

A qualitative review of personal career guidance in secondary schools in England

About the author

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Disclaimer

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Introduction

This is a report about personal career guidance practice from the perspective of secondary schools. It has been informed by interviews with school Careers Leaders (or equivalent) in schools in England in January 2020.

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)'s Compass tool – a self-evaluation tool to help schools track progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks – illustrates that personal guidance practice varies across institutions.¹ The interviews with Careers Leaders in this review build on this data and explores the different approaches taken by school to deliver personal guidance, and the associated enablers and barriers.

As with all eight benchmarks, personal guidance has been enshrined within statutory guidance.² It states that every school must ensure provision of independent career guidance, presented in an impartial manner, for Year 8 to Year 13 pupils. Within the statutory guidance there are headline measurables related specifically to personal guidance. They include;

- Every pupil should have opportunities for personal guidance interviews with a qualified careers adviser³ whenever significant study or career choices are being made.

¹ The Careers & Enterprise Company (2019). [State of the Nation 2019: Careers and enterprise provision in England's secondary schools and colleges](#). London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

² *Statutory Guidance: Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*. October 2018.

³ The statutory guidance refers to Level 6 and Level 7 personal guidance qualifications when discussing what is meant by a 'qualified careers professional'. This is the professional standard for Careers Advisers working in schools and it is recognised by the Career Development Institute (CDI), the professional body for Advisers. The

- The school should use a qualified careers professional, who could be an appropriately trained member of school staff, to provide personal guidance interviews.
- The Government’s expectation is that every pupil should have at least one such interview by the age of 16, and the opportunity for a further interview by the age of 18.
- The school should integrate this guidance within the pastoral system so that personal careers interviews can be followed up by the form tutors or their equivalent.
- The personal guidance should be clearly connected with the wider career programme.

The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit (September 2017),⁴ published by The Careers & Enterprise Company, provides examples of what ‘good’ personal guidance looks like. The toolkit describes ‘good’ in the following contexts:

- Listening to students’ needs
- Helping students to identify and explore suitable options
- Challenging assumptions
- De-mystifying learning and labour market systems
- Developing strategies for how to achieve goals
- Building students’ persistence, motivation and confidence
- Referring students to other agencies.

This is further reflected and reinforced in the Career Development Institute (CDI)’s own quality assurance framework for 1:1 careers interviews.⁵

This review seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent is personal guidance being carried out in schools in line with the statutory guidance?
- 2) What is the quality, or effectiveness, of personal guidance (bearing in mind guidance provided by the CEC⁶ and CDI)?

CDI also outlines a set of professional standards and a code of ethics for the profession. The statutory guidance also ‘encourages’ schools to use the CDI’s professional register when seeking to recruit and/or commission appropriately qualified advisers. It is important to note that personal guidance can be delivered by an ‘appropriately trained’ member of school staff.

⁴ See <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/careers-enterprise-cdi-gatsby-benchmark-toolkit.pdf>

⁵ CDI Recommendations for Quality Assurance Criteria: Career Development Interventions <https://www.thecdi.net/QA-of-Career-Development-Interventions>

⁶ https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/1146_what_works_-_personal_guidance_digital_15-11-2018.pdf

Following the Careers Leader interviews six key themes emerged. For each of these themes this report presents key insights, recommendations, examples of practice and suggested further research.

Method

The review was conducted across a pre-identified 21 secondary schools (including 12 with sixth-forms) in England. The sample represented a wide geographical spread with schools from the north-east of England, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humber, the Midlands, London, the south-east, south-west and south coast. The schools also represented a broad range of geographies from inner-cities to rural locations, and a wide range of population demographics, such as varying levels of unemployment rates in their catchments.

The Gatsby Benchmarks, statutory guidance and existing quality markers outlined by the CEC and CDI were used to develop a framework for semi-structured telephone interviews with the Careers Leader in each institution (see Appendix 1). Questions were sent in advance to participants, with discussions lasting approximately 30 minutes. Some schools nominated someone other than the Careers Leader to take part, for example another representative within the schools with careers responsibility or a careers adviser (no external careers advisers were interviewed).

Key findings

- The majority of schools said that they are achieving or working well towards the achievement of Benchmark 8. Sixteen schools said that they were ‘meeting’, four were ‘progressing towards’ and one school was ‘not meeting’.
- The majority of schools confirmed that they have a qualified careers adviser delivering personal guidance. Seventeen schools had a qualified careers adviser who holds either a Level 6 or Level 7 Career Guidance qualification, two schools had ‘trainee’ careers advisers undertaking the Level 6 qualification, one school had someone doing the careers adviser role but not yet working towards Level 6, and another school had no-one doing the careers adviser role.
- The schools have two main models for the provision of personal guidance.
 - Internal resource – staff who were either recruited as qualified Careers Advisers or were ‘upskilled’ from another existing role in the school. Eight schools employed their own careers advisers.
 - External resource – careers advisers are provided by external companies. Twelve schools commission an external provider.

