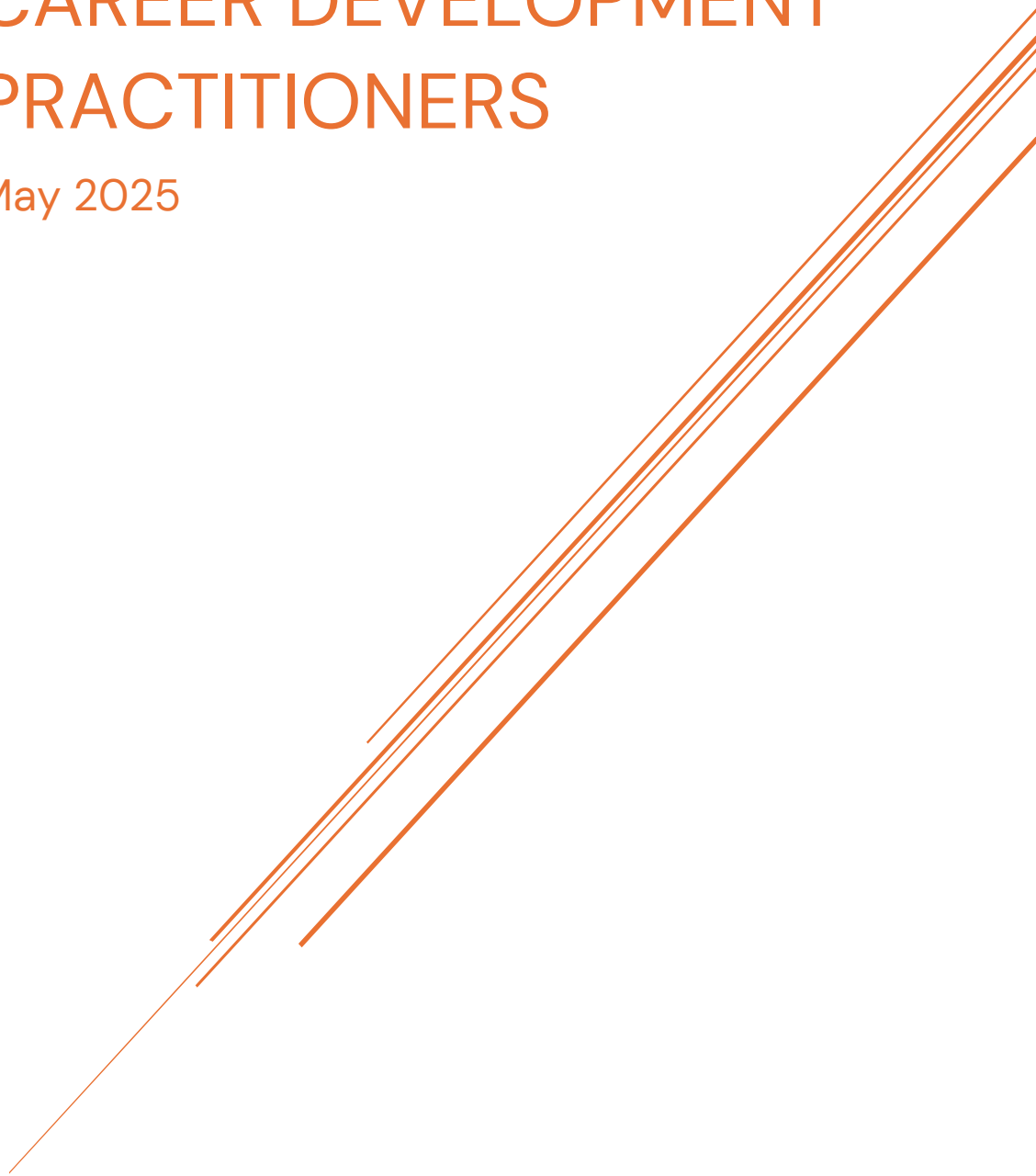
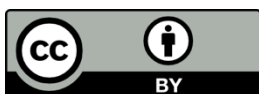




2024 NATIONAL SURVEY OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

May 2025





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Executive Summary

The 2024 National Survey of Australian Career Development Practitioners provides a rich and nuanced portrait of the profession in Australia today. Drawing on responses from 734 Australian career development professionals working across diverse settings in the Australian career development sector, the findings offer a compelling snapshot of a highly skilled, committed, yet overstretched workforce operating at the forefront of helping individuals navigate education, employment, and life transitions.

