
GOOD CAREER GUIDANCE



THE NEXT 10 YEARS



GATSBY

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FOREWORD

BY LORD SAINSBURY OF TURVILLE

Settlor of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation



More than a decade ago, my charitable foundation, Gatsby, sought to answer the question: how can all young people receive careers guidance that fulfils their ambition and aspiration, whatever their background. Following an exploration of the international careers landscape, defining what good would look like and, critically, working out how to achieve good for as many young people as possible, the result was what is now known as the Gatsby Benchmarks.

A great deal has been achieved in the 10 years since the original *Good Career Guidance* report was published. School and college staff, careers specialists, and local and national stakeholders across the country have worked incredibly hard to deliver improved careers guidance for young people, and the results have been impressive. We now have a careers guidance system as good as any other country.

But just as the last decade has been a time of much improvement, it has also been a time of significant change. This has included the continued expansion of multi-academy trusts, reforms to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision, the publication of the Independent Review of Technical Education, and the subsequent reforms its recommendations brought about, such as the roll-out of T-levels and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). The evolving labour market has also seen fundamental changes since the Covid-19 pandemic. It was within this context that those leading Gatsby's careers guidance work set out to assess if the benchmarks of 2014 needed to change for 2024 and beyond.

It is testament to the quality of the work carried out more than 10 years ago, that after 18 months of review, evidence gathering and consultation, the benchmark framework has been found still to be robust and relevant. The eight benchmarks remain. However, where the evidence has called for it, updates, refinements and clarifications have been made to definitions and criteria. This report details those changes and offers an opportunity for government and education leaders to reaffirm their support for good careers guidance for young people across the country.

The list of organisations and individuals to thank for this significant piece of work is too long to properly acknowledge here. I greatly appreciate the commitment and dedication of so many from both the world of education and the world of work. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Sir John Holman, who earlier this year formally retired after more than half a century of dedication to improving education in this country, for his huge contribution to the original report. Through both my time as Minister for Science and Innovation and the work of Gatsby, I have had the privilege of witnessing John's incredible commitment to improving the life chances of young people and his exceptional ability to make change happen.

Finally, I believe this updated version of the benchmarks will be as invaluable in delivering good careers guidance for the next generation as the original benchmarks were for those young people who are now realising their career ambitions.



David Sainsbury
Settlor

FOREWORD

BY THE RT HON BARONESS SMITH OF MALVERN

Minister for Skills



My whole professional life has been about making sure people get every opportunity to learn and to succeed, no matter who they are or where they are from. During my career teaching vocational qualifications and A levels, and in my previous ministerial role working on 14-19 education, I have seen first-hand how good careers guidance can fuel the aspirations of young people to get on and lead to better outcomes.

This is why a framework that enables institutions to meaningfully integrate careers guidance into their core purpose is critical. It is why the Gatsby Benchmarks stand out as a truly impactful addition to the support available to the sector.

The Gatsby Foundation's decision to assess and review the impact of the Gatsby Benchmarks has ensured that both this government and the wider sector can trust the ongoing relevance of the benchmarks. The extensive research carried out suggests overwhelmingly that the framework, with careers leaders at the helm, has a positive impact on young people. An example of this can be seen in the research that indicates a link between a school or college achieving more benchmarks and a reduction in their young people being not in education, employment and training (NEET).

The publication of this report is a moment to thank the Gatsby Foundation and to celebrate those who are on the front line in making good careers guidance happen, breaking down barriers to opportunity and shaping young lives. I want to thank everyone involved, from expert careers leaders and careers advisers to businesses and local hub networks, for their dedication and commitment to helping young people to achieve better life chances.

I am proud to represent a mission-driven government that is committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity and kickstarting economic growth. The original Gatsby Benchmarks have helped to embed the same mindset at the heart of education institutions across England. I am pleased to reaffirm the government's commitment to the Gatsby Benchmarks as the bedrock of our strategy to provide high-quality careers guidance to all young people.

This report is an exciting opportunity to look ahead to the next 10 years of good careers guidance. There is still work to be done in our pursuit of providing the best possible outcomes for all young people. In particular, there are opportunities to go further in tailoring guidance to meet the needs of disadvantaged young people and those who need different or additional support.

This government is determined to create a new era of opportunity and economic growth, with high-quality careers advice and work experience at the heart of our mission. I am very proud to be in a position to work alongside you all to build on those strong foundations, ensuring that young people from all backgrounds will benefit from the lifelong impact of high-quality careers guidance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

The Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern
Minister for Skills

Over the last 10 years, Gatsby has had the privilege of supporting the remarkable transformation of careers guidance in secondary schools and colleges. By using the Gatsby Benchmarks for good careers guidance, dedicated individuals in secondary schools and colleges are making world-class careers guidance a reality for millions of young people. There is a huge amount to celebrate and be proud of:

- Widespread adoption and implementation – more than 90% of schools and colleges,¹ which is over 4,700 institutions, now measure their careers provision using the eight Gatsby Benchmarks.
- Progress – benchmark achievement has more than tripled, from less than 1.9 benchmarks out of 8 in 2018, to 5.8 in 2024.²
- Making a difference – young people’s career readiness is increasing,³ and they are more likely to be satisfied with the careers guidance they receive.⁴
- Positive impact on outcomes – the more benchmarks a school or college achieves, the lower the number of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) at age 16 or 18.

Good careers guidance helps to bridge the worlds of education and work and is vital for economic prosperity and growth. It also contributes to social justice because it is young people who do not have strong family or social connections to different careers who benefit most from careers guidance. When young people make supported and informed choices about their future study, training and work options, they are better able to maximise their talents and realise their ambitions.

Good careers guidance helps to bridge the worlds of education and work and is vital for economic prosperity and growth.



RATIONALE

In the last decade, schools and colleges have innovated, technology has advanced and there have been significant changes to both the education landscape and the labour market. Some independent training providers (ITPs) also started applying the benchmarks for use in their own setting. In 2023 we began systematically assessing the wider literature and the impact of current practice: we spent time in schools, colleges, ITPs and with employers, and we considered challenges and learnt how institutions had overcome them.

This report presents the updated benchmark framework. It outlines what is staying the same and what updates have been made, referencing the evidence we used for each update, alongside examples of impressive practice we have seen in action.

In 2023 we began systematically assessing the wider literature and the impact of current practice.

METHOD

Ryan Gibson, who led the original Gatsby Benchmarks pilot from 2015 to 2017, has acted as senior adviser to Gatsby for this work. The project was supported by our independent academic partner, the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby. We were also supported by an advisory group, a practitioner group and a range of sector experts (see Appendix 1).