The external model was more prevalent, and, within this model, the use of larger well-known organisations is most common. Six schools commission former and

surviving Connexions Services, five commission other private sector providers, and one school uses a sole trader.

- Two-thirds of schools in the survey said that, by the end of Year 11, all their students will have had a personal guidance interview (14 schools). The statutory guidance is more open to interpretation with regard to post-16. It states that young people should have had the *opportunity* for a further interview by the end of Year 13. Despite this, five school sixth forms said that all of their students will have a personal guidance interview.
- There is variation in the length of the initial personal guidance interview from less than 20 minutes to 1 hour. The most common duration (in nine schools) is 30 minutes, and three schools allowed 20 minutes. Therefore twelve schools provided personal guidance one-to-ones of 30 minutes or less (57% of the sample).
- When asked about ideal models of personal guidance, interviewees suggested that schools would like to allocate more time for each interview, increase the number of personal guidance interviews for students and to introduce them lower down the school.
- The main barriers to ideal models are the lack of time and budget allocated to personal guidance. This suggests further value could be given to personal guidance by school management and budget decision-makers.
- Year 11 students can sometimes be deemed 'off-limits' for all personal guidance, and others are not allowed out of English, maths or science lessons. To compensate, several schools are focusing post-16 transition personal guidance on Year 10.
- The arrangements for personal guidance in some schools are somewhat fragile. For example, schools have struggled to source and provide personal guidance when existing arrangements break down.
- Only two schools shared that they have knowledge of the CDI Register of Career Development Professionals. They used it as part of the quality assurance of their externally contracted careers adviser. It was not used as a resource for procurement.
- Schools are using a binary measure to demonstrate they meet Benchmark 8, i.e. do all or most students by the end of Year 11 get a personal guidance interview? The schools interviewed did not have a consistent view on what constituted a sufficient duration for an interview, or a way of ensuring quality.
- Positively, action planning in personal guidance interviews took place routinely with students, and action plans were frequently shared with other school staff. However, they were not always acted upon. There was no indication that personal guidance was 'integrated with pastoral learning' or 'connected to the wider career programme'.

- The quality assurance of personal guidance could be significantly improved. The most common measures of effectiveness are destinations and informal/anecdotal feedback from students and/or staff (in terms of post-interview informal conversations between Careers Leader and student, or between Careers Leader and Tutors who had spoken to students).
- The best examples of personal guidance were found in schools where it is valued, adequate resource is in place, robust quality assurance is evident, it is integrated into pastoral systems, and is connected to curriculum.

Six Themes

The following six themes emerged as a result of the reviews with Careers Leaders. The themes that emerged highlight:

1. The broad split between two equally successful models of delivery – internal staffing and external personal guidance provision.
2. The fragility of current arrangements in some institutions.
3. The prevalence of relatively short personal guidance interviews
4. Further consideration of how personal guidance integrates with the pastoral system and connects to the wider career programme.
5. The relationship between the value placed on personal guidance by managers and the quality of provision.
6. The need for improved quality assurance processes for personal guidance.

1) Models of personal guidance provision

The model for delivery fell into two broad categories; one whereby the school provided an internal solution by employing their own careers adviser (sourcing someone external or upskilling internally) and the other whereby the school commissioned an external careers adviser (who is employed by a Local Authority, still-existing Connexions Service, private company or sole-trader). Twelve schools adopted an external solution and eight schools used internal arrangements. Both approaches led to equally successful personal guidance.

The focus of personal guidance was on Year 11, although there are examples of the 'Year 11 cohort' being seen from summer term of Year 10. There are several schools whereby

competing demands on Year 11 time has resulted in a re-focus or a planned re-focus on Year 10. This issue is most reflected in key theme 5, the value of personal guidance.

Where personal guidance takes place lower down the school, it is nearly always targeted including work carried out with SEND pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or those who have been identified within 'risk of being not in education, employment, or training (NEET)' indicators. On the whole, personal guidance does not regularly take place further down the school, although Careers Leaders highlighted this as something they would like to happen in an ideal world.

The majority of schools said that they also allow students to self-refer for further personal guidance. This does not necessarily mean that they will get a formal appointment with a careers adviser – instead the Careers Leader might see the student initially and/or the student is referred to any drop-in offered by the careers adviser at lunch or after school. Further exploration would be needed to explore how self-referrals are managed, whether all year groups are given equal information about self-referral, and if self-referral changes the overall picture of who receives personal guidance and when.