A dominant theme to emerge is the sector's strength and experience. The majority of practitioners bring extensive prior professional expertise into the field, with nearly half (45%) having over ten years of dedicated career development practice. While the workforce remains predominantly female (84%), a subtle generational shift is underway, with the proportion of practitioners under the age of 45 increasing from 22% in 2015 to 28% in 2024.

The survey also reinforces the profession's identity as a mid-career destination, with 75% of practitioners transitioning from other roles and industries and most entering the field in their 30s or 40s. This career trajectory brings valuable cross-sector experience but also signals an urgent need to address workforce renewal. With 72% of practitioners aged 45 or older, succession planning and targeted recruitment of younger professionals will be vital to sustaining the sector's capacity and diversity. If nurtured strategically, the profession's blend of experience, adaptability, and commitment positions it as a key enabler of workforce resilience in a rapidly changing labour market.

The data reflects a professional community with a high level of formal qualifications—66% hold a Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher and a strong appetite for further learning, with more than half indicating interest in a Master's qualification. This enthusiasm, however, is tempered by critical challenges. Respondents reported feeling overworked, under-resourced, and constrained by limited opportunities for advancement, with leadership gaps compounding workplace dissatisfaction.

Practitioners continue to deliver substantial value to clients, particularly through one-on-one consultations and connections to education and training, both of which were rated highest in benefit and impact. However, virtual tools and simplifying labour market information were rated as among the least beneficial, suggesting a mismatch between policy ambitions for digital innovation and actual practice.

Despite obstacles, the profession remains deeply engaged and optimistic, with an average job engagement score of 8.1/10. The sector is entering a pivotal phase, with growing recognition of areas that require attention. Gaps in AI adoption, limited performance evaluation frameworks, and underuse of professional standards highlight opportunities to strengthen structural support, particularly in innovation, leadership, and accountability.

Overview of the Survey

The 2024 National Survey of Career Development Practitioners, conducted between 28 October and 28 November 2024, gathered insights from 734 career development practitioners working across diverse settings in the Australian career development sector.

86% identified as career development practitioners. 14% identified as working within the career development sector

Commissioned by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), the survey aimed to better understand the workforce, identify challenges and opportunities, and inform strategic decision-making for policy and practice.

Methodology and Segmentation

The data presented in this report draws from a national survey commissioned by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA):

The 2024 survey, titled National Survey of Career Development Practitioners, was conducted in the field from 28 October to 28 November 2024, with a total sample size of $n = 734$ respondents.

The 2024 survey was conducted using Survey Monkey and consisted of 47 questions grouped under the following headings:

- Demographics
- Qualifications
- Working in the Industry
- Career Development Activities
- Motivators and Barriers
- Quality and Value
- Measuring Performance
- Professional Development and Growth
- Artificial Intelligence and Career Development

The survey was promoted through CICA Member Associations and on CICA's social media channels, ensuring broad national reach across practitioners in diverse employment contexts. Respondents represented a broad cross-section of the career development industry, including professionals working in education, employment services, community organisations, and private practice. The findings offer a robust evidence base for identifying trends, informing policy, and supporting strategic workforce planning.

Segmentation

Throughout this report, demographic segmentation has been applied to analyse responses and explore variations in experience and perspective across different groups. Key segmentation variables include age, gender, years of experience, qualification level, employment setting, and geographic location. This approach enables more detailed and nuanced insights, helping to identify specific workforce needs and inform targeted development strategies across the sector.

Demographics and Workforce Profile

The profession remains highly gendered, with 84% of respondents identifying as female. This marks a slight but consistent upward trend over the years. Notably, the proportion of male practitioners has declined to 16%, down from 20% in 2015.