The review process took place over two years and involved:⁵

- an open online consultation with more than 1,200 respondents and interviews with sector experts – both individuals and organisations
- literature review on good careers guidance and the benchmarks
- analysis of benchmark progress data using Compass⁶
- case studies of how the benchmarks have been adapted and used internationally
- research gathering the views of young people (with Youth Employment UK) and employers (with the British Chambers of Commerce)
- findings from independent reviews of careers guidance by the House of Commons Education Select Committee⁷ and the education regulator, Ofsted⁸
- visits to different types of secondary school, college and ITP, to hear directly from practitioners and young people
- a series of roundtables with a diverse range of stakeholders, exploring specific topics in depth

THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME |
| 2 | LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION |
| 3 | ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH YOUNG PERSON |
| 4 | LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS |
| 5 | ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES |
| 6 | EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES |
| 7 | ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION |
| 8 | PERSONAL GUIDANCE |

The benchmarks are near-universally supported – 94% of respondents saw them as a valuable framework for careers guidance.

OVERVIEW OF UPDATES

Schools, colleges, ITPs and wider stakeholders all agreed that stability was important. They were committed to building on the strong foundations of the benchmarks and the progress they have inspired. Our open consultation⁹ found:

- The benchmarks are near-universally supported – 94% of respondents saw them as a valuable framework for careers guidance.
- The proportion of respondents who valued each one of the eight benchmarks ranged from 96% to 99%, showing that each individual benchmark has near-universal support as part of the overall framework. No benchmark is considered significantly more important than any other.
- Eighty-eight per cent of secondary school and college leaders reported that the benchmarks had had a positive impact on their young people.

When considering updates to the framework, we remained committed to the use of evidence, just as we did when laying the foundations for the original Gatsby Benchmarks. We also knew that continuing to set ambitious goals for careers guidance was important, but that stability was equally important for practitioners. Therefore, we have only made updates that the evidence suggests will lead to improved outcomes for young people.

We have retained the number of benchmarks and their titles for both schools and those working with young people in colleges while ensuring they are also applicable to those working with young people in ITPs. The updated benchmarks continue to give careers leaders the autonomy to design and deliver their own careers guidance programme, because they know what works best for the young people in their institution and in their community.



While the title of each benchmark has remained the same, updates have been made to each summary and set of measurable criteria. The updated wording can be found in the Gatsby Benchmarks chapter. Five prominent themes emerged from the evidence used during the review of the benchmarks:

Careers at the heart of education and leadership

Careers guidance is both a whole-staff and a whole-institution endeavour. We have emphasised linking careers to the institution's vision and strategic plans, acknowledged the importance of staff development and included distinct responsibilities for leadership, governors, careers leaders and advisers.

Inclusion and impact for each and every young person

Woven through multiple benchmarks are updates that emphasise the importance of tailoring programmes to the needs of each young person. Particular attention is given to inclusion and any additional or different support that may be needed by vulnerable or disadvantaged young people or those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Meaningful and varied encounters and experiences

We have emphasised the focus on flexible delivery and the impact of encounters and experiences of education and work. We have expanded the definitions of 'meaningful' in Benchmarks 5 and 7 and added one to Benchmark 6. They specify the importance of offering a variety of encounters and experiences, of giving young people time to prepare and reflect and of using technology alongside, but not instead of, in-person activity.

Focusing on the use of information and data

We have ensured that all young people can explore all future pathways equitably. The focus is now on *using* information to inform decision-making. Data collection has been refocused to include aspirations and intended destinations, to help tailor support. Longer-term and sustained destinations data remain important as part of the evaluation process.

Engagement of parents and carers

Parents and carers are one of the biggest influences on young people's career decision-making. Updates embed parent and carer engagement into planning and specify the need to share information with parents and carers and support them to use it with their children.

MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK

The updated benchmarks are a world-class framework for careers guidance in schools, colleges and ITPs. This report summarises the overwhelming evidence that the benchmarks have a positive impact on young people's outcomes. Schools, colleges and ITPs are making good careers guidance happen, but they cannot do it alone. There must be a supportive system of policy, infrastructure and resources to create the right conditions for success. The updated benchmarks are being launched at a time of change, with a new government in power and significant policy developments on the horizon. This presents an exciting opportunity to weave careers guidance for young people into emerging education and skills planning initiatives, including Skills England, the Curriculum and Assessment Review, delivery of the Youth Guarantee and the new public employment and careers service.

The benchmarks also act as a framework onto which additional support, innovations and projects can be organised. **We therefore strongly recommend that government retains the Gatsby Benchmarks as the national standard for careers guidance, embedding it into relevant guidance for secondary schools, colleges and ITPs. Ofsted should also continue to use the benchmarks to inform their understanding of what good looks like for careers guidance.** One key development would be for school inspection reports to include descriptions of careers guidance, as is currently required for colleges.

The huge progress that has been made in schools, colleges and ITPs has not happened in isolation. Our report outlines the significant impact that the current national system of support, which is mainly overseen by the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC), has had on this progress.

The government should continue to invest in existing careers guidance infrastructure, including careers leader training, the Compass benchmark measurement tool, regional careers hubs and the Careers Impact System of peer review. Careers guidance is complex and involves multiple stakeholders from education and the world of work, which makes stability critical. **We therefore recommend that the national infrastructure is funded for periods of at least three years at a time.**

In addition to the above essential requirements there is other activity we think would help ensure continued high-quality delivery of careers guidance and should be a priority for this parliamentary term.

All young people, whatever their learning location or situation, deserve good careers guidance.

The government should consider how best to ensure young people studying in ITPs and those following an apprenticeship can access good careers guidance. Guidance should also be developed to ensure that young people who are not in formal education have access to the careers guidance that best suits their needs. This should be based on the principles of the benchmarks and decided in collaboration with local provision.

With a core theme of the updated benchmarks being the use of data, **it is important that government-assured good-quality data, specifically labour market information (LMI) and timely, sustained and long-term student destination data, continues to be provided.** Work should also continue on improving granularity and how best to present the data on economic trends, such as the transition to a net zero economy, to education institutions.

Further work should also be undertaken to help all education leaders understand the impact careers guidance has on outcomes for young people. This could best be achieved through embedding careers into current training, such as relevant national professional qualifications (NPQs) and the proposed Excellence in Leadership programme.

Securing the delivery of high-quality professional guidance by careers advisers is at the heart of Benchmark 8. **The education and careers sector, including government, should work with the Career Development Institute (CDI) to explore how careers advisers working with young people could join the CDI professional register.** Careers advisers who are on the CDI register for careers guidance professionals are qualified, committed to annual professional development and adhere to a code of ethics, but not all careers advisers are currently on this register. Work should include ensuring the register is fit for purpose and exploring ways of encouraging and supporting qualified careers advisers to register.

Our work has shown that we need more employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to offer experiences of workplaces. Employers need to be supported to understand the variety of experiences they can offer and to move away from the misconception that experiences are limited to blocks of one or two weeks. **The updated benchmarks help clarify the ways employers can offer experiences of workplaces, but the role of careers hubs could be expanded to improve the volume, quality and coordination of these experiences.**

Finally, we heard lots of other valuable ideas from stakeholders that deserve serious consideration. For example, exploring whether there would be value in creating a national research institute for careers guidance to better focus research investments and efforts and ensure innovation and insights are fed into practice more quickly. Further work could also be done to explore the best way to help young people articulate what they have learnt from their careers guidance programme. Finding a consistent way and a consistent language to do this will enable employers and education institutions to recognise the value of young applicants and understand the applicability of the experiences they have had.