The Internal Model

Where Careers Advisers are employed internally (eight schools), they have duties in addition to those related to personal guidance. In five schools the careers adviser is also fulfilling Careers Leader duties. In four of these schools the careers adviser is also the named Careers Leader, and in the other one school, they perform many of the duties of the Careers Leader, who is a member of the SLT. The other three internal careers advisers work alongside and are line-managed by the Careers Leader; however they also have other responsibilities across the whole career guidance remit including administrative tasks.

The overwhelming benefit stated for having an internal careers adviser is the consistent accessibility to and availability of the personal guidance service in school. All eight schools suggested that accessibility and availability were strengths. Comments included: "I am on-site all of the time"; "Everyone gets access to personal guidance"; "I am visible and available"; "There is consistency".

Other benefits include being dedicated to the whole guidance process and having greater knowledge of the students and school. Comments included: "Full-time non-teaching role allows dedication to the overall career programme"; "I can see through the whole guidance process"; "I am dedicated to careers all of the time"; "Being on-site allows greater knowledge of students and families"; "I get to know the students"; "I can improvise and change things".

The most prevalent weakness identified came from the five staff who operated as the careers adviser and the Careers Leader. Specifically, they found it a challenge to balance time between the two roles – with competing demands including administrative tasks. It

is important to recognise that a Careers Leader and a careers adviser each have their own set of duties and responsibilities. However, the other three internal careers advisers also had some other duties across the wider career programme including administration and they, too, perceived similar weaknesses. Comments included: “Balancing roles is challenging”; “There are loads of demands on my time”; “Would love more capacity... so (I) am not spread so thin”. The latter comment came from a careers adviser/Careers Leader who commented that the competing roles did not allow her to completely focus on personal guidance at the most timely point of the year.

Other identified weaknesses included perceived recruitment-related pressure from schools with sixth forms (two responses), a lack of cover in the event of absence, and a lack of an external voice/face and line management support from those who do not fully understand personal guidance. This raises some questions about how professional careers advisers employed by a school continue to develop their skills, keep up to date with knowledge, and communicate the value of personal guidance. This is discussed further below. Although these weaknesses reflect the prevalent feedback from schools with an internal model, it is very possible that several are reflective of the external model schools too (we would assume that careers advisers from a specialist company would be more likely to have access to professional ‘career’ line management and CPD opportunities).

The External Model

In the twelve schools using external careers advisers, the commissioned arrangement is commonly as a result of long-lasting partnerships, often pre-dating the widespread use of the Gatsby benchmarks and a legacy of Connexions Services. Seven schools are using these now-traded Connexions Services. Interestingly one of them still partially funds personal guidance, with the school ‘topping up’ the provision through a traded arrangement. This is unique within the sample.

Of the other external arrangements, two schools involve companies whose Directors are previously known to the school through previous roles within the local Connexions Service. Therefore only three schools sourced an external commission outside of existing and/or prior relationships.

The length and frequency of the externally commissioned contracts vary widely, ranging from 8 days to 60+ days. A few contracts are fulfilled across a limited period of time, whilst others provide a consistent presence of a careers adviser on one or two days per week throughout the year. Roughly speaking, three schools fall into a ‘limited contract’ category (8 to 12 contracted days), two schools contract around 20 days, three commit to about 30 to 40 days, and three have a more substantial and frequent arrangement (60+ days and/or two days per week). In one conversation with a Careers Leader, the length and frequency of the contract was undefined.

The main benefits of using an external organisation include the perception that a specialist service is a professional entity with qualified, knowledgeable staff who stay up

to date with career information and guidance practice. Five schools specifically commented about the professionalism of such services. Comments included: “We use a well-known independent and impartial provider” “There is more of an impact from the adviser being external” “It gives peace of mind that the adviser’s professional training is up-to-date” “We have confidence that the adviser is qualified and committed to a minimum of 25 hours CPD per year” “They are experts in what they do”.

The main weakness of the external model is the limited presence of a careers adviser in the school, which means that students have less accessibility to personal guidance and less chance of timely support. Four schools specifically commented about this, with one observing that their careers adviser would be “finished in 3 weeks”. Other comments included: “Would like more of the careers adviser” “Not accessible to all students and not timely” “The adviser is not in school enough” As many of the school relationships with personal guidance providers are long-standing, it also raises concerns about what happens if services disappear.

When asked what would improve their personal guidance model, several themes were identified:

- i. More interviews (six Careers Leaders);
- ii. Personal guidance should also be provided to younger students (five);
- iii. longer interviews (four); and
- iv. buy-in more days from the external provider (four).

