks, Hard Skills, Soft Skills</td>
<td>Knowledge, Skills and Tasks, includes ways in, career paths and progression</td>
<td>Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A user example

The current confusion can be seen if a citizen wished to research for the role of a welder – using government careers sources.

I look on the National Careers Service Website

I wonder how many jobs there are as welders?

I am interested, so I look at how to be an apprentice

The National Careers website give details of what to do to be a welder, but the apprentice link doesn’t seem to work today, so I visit IfATE

But now I am confused, the skills needed on IfATE’s website to be a welder are different to those on the National Careers service one, and there are all sorts of different types of welder!
There is confusion between taxonomies where each may provide different names for a role or different skills requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Taxonomy</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Nearest Equivalent</th>
<th>Comparison Taxonomy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONS SOC 2020</strong></td>
<td>Plate welders</td>
<td><strong>ONS SOC 2020</strong></td>
<td>Welding trades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ONS SOC 2020</strong></td>
<td>Plate welders</td>
<td>O*NET/US SOC 2018</td>
<td>Welders, Cutters, and Welder Fitters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ONS SOC 2020</strong></td>
<td>Plate welders</td>
<td>ESCO</td>
<td>Welder</td>
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<td>Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ONS SOC 2020</strong></td>
<td>Plate welders</td>
<td>National Careers Service</td>
<td>Welder</td>
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<td>Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ONS SOC 2020</strong></td>
<td>Plate welders</td>
<td>IFATE Occupational Standards</td>
<td>Plate welders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing cross-walks (data/code translations)</td>
<td>Inconsistent terminology</td>
<td>Limited links between taxonomies and careers pathways</td>
<td>Data on skills demand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Currently there is no ownership for any potential issues of how Sector Subject Areas (SSA) map over to Standard Occupational Codes (SOC)</td>
<td>For example, IfATE will describe skills in a different way to skills bootcamps. Occupations and pathways can be called different things: UCAS has Agriculture, horticulture and animal care, The National Careers Service will call this Animal Care and IfATE has Agriculture, Land Management and Production Pathway; Animal Care and Management Pathway Independent work on skills mapping is completed regularly by the private sector which confuses the descriptions of skills further.</td>
<td>Qualifications and skills: Limited details of what skills can be attained by completing an academic qualification. Occupations and Skills: For example, a Universal Credit claimant will tell a work coach their previous 3 jobs, but the work coach cannot neatly see the next available job they could be offered with their skillset. Qualifications and Occupations: For Higher Education qualifications, careers ‘outcomes’ data is difficult to collect and any outcomes that are provided are superficially collated or omitted because of lack of data availability.</td>
<td>There isn’t enough data currently available on skills demand or supply for employers. The granularity of the data available isn’t sufficient to work with, and there is no agreement of what the granularity should be. As there is no governance on data for skills, there is no agreed framework for what ‘good’ looks like. The limited data can be out of date quickly. There is no facility to offer tools to link data together.</td>
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A Common Careers Taxonomy – vision

The vision of the back-end taxonomy and data architecture is to have a taxonomy that aligns skills, occupations and qualifications, drawing on up-to-date labour market information.

There are a wide-range of interested stakeholders in this space and several user groups who would benefit from consistent, up-to-date, government-assured data.

However, to achieve this, several problems need to be addressed. The overarching problem can be summarised as:

"There are currently gaps in the data across the careers landscape. Furthermore, there is not a common framework that describes, and links labour market information (LMI) related to skills, qualifications, and occupations across English government and the wider sector.

As a result, we cannot source and present the most relevant LMI linked to careers for our users to make the most informed careers decisions."
The Single Source

The Single Source is composed of the ‘front-end’ digital facing interface and a ‘back-end’ data architecture and taxonomy on skills, qualifications and occupations.

The exact technological architecture and data architecture is to be further defined. Some guiding principles for the back-end Single Source include:

- Allow data to be accessible to third parties and easily shared, ideally through an API and data download
- Engage with the current data and taxonomies being used by National Careers Service, IfATE, DWP and others to ensure these stakeholders can easily use and dock into the data and taxonomy
- Data is quality assured and kite-marked
- Governance is led by DfE

Benefits of a Single Source are:

- Tailored information for users to make informed careers decisions
- Improved consistency of careers information leading to decreased confusion of careers pathways
- Improved social mobility through better understanding of where a citizen’s skills can take them
- Supporting employers to see the links between skills and occupations and how to upskill/reskill their workers
- Increased reputation of government data and usage by stakeholders
The Taxonomy Oversight Group (TOG) has been instrumental in various ways. They acted as a conduit to invite relevant stakeholders to help support exploratory work. This approach has helped us understand the level of inconsistency or tolerance we should be willing to accept. The TOG has also listened to views on what qualifications could be most relevant to users.

The endorsement of SOC codes for occupations has given weight to our decision to use these as the 'backbone' of the Single Source. The approval of a skills taxonomy will drive single source information in both the short and long term. Principles from the TOG Best Practice Framework will be used in the design for future work on a UK based Skills Taxonomy. This has allowed us to test out some of our early thinking. Principles from the TOG Best Practice Framework will also be used in the design for future work on a UK based Skills Taxonomy.
The Design Sprint – and Recommendations

A three-day event, bringing together stakeholders from across government and careers landscape.

Day 1
Understanding and defining

Day one of the design sprint was held in a neutral office. It was about getting to know each other’s area of work.

It was also about challenging our assumptions, identifying the problems and how they affect each organization.

The end of the day focused on defining a problem statement.

Day 2
User Cases and Objectives

Day two was a virtual event, where we spoke to each organization separately and then brought everyone together at the end of the day.

This was to get ‘uncensored’ concrete examples of taxonomy and data challenges from different users.

We also wanted to suggest potential objectives which could align work to address the problems faced.

Day 3
Agree the goal, objectives and recommendations

As with day 1, this was a face-to-face event, again in a neutral office.

Following the ranking exercise, we had 4 clear objectives that would support the goal of the Single Source.

Day 3 focused on identifying actions to meet these objectives, with specific questions on who could achieve them, when it could be achieved, how it could be achieved, and what it might cost.
Outcomes…Work done so far… And work to be commenced

Outcomes / Actions

- Agree to use SOC extensions as the foundational ‘spine’ of the taxonomy.
- Examine how to map other taxonomies such as IfATE’s occupational codes and National Careers Service’s job profiles to SOC extensions. Mapping completed by summer 2023.
- Examine how to improve current data collection methods to a more granular level.
- Scope and identify digital hosting requirements for a single source.
- Understand resource requirements for the upkeep and governance of a single source.
- Link up with the ONS’ Taxonomy Oversight Group to potentially quality assure cross-walks.
- The creation of a UK based skills taxonomy, encompassing occupations, skills and qualifications

Recommendations

- Mapping IfATE’s occupation maps and SOC2020 extensions. Work is already in draft form and would quickly benefit alignment.
- National Careers Service to align its job profile codes to SOC2020 extensions.
- Develop a prototype for linking non-technical qualifications to occupations. This includes mappings between higher education courses or academic qualifications (such as A Levels) to occupations.
- Create a working group to continue facilitation of collaboration across stakeholders to share best practice, mapping of data and align cross-government work in this area.