CONCLUSION

The updated benchmarks are an opportunity to celebrate the passion and commitment of education institutions, careers professionals and employers across the country. Evidence of impact is already strong and continues to grow, and it is clear that careers guidance in this country is moving in the right direction and is delivering substantial benefits for young people.

We are hugely grateful to the hundreds of individuals and organisations that have supported the update to the benchmarks. The updated Gatsby Benchmarks for good careers guidance are based on the latest evidence and impactful practice and they continue to represent world-class provision.

Good careers guidance is about doing a variety of things, as described by the benchmarks, and doing them well and consistently over time. With schools, colleges and ITPs in the driving seat and with the support of a community of professionals from careers guidance and the world of work, we can be sure the next generation of young people will benefit from the careers guidance they deserve.



The Gatsby Benchmarks have transformed how we view careers and how we provide careers guidance for our young people, all of whom have a complex and diverse range of needs.

They are a fantastically powerful tool in preventing NEET, developing multi-agency approaches with partners, and rethinking our approach to what is possible with employers and workplaces.

CEO, Wave Multi-Academy Trust and
member of NAHT SEND and AP Council



INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREERS GUIDANCE

A career is a vital thread running through a person's life. It is formed by the ongoing complex and shifting choices an individual makes, based on their understanding of themselves and the world around them. Compulsory education has a huge influence on these decisions. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that all young people develop their knowledge and skills, that they are equipped with decision-making tools and have the opportunities to make well-informed and confident choices about their next steps.

Careers guidance does just that. It provides much of the information and guidance and many of the encounters and experiences that a young person needs to move successfully into their next stage of life, including into study, training or work.

It is crucial that all young people, whatever their background, receive good careers guidance. It enables them to maximise their talents, realise their ambitions and, ultimately, secure a rewarding career. Young people without strong social or family links to different careers benefit most; good careers guidance drives social mobility and contributes to social justice. Helping young people prepare for the labour market is also a key tool for employers and governments to address skills gaps and improve productivity.

More than 4,700 schools and colleges use the benchmarks to structure their programmes and track their progress.

THE GOOD CAREER GUIDANCE REPORT

In 2014 we published *Good Career Guidance*,¹⁰ led by Sir John Holman, which used international evidence to define what world-class careers guidance for young people looked like. The critical elements of good careers guidance were developed into a framework of eight benchmarks.

- 1 A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME
- 2 LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION
- 3 ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH YOUNG PERSON
- 4 LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS
- 5 ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES
- 6 EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES
- 7 ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION
- 8 PERSONAL GUIDANCE

The benchmarks have provided a shared understanding of, and common language for, careers guidance. They have been enthusiastically embraced by secondary schools and colleges, and some independent training providers (ITPs) have begun using them to shape their provision. More than 4,700 schools and colleges use the benchmarks to structure their programmes and track their progress.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE: THE LAST 10 YEARS

Since the publication of *Good Career Guidance*, there have been significant changes in both education and employment. There has been an increase in academisation, with more schools joining multi-academy trusts (MATs), and many colleges merging into larger groups. The qualifications landscape, especially in technical education and apprenticeships, has undergone significant reform and the labour market is adapting to changes driven by goals for sustainability, advances in technology and the rise of the gig economy.

The changing world of work

Developments in the labour market accelerated during global Covid-19 restrictions in 2020-21. These trends include more flexible working patterns, the transformational use of technology and changing employee attitudes to how job satisfaction can be achieved.¹¹ The mixture of workplace-based and remote online working, now common in many sectors, brings both challenges and opportunities for young people's encounters with employers and for their experiences of workplaces.

As technology continues to change the nature of work, the skills needed by different sectors and recruitment practices will also continue to evolve. Many young people will experience online interviews and some will be expected to work remotely online as well as in person.

As society transitions to net zero and embraces artificial intelligence (AI), the growth of industries and job roles will continue to shift. It is crucial that both young people and their parents and carers are aware of the evolving nature of the labour market, and that all young people are equipped to navigate a changing world.

Careers guidance policy

The legislative framework for careers guidance has evolved over the last decade and now all types of state-funded secondary school are required to provide careers guidance starting in Year 7. Provider access legislation has also been strengthened, ensuring a wider variety of education institutions and training providers can engage with young people ahead of key decision points, including discussion about government-approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The national inspectorate, Ofsted, now includes the quality of careers guidance in their Education Inspection Framework,¹² which has a greater focus on careers as part of the inspection process.

Since 2017, the benchmarks have been the cornerstone of national careers guidance policy and statutory guidance in England. This has not only impacted on practice in schools and colleges but has helped to “lay the foundations of a coherent careers system, with strong collaboration between educators, training providers and employers”.¹³

The independent reviews of the careers guidance system in England carried out by Ofsted and the House of Commons Education Select Committee acknowledged these strong foundations. Ofsted stated that, “both schools and FE [further education] and skills providers found the Gatsby benchmarks useful to help strategically review and develop their careers programme”.¹⁴ The Education Committee concluded that the benchmarks are the right framework, and an updated Careers Strategy should include a focus on “increasing the number of schools achieving the Gatsby benchmarks in full”.¹⁵

The benchmarks have also inspired careers guidance policy development around the world. We are proud that those developing initiatives in other countries, such as Spain and Hong Kong, see what is happening in England as world-class and have taken inspiration from the benchmarks to shape their own provision.

A national infrastructure

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) was established in 2015 and oversees a range of national careers infrastructure for education, including digital tools, resources, training programmes, research, a national network of cornerstone employers, enterprise advisers and careers hubs. There is also a vibrant community of organisations that provide a wide range of additional support to education institutions, including access to careers professionals, employers and workplaces, as well as free and paid-for resources and digital products for managing careers programmes.

More than 90% of schools and colleges use Compass, the national digital tool co-developed by the CEC and Gatsby.¹⁶ Compass helps schools and colleges measure their progress against the benchmarks and develop a plan to meet all eight.

Since 2018 it has been cemented in policy that every school and college should have a careers leader who is responsible for the development of their institution's careers programme. More than 3,000 of these careers leaders have received nationally developed training, which is driving up standards in provision. Schools and colleges with a trained careers leader achieve significantly more benchmarks than those without.^{17 18}

A network of careers hubs has been established. There are hubs in every region of England and more than 92% of schools and colleges are part of one,¹⁹ working alongside employers to support and improve practice. Being part of a careers hub has been shown to help education institutions achieve the benchmarks – and those that have been part of a hub for the longest time, achieve the most benchmarks on average.²⁰

THE IMPACT OF THE BENCHMARKS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Careers guidance for young people has improved significantly since 2014. This is reflected in the number of benchmarks being achieved, which has increased from just below two out of eight in 2017 to just below six in 2024.²¹ This is significant because we know achieving more benchmarks leads to increasingly positive outcomes,^{22 23} as we explore below.