2) *Fragility of personal guidance provision and arrangements*

There is a degree of fragility with personal guidance provision whether the current model is internal or external, as discussed in theme 1. Fragility in this review mainly reflects the lack of a plan should the existing arrangement fail. Nationally, lots of Connexions Services immediately transitioned to traded services after central funding was cut (in 2011), of which some have since ceased to trade.

Many of the schools interviewed indicated that their external advisers had been borne out of the long-standing relationships developed through Connexions Services. However, it is unclear what happens when schools need to find a new adviser, or when their current service is poor quality.

The evidence suggests that when the existing relationship breaks down or is threatened it presents challenges. Three schools with the external model described the challenges they recently faced, and a further one expressed fears relating to potential future funding changes. This funding concern was unique to those interviewed – “There is a threat of our partial funding from the Local Authority being cut.... (and) there is uncertainty about the future.”

In one school it took the full autumn term to source an alternative careers adviser through a local Careers Leader network. In another, the “consistent careers adviser

for two years” left, and the commissioned external service were unable to source a replacement for 3 months. A third school deemed the local traded Connexions provision to be too expensive, so internally allocated the Careers Adviser role to an existing member of staff with the intention of putting them through the Level 6 training.

In the two schools who struggled to source another adviser, and in another who expressed an interest in comparing services, none were aware of the Career Development Institute’s Register of Career Development Professionals.⁷ However, some schools (two) had used the CDI register to support quality assurance. Local networks through which knowledge can be shared about locally available provision were used to support finding a new adviser (as seen in one of the cases above). For example, Careers Leaders will access one or more of the following: their local Careers Hub, local Careers Leader network meetings, a career network within their multi-academy trust or Local Authority.

Fragility of provision is most felt in the external model. However, there is potential fragility in the internal model too. One internal careers adviser (who is also the Careers Leader) said that one of the weaknesses in their schools’ model is, “If I am off ill, there is no cover.” When this had occurred, no qualified cover could be found for some time. In two schools within this sample, an internal member of staff without a professional guidance qualification had carried out interviews with students.

A further point of ‘fragility’ concerns the time it takes to complete the Level 6 training required to become a professional careers adviser. The ‘Total Qualification Time’ (TQT) of the course is 600 hours (as per the qualification standards for OCR Level 6 Diploma Career Guidance and Development). Accounting for the fact that the internal ‘trainee’ is working and likely fulfilling a broad range of duties (as evidenced in this paper), realistically completion will take 18 months or longer. For any school, this is a substantial commitment and in this period of time the person is not fully qualified. It is therefore critical that they access professional support, this could be through other staff in the school or through the CDI where this is not available in the institution.

Recommendations

The recommendations arising from this theme are:

- All personal guidance professionals should be encouraged to sign up to the CDI Register of Career Development Professionals. This register should then be promoted to schools as a way of supporting quality-assured procurement.

⁷ <https://www.thecdi.net/find-a-professional>

- Awareness should be raised of support networks beyond the school, e.g. professional practice groups (where best practice is shared or peer mentoring arrangements set up), local Careers Hubs, Local Authority services, Careers Leader networks and the CDI.

3) *The prevalence of relatively short Personal Guidance interviews*

There is a wide variation in length of personal guidance interviews students receive, ranging from 20 minutes to 1 hour. Although nine of 21 schools overall offer interviews longer than 30 minutes, the most common duration is 30 minutes (in nine schools) and a further three schools offer 20 minutes per interview.

It is important to note that there is no recommended duration for a personal guidance interview within the benchmarks or (at the time of writing) from any other well-known reliable source. However, some of the Careers Leaders surveyed recognised that shorter interviews do not provide an opportunity for significant 'guidance', and four schools expressed a desire to offer longer interviews for their students. The desire to have longer interviews was often stated by those in the dual role of careers adviser and Careers Leader, indicating that they are not being allocated sufficient time to perform both roles.

The variation in duration of personal guidance is likely to be determined by a number of factors rather than just one. However, the most repeated barriers mentioned are cost, time and perceived value. When asked about the barriers to longer personal guidance interviews, the Careers Leaders overwhelmingly identified cost (eleven Careers Leaders), time (ten) and the lower value placed on personal guidance within the wider context of the school (ten). Responses related to 'value' included; the lack of a whole school buy-in, no SLT/headteacher focus on careers, low priority compared with academia, and a reluctance to let some students out of lessons.

The impact of budget constraints is more evident where a school commissions external provision. As noted in theme 1, schools who do this buy in a certain number of days to deliver personal guidance. The number of days bought in is varied, and clearly some spend more money on external provision than others. This might simply reflect the size of the school. However the huge variation in contract size strongly suggests that it also reflects the length of time allocated per interview.