A significant insight is the age composition of the workforce. Almost three-quarters, 72%, are aged 45 years or older, yet this represents a modest change from 2015, when the figure stood at 78%.

The data suggests that career development is commonly a mid-career entry profession, with many practitioners entering the field in their late 30s to early 40s. This is supported by the fact that 75% of practitioners transitioned from other roles and industries.

Only 6.8% of the workforce are younger practitioners (25–34 years), suggesting future sustainability concerns unless recruitment pipelines are strengthened.

In terms of employment type, 62% of respondents now work full-time compared to 48% in 2016. Part-time roles have declined, aligning with broader shifts in employment structures and potentially indicating stronger institutional investment in career services.

Qualifications and Professional Background

The data reveals a highly qualified and professionally experienced sector. The most common qualification remains the Graduate Certificate in Career Development, the recognised professional level qualification. In total, 66% have a Graduate Certificate or higher, and 15% hold a Certificate IV, the recognised minimum associate qualification.

These trends highlight the importance of recognising and valuing prior workforce experience as a key strength that complements professional career development qualifications and enriches practice across the sector.

Importantly, 75% of practitioners entered the career development field from other roles and professions, bringing a diverse and rich set of skills to the profession, which complements professional career development qualifications. This influx of experience strengthens the sector's adaptability and relevance, but also points to career development as a secondary or mid-career shift for many.

Additionally, the profession shows a deep commitment to pursuing higher-level qualifications, with 52% indicating an interest in obtaining a Master's qualification in Career Development if one were available to study, strongly endorsing the sector's aspirations for deeper academic and professional engagement. Of the 52% indicating an interest in Master's qualifications, 70% already hold the Graduate Certificate in Career Development.

Key Activities: What Makes an Impact

Respondents rated the benefit and impact of various professional services provided to clients, revealing clear preferences and performance strengths.

One-on-one consultations were overwhelmingly rated as the most beneficial and impactful service

- 76% rated them as the most beneficial
- 70% rated them as having the largest impact

These were the highest scores across all activities, confirming the central role of personalised career conversations.

Connecting clients to education and training ranked highly in both benefit and impact

- 45% rated it among the most beneficial
- 59% rated it among the most impactful

This underscores the importance of facilitating access to learning pathways as part of effective career support.

Simplifying labour market information ranked second lowest in both benefit and impact

- 31% rated it among the most beneficial
- 18% rated it among the most impactful

Virtual career fairs ranked lowest in both benefit and impact.

- 8% rated it among the most beneficial
- 3% rated it among the most impactful

This insight suggests that human interaction and relational engagement remain at the heart of effective career development practice, even amid increasing digitalisation.

Challenges in the Workplace

Despite high levels of engagement and commitment, some career development practitioners report significant barriers to thriving in their roles:

- 32% feel overworked and stressed
- 27% cite a lack of quality leadership from managers
- 26% report limited opportunities for career progression

These figures point to a systemic challenge in how the sector supports its workforce, not only in terms of workload, but also in leadership, mentorship, and pathways for advancement. Addressing these issues requires renewed attention and advocacy to ensure employers better understand the role and value of career development practitioners.

Evolving Service Models in a Post-Pandemic Landscape

The COVID pandemic significantly disrupted traditional career service delivery, prompting practitioners and organisations to rethink how they connect with clients. Four years later, the data highlights how many of these changes have become embedded in ongoing practice, revealing both a diversification in service models and a strategic opportunity to expand reach and impact.

In person services remain the most common approach, with nearly 40% of practitioners reporting little to no change since the pandemic. This reflects a strong return to or continuation of traditional face to face delivery methods. However, these models often require significant time, travel and infrastructure, which can make it difficult to scale services and respond to rising demand.

In contrast, nearly 32% of respondents have shifted to more virtual or blended models, reflecting increased digital literacy among clients and the flexibility provided by online delivery. These approaches offer scalable solutions for career development services by reducing barriers, alleviating resource constraints and connecting practitioners with clients across wider geographic areas. They are particularly advantageous for individuals in rural, remote or underserved communities.