More young people are satisfied with the careers guidance they receive²⁴ and are increasingly being made aware of the options available to them – with real impacts on the choices they make. For example, uptake of apprenticeship pathways is 16% higher in the schools who provide information on apprenticeships to all students, compared with those who do not.²⁵ There is an increasing appetite from young people to access more careers-related activities when making these important decisions.²⁶

Career readiness

Young people's career readiness (a measure of how prepared they are for future decisions and work) improves by more than 20%²⁷ when they have completed careers programmes designed using the benchmarks. They have more awareness of the local labour market and post-16 pathways and more confidence in their skills, including application and interview skills. On average, young people in institutions with the strongest careers provision have higher career readiness than those in institutions with weaker provision.



Destinations of young people

The benchmarks significantly enhance the outcomes for young people. Analysis of national data sets linked to careers guidance activity show that young people from institutions with the strongest careers provision have stronger confirmed education, employment and training destinations post-16 and post-18. The most recent analysis shows students in institutions achieving all eight benchmarks are 8% less likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) compared to peers in schools with low or no Gatsby Benchmark activity.²⁸ There are also indications that this relationship is strongest for those institutions with the most disadvantaged young people, with as much as a 20% reduction in NEET rates.²⁹ Estimates suggest that just the impact of reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET could be worth £150m in savings to the Exchequer per year.³⁰

THE IMPACT OF THE BENCHMARKS ON EMPLOYERS

Strengthening the relationship between education and the world of work is essential to delivering good careers guidance. The benchmarks have made it easier for employers to work with schools and colleges because they provide clarity about the different ways they can engage in the careers programme.^{31 32} For example, employer engagement could include supporting curriculum lessons, talks to young people, providing group workplace visits or hosting individual workplace experiences of different durations. In 2023, 96% of 11-18-year-olds – more than three million – had an encounter with an employer. Nine out of ten employers say working more purposefully with education helps them support young people to take up careers in their industry and it also helps employers develop new talent pipelines.³³

Boosting employer engagement

Employers play a key role in good careers guidance. They help bridge the gap between education and the world of work. Some businesses still feel that young people should be more prepared for the world of work³⁴ and have voiced concerns about skills shortages. However, only a relatively small proportion of employers actively engage with the education and skills system or in preparing young people for the workforce, whether through skills plans, apprenticeships or engaging with education institutions.³⁵ Many organisations are working hard to support employers with this, but this work needs to continue and grow.

INNOVATION AND PROGRESS

The benchmarks are working: the expertise of schools, colleges and employers has grown and this has driven higher standards and innovations in careers guidance; the vital role of the careers leader is established; curricula have evolved; new models of work experience that are focused on impact have been developed and the use of technology is advancing. Huge progress has been made and practice continues to evolve.

Variations in progress in achieving the benchmarks

Not all schools and colleges are achieving all eight benchmarks – the average was 5.8 in 2024.³⁶ Some individual benchmarks have proved more challenging to achieve than others, and this varies depending on the type of institution, whether that be schools, colleges or special schools.

Although careers hubs and other supporting infrastructure are now available around the country, some are relatively newly established. In these areas it will take time for schools and colleges to fully benefit from the support on offer.

RATIONALE

We believe the time is right to set the direction for the next 10 years, to make sure that in this changed and changing landscape, secondary schools, colleges and ITPs can continue to provide world-class careers guidance for every young person.

This report presents the updated Gatsby Benchmark framework, explaining the evidence behind any changes and showcasing the impressive work we have seen in action.

We know schools, colleges and ITPs cannot deliver careers guidance in isolation, we have therefore explored what else needs to happen to make the wider system work and create the conditions that will enable every institution in the country to sustainably implement the benchmarks.

This report is also being published at a time of change, with a new government in power and significant policy developments on the horizon. Careers guidance should be central to education and skills planning, and it presents an exciting opportunity to weave careers guidance for young people into emerging initiatives, including Skills England, the Curriculum and Assessment Review, updates to the Early Career Framework and professional development entitlements, Young Futures hubs, Youth Guarantee and a new public employment and careers service.

METHODOLOGY

This review of the benchmarks has been guided by a set of core principles. We committed to:

- listen to the experiences of secondary schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs)
- learn from impactful practice and unpick persistent challenges
- make changes only when they are supported by evidence and will lead to better outcomes for young people
- maintain the high aspirations that underpin the benchmarks, aiming for world-class careers guidance
- factor in changes in education, the labour market and the needs of employers

Ryan Gibson has been a senior adviser to Gatsby during this review, working alongside the Gatsby team as we have set the direction for the benchmarks for the next 10 years. Ryan first worked with Gatsby facilitating the pilot of the original benchmarks in the north-east of England in 2015, having had responsibility for careers guidance in a school that early on saw the benefits of the benchmarks. Since then, Ryan has held a senior role, leading careers for a large multi-academy trust (MAT). We are particularly grateful to Ryan for leading conversations with stakeholders across the country and bringing his expertise to bear on updates to the benchmarks.

Over a two-year period (see Figure I), we reviewed multiple strands of evidence. Our independent academic partner, the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby, produced several reports, including a literature and research review, consultation survey analysis and a selection of international case studies (all available as appendices).

OVERVIEW OF OUR PROGRAMME OF WORK

Figure I: Timeline

FEBRUARY 2023 - AUGUST 2023

- sector interviews
- literature review
- consultation survey
- international case studies
- CEC data analysis

MARCH 2023 - OCTOBER 2023

- school, college and ITP visits
- roundtables and stakeholder consultation (including young people)
- data and evidence analysis

NOVEMBER 2023 - OCTOBER 2024

- benchmark refinement
- stakeholder consultation
- report writing

NOVEMBER 2024

- report launch



We commissioned additional research from Youth Employment UK to better understand young people's experiences of careers provision. We engaged the British Chambers of Commerce so we could better hear the voice of business and consider future work trends. We also reviewed the findings of the Education Select Committee enquiry into careers and the Ofsted thematic reviews of careers guidance.

This evidence was supplemented with an extensive programme of visits to secondary schools, special schools and alternative provision settings, colleges and ITPs. We also spoke directly with young people during many of our visits and their insights have been especially useful.

We also spoke directly with young people during many of our visits and their insights have been especially useful.

Alongside these visits, we held a series of thematic roundtables, some co-convened with other organisations, during which we investigated emerging themes in greater detail. We held roundtables with governors, Ofsted, ITPs, employers and enterprise advisers, education leaders, hub leaders, careers leaders, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) organisations and practitioners, and careers advisers. Themes explored included experiences of workplaces, parent and carer participation, destinations, sustainability and the future of work, employers and modern workplaces, and emerging work and recruitment practices.

Throughout this work we continued to draw on our own evidence base, collected over the past 10 years. This included our evaluation of the north-east pilot and research into parent and carer engagement, careers advisers and labour market information (LMI).