The length of interview is not directly related to whether a school uses an external or internal personal guidance model. Four schools with an internal careers adviser offered students 30 minutes or less (50% of internal schools). By way of comparison eight out of twelve schools using an external provider offered interviews of 30 minutes or less (66.6% of external schools). The length of interview in each school

was determined through conversation and the answer was often framed by phrases such as “an average of” and “sometimes they can be longer/shorter”. However, the general picture is one whereby there are more shorter interviews than longer interviews.

Although interviews may be shorter than schools would like, the vast majority of schools do follow up in some way (17 schools). The follow-ups are overwhelmingly targeted (13 of the 17 that follow up), and the length of the second interaction is varied. However, most students only receive one initial interview. Although in three schools everyone receives a further meeting within the same academic year (Year 10/11), it is varied in length. Comments include: “We keep going until satisfied they are on the right track and they could get a full 30 minutes again”; “Most students get more than one, although for the more able it is likely to be brief”; “Often the follow-up is practical, for example completing application forms”; “In theory yes, in practice it is difficult”; “Not a huge number get follow-ups because of priority for all Year 11s to be seen”; “Not many get a follow-up”; “Likely that any follow-up would come to me (the Careers Leader)”.

There are also other careers conversations in school (and out) that might contribute to or follow on from the personal guidance interview. These follow-up career conversations, and extra support to enact the agreed actions, are not a measure of personal guidance directly, but rather evidence to measure whether or not personal guidance is integrated with other pastoral support and connected to the wider career programme (both existing criteria within Benchmark 8).

Best practice

One Careers Adviser had a clear ideal measure that a personal guidance interview should be 45 minutes. However, when the meeting time falls short of this ideal or when there is a need, there is an assessment of distance still to travel and a further guidance meeting is arranged accordingly. Sometimes interviews last one hour as appropriate and when possible. This is managed through a Red Amber Green (RAG) system through which students are tracked and followed up. This is supported by an open door self-referral system that students are encouraged to use when they want further guidance. The careers adviser is visible, has a base and is considered approachable by the student body.

Recommendations

- Clear advice should be given to school leadership about the value of personal guidance interviews to ensure sufficient resource (staffing and budget) is in place to give students guidance interviews of greater than 30 minutes.

4) Integrated and Connected Personal Guidance

The statutory guidance states that “the school should integrate this guidance within the pastoral system so that personal careers interviews can be followed up by the form tutors or their equivalent” and also that “personal guidance should be clearly connected with the wider career programme”. Within the school reviews the questions that relate to integration and connectivity include those about student preparation (Question 5), action planning (Q8) and other staff involved in careers conversations (Q11).

Overall, the conversations during each school review suggest that achievement of Benchmark 8 is interpreted in a binary way: either ‘pupils get a personal guidance interview by the end of Year 11’ or they do not. There is therefore scope for significant growth in terms of integrating interviews into the pastoral system and career guidance programme more generally.

Preparation for personal guidance

In terms of preparation for the personal guidance interview, the conversations with the Careers Leaders focused on how the schools prepare the students. There was little discussion about how the careers advisers are prepared.

Where schools said preparation does happen, the most common activity was group work (seven schools). Five schools reported that students are prepared for personal guidance by a presentation in assembly (25% of those offering personal guidance), and four mentioned that an analysis of potential NEETs or a survey of students was carried out to determine priority. One school specifically mentioned conversations between the careers adviser and Careers Leader.

Five schools reported that there was no preparation (25% of schools offering personal guidance). Comments from these schools included: “Up to the student. Some come through well-prepared, others less so”; “The focus is on getting the Year 11 interviews done”; “A pre-interview checklist was previously used, but students did not engage”; “They are notified about their interview and they know me through my Careers Leader role”; “Students are not prepared enough for their careers interview in Year 10 and/or Year 11”.

Action Planning

Of the schools offering personal guidance, 17 provide the student with an action plan (85%), and four of these also record the interview and outcomes on a spreadsheet (tracking sheet). Two schools only use a tracking sheet, and one school has no record of the personal guidance intervention at all.

Action plans are a clear opportunity for personal guidance to integrate and connect to the rest of the career programme. In 85% of the schools in the sample, students do receive an action plan. They are the main outcome for the client and the school, and they are rich in qualitative and quantitative individual data which can inform

further conversations in the school and the career activities the school delivers. Indeed, action plans are an integral part of the quality assurance of 1:1 interventions, as detailed within guidance from the CDI.

Of the 17 schools in which an action plan is completed, ten schools definitively stated that it is shared and stored within the school, two definitively stated that they were not shared, and in five of the conversations it was inconclusive whether the plans are shared with the school or not. Therefore at least 60% of schools who provide an action plan for students are sharing and storing, and therefore allowing for the possibility of integration and connectivity.