Approximately 19% of practitioners now utilise a balanced model combining in person and virtual services. This blended approach supports both accessibility and personalisation, enabling flexible and client centred engagement. It promotes stronger relationship building while extending the potential reach of services.

Smaller groups of practitioners have adopted more defined approaches, with 4% delivering services entirely online and 3% returning exclusively to in person interactions. These variations may reflect organisational policy, resource availability or client preferences.

An additional 9% selected Other, indicating the use of innovative or context specific methods. These may include asynchronous tools, embedded services within schools or community hubs, or outreach delivery models.

To fully harness the benefits of these evolving models, strategic investment is essential. Digital infrastructure, practitioner training and client support must be prioritised. Building digital literacy and ensuring equitable access to technology, especially for marginalised populations, will be critical to sustaining and expanding high-quality, future-focused career development services.

Overall, the evolution of service delivery is not just a response to disruption but an opportunity to build more accessible, inclusive and scalable systems that meet the changing expectations of clients and the realities of a modern workforce.

Professional Development and Standards

The data reveals a mixed picture of professional development:

- 53% of practitioners spend at least one day per month on professional development.
- 50% of respondents preferred in-person workshops and conferences, well ahead of online (29%) or virtual (16%) options. This preference highlights the enduring value of face-to-face learning and peer connection in the profession.
- 25% reported having no allocated budget, and 21% did not know if such a budget existed.

Awareness of the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners is strong (97%), but usage remains patchy. Half of the respondents indicated they never use or are unsure if standards are used in performance evaluations—a missed opportunity for quality assurance and reflective practice.

Self-assessment of competencies also varied:

- Practitioners rated themselves highly in communication, professionalism, and rapport building.
- Confidence was lower in technical areas, including applying frameworks, evaluating services, and using enterprise skills.
- This indicates a clear training need, particularly in evidence-based practice, evaluation, and innovation.

Importantly, these lower self-ratings may not always indicate a lack of capability. Many practitioners are likely already engaging with the competencies implicitly but may not recognise or label their work using the terminology of the Professional Standards. This disconnect between practice and professional language may be contributing to under confidence. Addressing this gap, through reflective tools, supervision, and more precise mapping of day-to-day tasks to competencies, could significantly improve practitioner confidence and strengthen professional identity

Measuring Impact

Impact evaluation practices within the sector remain largely informal and inconsistent:

- Top methods of evaluating services include feedback from line managers (55%), client feedback (50%), and self-assessment (50%).
- Only 35% received formal performance reviews.
- Just 42% used administrative data.

While reflective and client-centred practices are common, the sector would benefit from more structured, data-informed evaluation approaches to strengthen service quality, guide professional growth, and support systemic improvement.

Artificial Intelligence: An Untapped Opportunity

The profession is in the early stages of AI adoption:

- 36% have never used AI for administrative tasks, and 53% have never used AI for client support.
- 70% of respondents identified AI training as the most urgent development area, reflecting a skills gap and a strong desire to adapt.

Respondents were asked to identify the types of AI training they considered necessary or would personally require in their role as career service professionals. The results reveal a strong demand for practical, ethical, and foundational knowledge in AI to support evolving service delivery.

The most selected training need was AI tools for career counselling and job search, accounting for 23.8% of responses. This suggests that these practitioners see learning more about the application of AI in client services as a top priority, particularly in helping individuals navigate complex job markets.

Following this, AI in resume screening and candidate assessment was identified by 18.5% of respondents as a training need. As recruitment technologies become increasingly AI-driven, practitioners recognise the importance of understanding these tools to better guide and prepare clients.

AI ethics and responsible use also emerged as a training need, with 17.8% of responses. This is consistent with the profession's commitment to upholding ethical standards and ensuring AI is used in a way that is transparent, fair, and aligned with client interests.

A further 17.2% of responses pointed to the need for a basic understanding of AI concepts, indicating a widespread desire for foundational knowledge that can underpin more advanced applications.