This project has been supported by an advisory group, a practitioner group and a range of sector experts (membership in Appendix I). They have helped shape our approach and have explored themes and findings with us as they emerged.



This project has been supported by an advisory group, a practitioner group and a range of sector experts.

SUMMARY OF UPDATES TO THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS

Since their introduction, the benchmarks have driven improvements in careers guidance. Evidence shows that those institutions successfully implementing all eight benchmarks achieve the most positive outcomes for young people. We have built on these firm foundations. We have retained all eight benchmarks, but we have amended the descriptive and measurable elements where evidence showed these amendments would support further improvements to young people's outcomes.

This chapter outlines both the updated benchmarks and the expanded definitions of meaningful activity. One set of benchmarks is for use by secondary schools, including special schools, alternative provision and those with sixth forms. The other is focused on young people up to age 18 (or 25 for those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP)) in colleges and independent training providers (ITPs). ITPs play a vital role in the further education landscape and many young people attend them. Growing numbers of ITPs have been using the benchmarks in their own setting, so we have made sure the language includes careers guidance for young people learning with them.

Schools, colleges, ITPs and wider stakeholders all agreed that stability was important. They were committed to building on the strong foundations of the benchmarks and the progress they have inspired. Our open consultation³⁷ found:

- The benchmarks are near-universally supported – 94% of respondents saw them as a valuable framework for careers guidance.
- The proportion of respondents who valued each one of the eight benchmarks ranged from 96% to 99%, showing that each individual benchmark has near-universal support as part of the overall framework. No benchmark is considered significantly more important than any other.
- Eighty-eight per cent of secondary school and college leaders reported that the benchmarks had had a positive impact on their young people.

Evidence shows that those institutions successfully implementing all eight benchmarks achieve the most positive outcomes for young people.

Continuing to set ambitious goals for careers guidance is important, but stability is equally important for practitioners. The eight benchmarks already described the essential elements of world-class careers guidance. When considering updates to the framework we remained committed to the use of robust evidence, which was the foundation of the original benchmarks, and we have only made updates that the evidence suggests will lead to improved outcomes for young people.

While the title of each benchmark has remained the same, updates have been made to each summary and set of measurable criteria. We have retained the high expectations of the benchmarks but have clarified, refined and strengthened them to reflect the new evidence and most impactful practice that has developed in the last 10 years.

The rationale and supporting evidence for each change is explained in the chapters for each benchmark, which also include examples of existing good practice. Appendix 9 provides a detailed comparison of the differences in the wording between the original and updated benchmarks. We hope this quick reference guide will be useful for practitioners.

Several prominent themes emerged from the evidence that has underpinned the updates to the benchmarks.



Young people need to be given opportunities to develop their skills and apply their knowledge. Crucially they then need to learn how to present their skills, knowledge and experience, professionally to an employer.

Employer, Gatsby roundtable

CAREERS AT THE HEART OF EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

Careers guidance is most effective when it is embraced by leadership, written into institutions' wider strategies and embedded into the practice of all staff. Amendments to the benchmarks emphasise the unique roles of different staff. We specify the responsibilities of education leadership and governors, and we cement and clearly distinguish the complementary roles of careers leader and careers adviser, which reinforces the need for careers advisers to be connected with relevant colleagues – especially special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) specialists. We also outline the need for every subject teacher to embed careers in their curriculum. As careers guidance is a whole-staff endeavour, updates have been made to ensure support is rooted in the institution's staff development programme for all those who work with young people.

INCLUSION AND IMPACT FOR EACH AND EVERY YOUNG PERSON

Good careers guidance is important for every young person whatever their background, interests or ambitions. This principle has always been at the core of the benchmarks, but we have re-emphasised the importance of designing activity that meets individuals' needs. Amendments have been woven through the framework, for example Benchmark 1 specifically references planning, sequencing and tailoring the careers programmes, and Benchmark 3 considers young people's concerns about any barriers to their career development and the importance of there being a diverse range of role models.

We recognise that additional, different or adapted information and support may be needed for some vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, including those with SEND. The practitioners who know their young people well are best placed to determine these needs.

Outstanding practice has been developing in special schools and specialist colleges and this has been drawn on throughout the report.

MEANINGFUL AND VARIED ENCOUNTERS AND EXPERIENCES

We have seen that the most impactful careers guidance balances the number and variety of encounters and experiences of education and work, with providing time for young people to prepare and reflect. We have recognised this by expanding the definitions of 'meaningful' in Benchmarks 5 and 7 and adding one to Benchmark 6. The definitions encourage variation and flexibility in how education institutions and employers work with young people, focusing on ensuring the activity has impact and benefits young people and their decision-making. Planning encounters and experiences as part of a progressive and sequenced careers programme for each student will also ensure they have the most impact.

All three definitions emphasise that the encounters should provide an opportunity for young people to learn what study or work is really like in the setting, including the recruitment and application process. They also highlight the need to share the purpose of the activity with all those involved, for the activity to be underpinned by learning outcomes, for two-way interaction between young people and employers or education institutions, and for young people to be supported to prepare for their interactions and reflect on what they have learnt. For a meaningful experience of a workplace, we have also highlighted the importance of students being set tasks by the employer and receiving feedback about their work.

We have made clear the importance of young people engaging with a broad range of stakeholders. For example, the self-employed, different sized businesses and different sectors in Benchmark 5, meeting a range of different people in the workplace in Benchmark 6 and meeting a range of staff and students in Benchmark 7. The definitions also restate the need to consider different support for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, and young people with SEND.

As technology changes workplaces and their recruitment practices, using technology can support young people to prepare and it can also expand the range of education institutions, businesses and other agencies that young people can access. However, virtual encounters and experiences should complement but not replace in-person activity.

FOCUSING ON THE USE OF INFORMATION AND DATA

Lots of information is shared with young people and with their parents and carers, but some gaps persist and the information that is shared must be *used* to be effective. Access to high-quality, up-to-date information about onward education and training options and the labour market has always been a feature of the benchmarks. We now focus on ensuring information sharing is inclusive and young people can explore all pathways equitably. This is especially important in the light of reforms to technical education. We now emphasise the need to support young people and others to *use* the information and data in their decision-making.

We received significant feedback that collecting destination data for three years after a young person left school was resource intensive. It prevented time being spent on making good use of the insights this data provided. As a result of this feedback, the focus is now on the *use* of sustained and longer-term destination data, whether internally or externally sourced, to strategically evaluate careers programmes. For example, some local areas have set up data sharing agreements, and the government also publishes sustained and longer-term destination measures. Institutions can now be focused on recording and using data on young people's participation in the careers programme, as well as their aspirations and their intended and immediate destinations. This will help institutions provide timely support based on individual needs, and it shifts the focus to current learners and recent leavers, particularly those without a secure next step who could be at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

ENGAGEMENT OF PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers remain a significant influence on the decision-making of their children, but they can struggle to feel confident or knowledgeable enough to embrace this role, and they often rely on their own first-hand knowledge or on that of their social networks. It is important that young people receive consistent guidance about their future choices from both their education institution and at home. We have therefore updated the benchmarks to strengthen the relationship between careers programmes and parents and carers. Engagement with parents and carers is now included in Benchmark 1 as part of the strategic planning of careers programmes. Throughout the framework we emphasise the importance of not only sharing information about education and careers options with parents and carers, but also supporting them to access and use it in conversations with their children.

THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS

FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN
COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT
TRAINING PROVIDERS

1

A STABLE
CAREERS
PROGRAMME

2

LEARNING FROM
CAREER AND
LABOUR MARKET
INFORMATION

3

ADDRESSING
THE NEEDS OF EACH
YOUNG PERSON

4

LINKING
CURRICULUM
LEARNING
TO CAREERS

5

ENCOUNTERS
WITH EMPLOYERS
AND EMPLOYEES

6

EXPERIENCES
OF WORKPLACES

7

ENCOUNTERS
WITH FURTHER
AND HIGHER
EDUCATION

8

PERSONAL
GUIDANCE

GATSBY BENCHMARKS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

BENCHMARK	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
<p>1 A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME</p>	<p>Every school should have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by pupils, parents and carers, staff, governors, employers and other agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every school should have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of governors, the headteacher and the senior management team, and has an identified and appropriately trained careers leader responsible for it. • The careers programme should be tailored to the needs of pupils, sequenced appropriately, underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to the whole-school development plan. It should also set out how parents and carers will be engaged throughout. • The careers programme should be published on the school's website and communicated in ways that enable pupils, parents and carers, staff and employers to access, and understand it. • The programme should be regularly evaluated using feedback from pupils, parents and carers, teachers and other staff who support pupils, careers advisers and employers to increase its impact.
<p>2 LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION</p>	<p>All pupils, parents and carers, teachers and staff who support pupils should have access to good-quality, up-to-date information about future pathways, study options and labour market opportunities. Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents and carers may require different or additional information. All pupils will need the support of an informed adviser to make the best use of available information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During each Key Stage, all pupils should access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their own decisions on study options or next steps. • Parents and carers should be encouraged and supported to access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their support for pupils in their care.

GATSBY BENCHMARKS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Continued

BENCHMARK	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
<p>3 ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH YOUNG PERSON</p>	<p>Pupils have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Careers programmes should help pupils navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression. In addition, opportunities should be tailored to the needs of each pupil, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, young people with SEND and those who are absent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school's careers programme should actively seek to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical thinking, showcase a diverse range of role models and raise aspirations. • Schools should keep systematic records of the participation of pupils in all aspects of their careers programme, including the individual advice given to each pupil, and any subsequent agreed decisions. • For pupils who change schools during the secondary phase, information about participation and the advice given previously should be integrated into a pupil's records, where this information is made available. Records should begin to be kept from the first point of contact or from the point of transition. • All pupils should have access to these records and use them ahead of any key transition points to support their next steps and career development. • Schools should collect, maintain and use accurate data for each pupil on their aspirations, intended and immediate education, and training or employment destinations to inform personalised support. • Schools should use sustained and longer-term destination data as part of their evaluation process and use alumni to support their careers programme.
<p>4 LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS</p>	<p>As part of the school's programme of careers education, all teachers should link curriculum learning with careers. Subject teachers should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of the knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of career pathways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every year, in every subject, every pupil should have opportunities to learn how the knowledge and skills developed in that subject helps people to gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of careers. • Careers should form part of the school's ongoing staff development programme for teachers and all staff who support pupils.

GATSBY BENCHMARKS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Continued

BENCHMARK	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
5 ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES	Every pupil should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment opportunities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include pupils' own part-time employment where it exists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every year, from the age of 11, pupils should participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer.
6 EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES	Every pupil should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the age of 16, every pupil should have had meaningful experiences of workplaces. • By the age of 18, every pupil should have had at least one further meaningful experience.
7 ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION	All pupils should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them, including academic, technical and vocational routes. This should incorporate learning in schools, colleges, independent training providers (ITPs), universities and in the workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the age of 16, every pupil should have had meaningful encounters with providers of the full range of learning opportunities, including sixth forms, colleges, universities and ITPs. • By the age of 18, all pupils who are considering applying to higher education should have had at least two visits to higher education providers to meet staff and learners.
8 PERSONAL GUIDANCE	Every pupil should have opportunities for guidance meetings with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of school staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These meetings should be available for all pupils whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all pupils but should be scheduled to meet their individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, SEND coordinator (SENDCO) and other key staff to ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every pupil should have at least one personal guidance meeting with a careers adviser by the age of 16, and a further meeting by the age of 18. Meetings should be scheduled in the careers programme to meet the needs of pupils. • Information about personal guidance support and how to access it should be communicated to pupils and parents and carers, including through the school website.

GATSBY BENCHMARKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

BENCHMARK	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
1 A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME	Every provider should have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by learners, parents and carers, staff, those in governance roles, employers and other agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every provider should have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of those in governance roles, leadership and the senior management team, and has an identified and appropriately trained careers leader responsible for it. • The careers programme should be tailored to the needs of learners, sequenced appropriately, underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to the whole-institution development plan. It should also set out how parents and carers will be engaged throughout. • The careers programme should be published on the provider's website and communicated in ways that enable learners, parents and carers, staff and employers to access and understand it. • The programme should be regularly evaluated using feedback from learners, parents and carers, subject staff and other staff who support learners, careers advisers and employers to increase its impact.
2 LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION	All learners, parents and carers, subject staff and other staff who support learners should have access to good-quality, up-to-date information about future pathways, study options and labour market opportunities. Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents and carers may require different or additional information. All learners will need the support of an informed adviser to make the best use of available information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During their programme of study, all learners should access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their own decisions on study options or next steps. • Parents and carers should be encouraged and supported to access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their support for the learners in their care.

GATSBY BENCHMARKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Continued

BENCHMARK	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
<p>3 ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH YOUNG PERSON</p>	<p>Learners have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Careers programmes should help learners navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression. In addition, opportunities should be tailored to the needs of each learner, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, young people with SEND and those who are absent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A provider’s careers programme should actively seek to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical thinking, showcase a diverse range of role models and raise aspirations. • Providers should keep systematic records of the participation of learners in all aspects of their careers programme, including the individual advice given to each learner, and any subsequent agreed decisions. • The records of participation and advice given should be integrated with those given at the previous stage of the learner’s education (including their secondary school), where these are made available. Records should begin to be kept from the first point of contact or from the point of transition. • All learners should have access to these records and use them ahead of key transition points to support their next steps and career development. • Providers should collect, maintain and use accurate data for each learner on their aspirations, intended and immediate education, and training or employment destinations to inform personalised support. • Providers should use sustained and longer-term destination data as part of their evaluation process and use alumni to support their careers programme.
<p>4 LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS</p>	<p>As part of the providers programme of careers education, all subject staff should link curriculum learning with careers, even on courses which are not specifically occupation led. Subject staff should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of future career paths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout their programme of study (and by the end of their course) every learner should have opportunities to experience how knowledge and skills developed in their subjects help people gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of occupations. • Careers should form part of the provider’s ongoing staff development programme for subject staff and all staff who support learners.