Five schools stated that action plans are used in an integrated and connected way. Comments included: “Currently (action plans) are accessed by the Careers Leader and the Head of Year”; “(They) are then shared with key members of staff including the Learning Mentor and Head of Year”; “In all likelihood tutors will only access students for whom there are concerns or have been referred”; “Some staff follow up on application forms”. In one conversation the Careers Leader shared that: “the information gathered from the interview informs the wider career programme.” This latter statement is a clear example of personal guidance ‘connecting with the wider career programme’.

There is evidence that Careers Leaders want personal guidance to integrate and connect. In one school, the new Careers Leader, with a fresh approach to careers, commented that, “there has to be evidence from the interview in the form of a quality professional action plan.... (It) is a document which is used to inform further support.” Currently the action plans are used by the Careers Leader and the Head of Year 11; however there was also enthusiasm for the action plan to be used more and for different purposes across the whole career programme. The Careers Leader shared the vision for whole school involvement in personal guidance including training, so that the wider staff team can see its value.

Wider careers conversations

Another insight into integration and connectivity can be found in the discussions about who else is involved in personal guidance (other than careers advisers).

There were six examples of other staff being involved who were qualified careers advisers (but were currently not delivering personal guidance sessions) – two worked in an attached sixth form (one was also the Careers Leader and the other worked for an external organisation) and the other four qualified advisers worked for the Local Authority working with young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or at risk of becoming NEET. It is highly likely that there are actually more qualified careers advisers from the Local Authority operating in schools doing personal guidance with SEND students. This presents an opportunity for schools to better connect these advisers with the whole-school career programme.

In terms of other people involved in wider career conversations, the Careers Leader was mentioned eleven times, Tutors/Pastoral Team got ten mentions, local roles funded through the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP – now known as Uni Connect) were noted five times followed by Head of Year (four), Senior Leadership Team (three), Sixth Form team (three), Learning Mentors (three), Business (two), DWP Schools Advisers (one), Apprenticeship Adviser (one), Colleges and Universities (one) and Qualification in Career Guidance students from a local University (one). Positively, it's clear that there are lots of career conversations taking place, however it was not clear whether those involved had access to action plans.

The following comments from Careers Leaders described how this approach was part of their long-term plan: “(Our) longer term plan is the whole school involvement in personal guidance. I would like staff training about the value of personal guidance.” “I have a vision for expanding conversations to include Senior Leaders meeting parents in Year 9 at GCSE Options Evening, and Tutors meeting students individually in Year 7 and 8. All in preparation for personal guidance in Year 10 and 11.”

The statutory guidance's measure of integration and connectivity is not clearly applied by schools when they self-evaluate progress against Benchmark 8. However, there is a framework in place in most schools which suggests that personal guidance can be integrated and connected. Preparation for interviews is taking place, and in most schools action plans are provided and shared with key staff. Key staff and other partners are also involved in wider career conversations.

Best practice

In one school, personal guidance practice is delivered from Year 8 to Sixth Form. It is coherently planned, integrated and connected to the wider programme. In Year 8 the Careers Adviser runs group sessions in which students are introduced to u-Explore careers software. Conversations about ideas, learning, jobs, skills and qualities begin in this group setting. In Year 9, small group interviews cover broad topics such as Labour Market Information and specialist on-line careers information. Some targeted students will get their first one-to-one interview. The work in Year 8 and 9 prepares the students for the main Personal Guidance interviews in Year 10. Each student gets 45 minutes of in-depth guidance. The Careers Adviser is also well-prepared, having had opportunities to build a relationship with the students.

In another school, an action plan is shared with the student and key staff including Learning Mentor and the Head of Year. The Learning Mentor works with targeted students and uses the guidance within the action plan to inform their work. Similarly the Head of Year reads the action plans to support those students where there are specific concerns about their academic progress and/or well-being.

A further school recognises that the rich information held in the action plans should be widely used across the whole curriculum in an integrated and connected way. This is part of the school's longer-term vision for the whole careers programme.

Recommendations

- Further research to explore how best to prepare advisers for student interviews.
- Preparation of students for interviews should be encouraged, particularly through integration with the pastoral system.
- Best practice could be shared with Careers Leaders, demonstrating how to effectively integrate personal guidance into the wider career guidance programme.

5) The value of personal guidance

The value of personal guidance is a clear theme that was raised by the respondents during the review. For example, those Careers Leaders who also acted as careers advisers felt that personal guidance was not valued as much as it should be in their schools.