Data analysis using AI, such as analysing labour market trends, was selected by 14.6% of respondents as a training need. This reflects an interest in leveraging AI to interpret workforce data better and inform evidence-based guidance.

Lastly, the integration of AI in virtual networking events received 7.5% of the responses, indicating a growing awareness of AI's potential to enhance digital engagement and connection opportunities for clients.

A small proportion (0.6%) selected Other, possibly indicating niche or emerging areas of interest not covered by the listed options.

Overall, the findings suggest that career development professionals are eager to build both their conceptual understanding and practical capability in AI, with a strong emphasis on client-centred, ethical, and informed application.

The responses underscore AI's untapped potential to improve efficiency and client engagement. Building confidence and competence in these tools will be key to modernising the sector.

There is a clear training imperative, with AI adoption still in its infancy across the profession, underscored by limited current use but a strong appetite for learning.

Outlook for the Industry

Despite the challenges, the profession remains highly engaged and optimistic about its future. In 2024, career development practitioners reported an average job engagement rating of 8.1 out of 10, indicating strong day-to-day commitment to their roles and a deep connection to their work's purpose. This high engagement level is particularly notable given the profession's persistent challenges, such as limited leadership support, high role strain, and underinvestment in professional development.

Moreover, 53% of respondents believe the sector will improve over the next five years, demonstrating a sense of collective resilience and hope. This optimism exists alongside structural pressures, suggesting that practitioners not only see the value of their work but also recognise opportunities for growth, reform, and innovation.

The data also shows that this optimism is not isolated to individual roles; it reflects a broader belief in the future of the profession. Many practitioners indicated that enhanced recognition, stronger integration of services, and investment in digital capability and AI training could significantly elevate the sector's impact.

Together, these findings depict a workforce that, despite ongoing limitations and systemic barriers, remains motivated, future-focused, and committed to growth. It is continually advancing its professionalisation and impact, driven by a shared sense of mission. Supporting this optimism with genuine structural improvements, particularly in funding, supervision, leadership, and policy integration, will be essential to unlocking the full potential of the career development profession.

Conclusion

The 2024 National Survey affirms that Australia's career development practitioners are deeply committed professionals who deliver immense value to individuals, education systems, employers, and communities. With an average job engagement rating of 8.1 out of 10, the profession demonstrates a strong connection to purpose and an enduring commitment to client-centred practice.

This is a profession characterised by strength and experience. Nearly half of all respondents have more than a decade of dedicated career development practice, and 75% entered the field from other roles and sectors, bringing valuable cross-sector insight and maturity to their work. The sector is also highly qualified, with 66% of practitioners holding a Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher, and more than half expressing interest in advancing to Master's level study. These findings reflect a commitment to professional development and lifelong learning.

However, the data also reveals persistent systemic gaps. Practitioners report high levels of stress and limited opportunities for supervision, advancement, or structured performance evaluation. Nearly one-quarter have no allocated professional development budget, and more than half rely on informal feedback rather than formal review processes. These constraints are compounded by patchy integration of the Professional Standards into daily practice and limited adoption of structured evaluation frameworks.

The profession's use of labour market information and digital tools, particularly AI, also remains limited, despite being recognised as areas of strategic importance. While AI training was identified as the most urgent development need in 2024, more than half of the respondents had never used

AI to support clients. Similarly, services such as virtual career fairs and simplifying labour market information were rated among the least impactful, pointing to a disconnect between digital innovation goals and on-the-ground realities.

Despite these challenges, practitioners remain focused on the future and optimistic. More than half believe the sector will improve over the next five years. This optimism is underpinned by a collective desire to enhance impact through better leadership, stronger integration, and greater recognition of the profession's value.

To realise this potential, the sector requires targeted and sustained investment. Priorities include building leadership pathways, embedding consistent evaluation practices, modernising technology use, and strengthening the systematic application of professional standards. These measures will not only enhance the quality and consistency of services but also ensure the sector remains responsive to evolving labour market demands.

With the proper infrastructure, support, and strategic vision, the profession is prepared to play a transformative role in shaping an inclusive, skilled, and resilient workforce for Australia's future.