GATSBY BENCHMARKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Continued

BENCHMARK	SUMMARY	CRITERIA
5 ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES	Every learner should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment activities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include learners' own part-time employment where it exists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every year, alongside their programme of study, learners should participate in at least two meaningful encounters with an employer. At least one encounter should be delivered through their curriculum area.
6 EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES	Every learner should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of their programme of study, every learner should have had at least one meaningful experience of a workplace, in addition to any part-time jobs they may have.
7 ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION	All learners should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them, including academic, technical and vocational routes. This should incorporate learning in schools, colleges, independent training providers (ITPs), universities and in the workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of their programme of study, every learner should have had a meaningful encounter with a range of providers of learning and training that may form the next stages of their career. This should include, as appropriate, further education colleges, universities and ITPs. This should include the opportunity to meet both staff and learners.
8 PERSONAL GUIDANCE	Every learner should have opportunities for guidance meetings with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of provider staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These meetings should be available for all learners whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all learners but should be scheduled to meet individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, SEND coordinator (SENDCO) and other key staff to ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every learner should have at least one personal guidance meeting with a careers adviser. Meetings should be scheduled in the careers programme to meet the needs of learners. • Information about personal guidance support and how to access it should be communicated to learners, parents and carers, and other stakeholders, including through the provider website.

DEFINITIONS OF ‘MEANINGFUL’

The updated Gatsby Benchmarks 5, 6, and 7, for schools and for young people in colleges and independent training providers (see previous pages), stipulates that young people should participate in meaningful encounters and experiences. Here we set out what constitutes a ‘meaningful’ encounter or experience.

BENCHMARK 5: ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

A meaningful encounter gives the young person the opportunity to learn about what work is like, what skills are valued in the workplace, their recruitment processes and what it takes to be successful. Throughout a careers programme, young people should encounter employers of different sizes and specialisms, including the self-employed, that reflect trends in the labour market, regionally and nationally. These encounters could be in person or a combination of in person and virtual, where appropriate. Both the young person and employers should be supported to prepare for the encounter. Additional or different support may be needed for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

A meaningful encounter will:

- have a clear purpose, which is shared with the employer and the young person
- be underpinned by learning outcomes that are appropriate to the needs of the young person
- have opportunities for two-way interactions between the young person and the employer
- be followed by time for the young person to reflect on the insights, knowledge or skills gained through the encounter

DEFINITIONS OF 'MEANINGFUL'

Continued

BENCHMARK 6: EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES

A meaningful experience gives the young person the opportunity to explore what it is like to work in that environment, what skills are valued in the workplace, their recruitment processes and what it takes to be successful. This could be achieved through visits to workplaces, work shadowing and/or work experience. Throughout the careers programme these experiences could be in person or a combination of in person and virtual, where appropriate. Both the young person and employers should be supported to prepare for the experience. Additional or different support may be needed for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and for young people with SEND.

A meaningful experience will:

- have a clear purpose, which is shared with the employer and the young person
- be underpinned by learning outcomes that are appropriate to the needs of the young person
- involve extensive two-way interactions between the young person and employees
- include opportunities for young people to meet a range of different people from the workplace
- include opportunities for young people to perform a task set by the employer or to produce a piece of work relevant to that workplace
- include the employer providing feedback to the young person about their work
- be followed by opportunities for the young person to reflect on the insights, knowledge or skills gained through their experience

Schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) can take into account any part-time work a young person may have, if it genuinely offers them a meaningful experience.

The definitions encourage variation and flexibility in how education institutions and employers work with young people, focusing on ensuring the activity has impact and benefits young people and their decision-making.

DEFINITIONS OF 'MEANINGFUL'

Continued

BENCHMARK 7: ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

A meaningful encounter gives the young person the opportunity to explore what it is like to learn, develop and succeed in that environment. This should include the opportunity to meet both staff and learners/trainees. Throughout a careers programme, encounters should be sequenced so that a young person can build up a clear picture of opportunities available to them. Experiences or encounters could be in person or a combination of in person and virtual and could include providers delivering sessions in a school, college or ITP, as well as young people visiting the provider. Young people and providers should be supported to prepare for the encounter. Additional or different support may be needed for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and for young people with SEND.

A meaningful encounter will:

- have a clear purpose, which is shared with the provider and the young person
- be underpinned by learning outcomes that are appropriate to the needs of the young person
- involve a two-way interaction between the young person and the provider
- include information about the provider, such as their recruitment and selection processes, the qualifications that provider offers and the careers these could lead to
- describe what learning or training with the provider is like
- be followed by opportunities for the young person to reflect on the insights, knowledge or skills gained through the encounter



Planning encounters and experiences as part of a progressive and sequenced careers programme for each student will also ensure they have the most impact.

BENCHMARK I

A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Every school should have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by pupils, parents and carers, staff, governors, employers and other agencies.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Every provider should have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by learners, parents and carers, staff, those in governance roles, employers and other agencies.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK I

Benchmark I underpins the framework and is often referred to as the 'strategic benchmark'. It sets out what is needed for a stable, structured and embedded careers programme that is known and understood by young people, parents and carers, education staff and employers.

STABILITY IS IMPORTANT FOR PROGRESS

We have kept the criterion that all schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) have a stable and structured careers programme. Young people's career development is continually evolving and therefore stability is crucial if a careers programme is to have long-lasting impact on practice and on all young people who experience it. Taking part in a stable careers programme gives young people a sense of direction and enhances their career readiness, motivation and skills.³⁸



If I know what is coming up next and I know where and who I can go to for help, I am much happier and confident in the choices I make.

Year 12 Student



Stability is achieved through a careers programme that is structured: that is designed to meet the needs of young people, has clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities, and regular evaluation to ensure continued effectiveness. The careers programme should align with the institution's vision, priorities and development plans. This often depends on the involvement and backing of the most senior leaders. This helps to establish a whole-institution approach, where all staff understand the value of careers guidance and their role in it, employers and other agencies know who to engage with and how, and young people and their parents and carers know the support available at each stage.

However, stable should not be seen as being static. Education, technology, the world of work and the needs of young people are continually changing and it is important that careers programmes evolve to ensure young people continue to be well-prepared.

STRUCTURING THE CAREERS PROGRAMME

Some schools, colleges and ITPs asked for guidance about what makes a structured careers programme.³⁹ **We have clarified in the criteria that the careers programme should be sequenced appropriately, underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to a whole-school development plan.**

When visiting schools and colleges, we found that impactful careers programmes were linked to wider improvement priorities, including for behaviour, attendance, wellbeing, inclusion and attainment. The careers programme is an important part of the solution to these challenges, not just another task. Effective careers guidance was also well-sequenced, building on prior knowledge, and each encounter or experience had a purpose as part of the whole instead of being an isolated or one-off activity. All activity was underpinned by progressive learning outcomes and was aligned to other aspects of learning and personal development.