Of the eight schools providing an internal model, five suggested insufficient value was placed on personal guidance interviews (63% of respondents). Comments

included; “Staff awareness and buy-in to personal guidance is a weakness” “It is a struggle with management” “The careers adviser is not valued as they should be” A further comment raised a concern that the school is not paying the internal careers adviser “appropriately.”

A number of responses also highlighted difficulties with access to students for personal guidance interviews.

Of the 21 schools in the sample, eight noted that there was limited accessibility to the students, specifically those in Year 11 (38% of schools). Comments included: “The Headteacher does not like Year 11s missing lessons”; “There is a reluctance to let Year 11s out of class”; “The limitation of lunchtime for interviews is a weakness”; “I am never allowed to take students out of Core subjects”; “The careers adviser is not allowed to take Year 11s out of any lessons except P.E.”; “Exams and academics take priority.” One Careers Leader stated that a lack of accessibility has the “unintentional knock-on” of reducing the importance of personal guidance. For example, students may begin to see personal guidance as of lower priority and place less value on the interviews if they are not prioritised. This was illustrated in several schools where adviser time was spent chasing up students who have “forgot” or who have “not had tutors hand them appointment slips”.

It is also important to emphasise that there is good practice in some schools where personal guidance has a higher priority. In these cases, personal guidance interviews are longer in duration, most students are followed up, further career conversations take place within the pastoral system, outcomes inform the curriculum, and quality assurance is in place.

Best practice

In this example of best practice, personal guidance is valued by staff and students alike. The careers adviser is also the Careers Leader. This hybrid role is given full attention because the person has no teaching duties, is employed full-time by the school, and is fully integrated into the whole school team. The value of the role was highlighted from the outset during the recruitment process – the school actively sought a professional careers adviser. This support of the profession is also seen in the commitment to taking placement students from a local postgraduate career guidance course (Qualification in Career Guidance). The postholder has been given rein to develop a service brand across the school, including a logo which is prominent in all the work. On-going evaluations about what works and what does not are supported. From the student perspective, the annual Year 11 survey of all careers activities shows that personal guidance is consistently valued as the best or next best careers activity.

Recommendations

- A communications campaign, with further support for Careers Leaders, to ensure the value of personal guidance is made clear to school leaders
- Further research to explore student perceptions of the value of personal guidance

6) *Quality assurance of personal guidance*

Quality assurance is predominantly focused on destinations data (intended destinations, Year 11 activity surveys, and longer-term destinations) and informal feedback (but may not be recorded). Destination measures was overwhelmingly the most commented way of measuring the effectiveness of personal guidance (52% of schools). In several schools, other than informal feedback from students and staff, this was the only measure. Informal feedback with students and staff took place in 48% of schools.

A quarter (24%) of schools had some formal measure of quality assurance in place – either a quality evaluation of the adviser (through an observation) or written student feedback (survey/questionnaire). However, this approach was not universal. Good data capture – such as through observation of personal guidance interviews and/or formal client feedback from students – establishes a measurable evidence base to demonstrate the impact of personal guidance, and this is vital in building the case for sufficient value to be placed on it within the school.

Quality Assurance including measures of effectiveness, awareness of the CDI Professional Register and the Matrix Standard (a suggested quality accreditation within the Statutory Guidance) is certainly a topic worthy of further discussion, study and direction for schools.

Recommendations

- All schools should be encouraged to collect consistent and good quality data on the impact of career guidance
- Schools should be made aware of the CDI Professional Register and the Matrix Standard to ensure they embed quality assurance into their procurement of personal guidance services.

Best practice

One of the schools described this complete quality assurance process;

- Destination measures are used and are a valid measure of effectiveness
- A student questionnaire (a student voice) is administered by the school and shared with the external provider
- Results are scrutinised, and they inform practice and allow further follow up as appropriate
- The careers adviser is observed in practice by the school Careers Leader and also a manager from the external service
- Review meetings are held between the school and provider to plan way forward, taking into account the above quality measures.

Appendix 1 – Interview questions

1. What does practice look like in your school?
2. In your school, how would you describe your current progress towards Benchmark 8 – Personal guidance?
3. What estimated percentage of students have had a 1:1 careers interview by the end of Year 11 (and a second one by the end of Year 13 where school has a sixth form)?
4. If only some students receive a personal guidance interview, how is the service distributed (across year groups, within year groups)?
5. On average, how long is each personal guidance interview and when, during the day, do they take place. How do students and staff prepare for it?
6. Are there opportunities for a follow-up personal guidance interview within the same academic year? Do some students get more than the recommended one personal guidance meeting before the end of Year 11/13? How does this work?
7. Can young people in your school self-refer when they feel that they need or want personal guidance? How does this work?
8. How are personal guidance outcomes recorded, how are they shared and with whom?
9. Who carries out the personal guidance interviews (internal and upskilled, internal with skill, external with skill? If external how were they sourced? How were they procured? Are they a sole trader/company/Local Authority?)
10. What qualification does the main person who delivers the personal guidance hold?
11. Are any other staff involved in personal guidance within the school? If so, who are they, what is their background, what qualification or training do they have?
12. How do you and your school measure the effectiveness of the personal guidance delivered?
13. What, in your opinion, are the main benefits of your current model to deliver personal guidance?
14. What, in your opinion, are the main weaknesses?
15. In an ideal world, what would personal guidance look like in your school?
16. What are the main barriers to the ideal personal guidance offer in your school?

Appendix 2 – Key data from 21 secondary schools

Tables of results

- In your school, how would you describe your current progress towards Benchmark 8- Personal Guidance?*

| Meeting | Progressing towards | Not meeting |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|
| 16 | 4 | 1 |

- What estimated percentage of students have had a 1:1 careers interview by the end of Year 11 (and a second one by the end of Year 13 where school has a sixth form)?*

Year 11

| 100% | 90%+ | 80%+ | 50-79% | Below 50% | 0% |
|------|------|------|--------|-----------|----|
| 14 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | 1 |

Year 13

| 100% | 90%+ | 80%+ | 50-79% | Below 50% | 0% |
|------|------|------|--------|-----------|----|
| 5 | 1 | | 4 | | 1 |

- On average, how long is each personal guidance interview, and when during the day do they take place. How do students and staff prepare for it?*

| 60 minutes | 45-59 minutes | 30-44 minutes | 20-29 minutes | Below 20 minutes | N/A |
|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|-----|
| 1 | 4 | 12 | 3 | | 1 |

- Are there opportunities for a follow-up personal guidance interview within the same academic year? Do some students get more than the recommended one personal guidance meeting before the end of Year 11/13? How does this work?*

| Yes (all, adviser-led) | Yes (targeted, adviser-led) | Yes (seen by non-adviser) | No | N/A |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----|-----|
| 3 | 13 | 1 | 3 | 1 |

- Can young people in your school self-refer when they feel that they need or want personal guidance? How does this work?*

| Yes | No | N/A |
|-----|----|-----|
| 18 | 2 | 1 |

- *How are personal guidance outcomes recorded, how are they shared and with whom?*

| Action Plan and Tracking Sheet | Action Plan | Tracking Sheet | None | N/A |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|------|-----|
| 4 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

- *Who carries out the personal guidance interviews (internal and upskilled, internal with skill, external with skill? If external how were they sourced? How were they procured? Are they a sole trader/company/Local Authority?)*

| Internal (employed by school) | External (employed by Local Authority) | External (employed by other organisation) | External (self-employed/sole trader) | N/A |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 8 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 1 |

- *What qualification does the main person who delivers the personal guidance hold?*

| Level 6 or 7 | No, but working towards Level 6 | No, but holds Level 2, 3 or 4 Advice and Guidance | None | N/A |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---|------|-----|
| 17 | 2 | | 1 | 1 |

- *How do you and your school measure the effectiveness of the personal guidance delivered?*

| Destination Measures | Quality Assurance-observation of adviser | Quality Assurance-client feedback (written) | Anecdotal i.e. conversations with students or staff but not recorded | None | N/A |
|----------------------|--|---|--|------|-----|
| 11 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 3 | 1 |

- *In an ideal world, what would personal guidance look like in your school?*

- Personal guidance lower down the school in Year 9/pre-GCSE choices
- Longer interviews
- More interviews
- Would buy in more days from local Careers Service
- Would buy in local Careers Service (this school was training up own staff)
- Would employ a full-time careers adviser internally (this school used an external service)
- Employ another person to support personal guidance – have a team
- More preparation for personal guidance interviews
- Complete focus on personal guidance at certain times rather than juggling responsibilities (A careers adviser/Careers Leader hybrid)
- Whole school staff to understand and recognise value of personal guidance and careers generally
- Students to understand and recognise value of personal guidance
- Get future assurances on Local Authority provision
- Tutors to follow up and get involved in careers conversations
- The school to respect my 'trained-up' adviser more.

- *What are the main barriers to the ideal personal guidance offer in your school?*

- Time
- Cost
- Budget cuts
- Reluctance to let students out of core subjects
- Getting a whole school 'buy-in'
- Expensive to train someone up
- Dual role provides challenges regarding time and priorities
- No administrative support
- Tension between roles
- Threat of reduced funding in the future
- Headteacher wanting to 'pull the plug'
- Lack of SLT/headteacher focus on careers
- No SLT commitment
- Low priority overall
- School being put in 'special measures'
- GCSE results drive
- Pressures to retain students in the sixth form