Ongoing support and doing things to prepare me over time is really important ... Careers shouldn't be a one-off, it should be something you do all of the time throughout school.

Year 12 Student

The new requirement introduces a more strategic focus on outcomes and impact. Institutions should consider how to develop knowledge, skills and understanding as part of a progressive learning journey. This will support each young person to make connections between their careers and curriculum learning and to navigate key transition points. It requires careers programmes, and the activities within them, to be clear about their intent and for this to be understood by everyone.

THE ROLE OF THE CAREERS LEADER IS CRUCIAL

Careers leaders are responsible for developing and directing a careers programme, bringing together the component parts into a coherent whole, but they cannot deliver it alone.

Their key relationships are with:

- internal colleagues, including headteachers and principals, governors, other leaders, such as the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCO), teaching or subject staff and the careers adviser
- external partners, including employers and other agencies
- young people and their parents and carers

We have recognised this pivotal role by specifying the need for a careers leader in the criteria.



CASE STUDY I

St Thomas More Catholic School's careers leader is also a member of the senior leadership team. They have responsibility for curriculum, assessment and personal development. This keeps careers on the agenda in leadership discussions and ensures alignment with the school development plan.

This approach has changed attitudes to careers provision, as the assistant head explained:



We are motivated to treat careers like every other aspect of curriculum and have applied the same curriculum principles – clear objectives that sequence learning over time, support timed to meet need, integration into quality assurance processes and annual evaluation that includes pupil, staff and stakeholder voice.

The careers leader is supported by a curriculum coordinator and a Level 6 qualified careers adviser employed by the school. The careers leader, careers adviser and SENDCO work together to review careers as part of the school's annual quality assurance cycle. The careers leader feeds back to the rest of the senior leadership team and updates governors.

3,000+

More than 3,000 careers leaders have received nationally developed and funded training.

TRAINED CAREERS LEADERS HAVE EVEN GREATER IMPACT

We have kept the expectation for careers leaders to be appropriately trained.

More than 3,000 careers leaders have received nationally developed and funded training. The training has helped them become more effective in their role and achieve more benchmarks in their institutions.⁴⁰ Training will be an important part of the ongoing development and sustained effectiveness of this crucial role.

Careers leader training is also needed because many careers leaders move into other leadership roles, meaning there is high turnover. This can be a challenge in the short term, but it is also beneficial that careers leaders progress into other leadership roles and take their careers guidance expertise into influential positions. For the short-term challenge, a stable careers programme should have systems in place to mitigate the impact that a change in careers leadership has on the effective delivery of the careers programme.

Some schools, colleges and ITPs have developed succession plans, induction plans for new careers leaders and contingency plans for if a careers leader is absent, just as they would for other key roles, such as the SENDCO or designated safeguarding lead. They have been effective in continuing the impact of the careers programme in times of change and we encourage all institutions to have these plans in place. In addition, many careers hubs have networks and support designed specifically for new careers leaders.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

For careers leaders to work effectively, they need the support of those who lead the institution. International evidence shows that where careers guidance is good, it has the active engagement and backing of leaders and is embedded in institutions' structures.⁴¹ Most schools and colleges told us they have this support⁴² and it is important that this continues.

Leaders have a crucial role to play. They set the direction and the values of their institution and they implement leadership structures that are effective for their setting. Leaders achieve quality careers guidance by thinking strategically about careers and using the benchmarks to review and develop their careers programme.⁴³

We have retained the need for the careers programme to have explicit backing from the senior management team and expanded this to include specific roles – headteachers, principals and those in governance roles.

By expanding this requirement, we aim to ensure careers guidance has the support of the most senior leaders in the institution and the body that holds those leaders to account. By doing so, we expect careers provision to benefit from greater stability, more opportunities to develop an embedded whole-institution approach, and an increased focus on impact.

CASE STUDY 2

At **United Learning**, the largest multi-academy trust (MAT) in England, careers is seen as a core way to raise standards. Trustees and the executive leadership team created the role of central strategic careers leader, an individual with strategic oversight and leadership of careers across the whole trust.

The central strategic careers leader is at the heart of the Trust and works closely with regional education directors to ensure that careers provision is discussed with individual school leaders and is reflected in the values and aims of each school. The Trust have aligned their provision to the Gatsby Benchmarks. Every school carries out termly auditing and action planning using the Gatsby Benchmarks, and a dashboard allows the Trust to review progress each term. Careers competencies are embedded into lesson delivery in every school, and communication strategies ensure young people know what they are entitled to and are clear about what they can expect from the careers programme.

Leaders have a crucial role to play. They set the direction and the values of their institution and they implement leadership structures that are effective for their setting.

TAILORED AND EVIDENCE-BASED CAREERS PROGRAMMES

The most impactful careers programmes are not necessarily those with the most activities.

Activities should be purposeful, focused and tailored to the needs of young people.

Although this was always an expectation, the wording of our new criteria highlights its importance. This links to addressing the needs of each young person (Benchmark 3). However, emphasising the importance of considering differentiated support in Benchmark 1, which is at the heart of the careers programme, ensures this principle is considered in all activity.

The focus should be on impact, informed by evidence. Careers leaders often identify additional, different or adapted activities needed by some young people, through evaluation processes. **It remains important that the programme is regularly evaluated.**

To support effective evaluation, we have added the need to use feedback from careers advisers and other staff who support young people as well as from young people, parents and carers, and employers. Careers advisers can provide invaluable feedback, using insights from their personal guidance meetings with young people and their expertise in local labour market trends, progression routes and provision. This underlines the close working that is needed between careers advisers and careers leaders.

Evaluation cannot rely solely on feedback; other evidence is needed. We know institutions can find evaluating careers programmes challenging⁴⁴ but having clearly defined intended outcomes will help institutions find the best approach to measuring and evaluating impact for the young people in their setting.

We have refined the criteria to emphasise that the focus of evaluation should be less on data collection and more on using data effectively to increase the impact of the programme. We have seen institutions embed careers guidance evaluation in the institution's wider quality assurance processes – moving away from evaluating individual activities towards a whole-programme evaluation approach. This then informs the overall development priorities for the institution as well as the direction of the careers programme.

EVALUATION SUPPORT

All institution types are inspected by the education regulator, Ofsted.⁴⁵ Part of this inspection is consideration of their careers guidance. Colleges are also currently required to pay for, and achieve, the government's matrix Standard. The matrix Standard⁴⁶ assesses broader information, advice and guidance provision for both young people and adults, and is used across a wide range of health, finance and social services. Careers leaders in all institution types can self-evaluate their provision against the benchmarks through the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) managed Compass tool,⁴⁷ which has recently been supplemented with external rigour by the development of the Careers Impact System (see sector example 1).

Many careers hubs and multi-academy trusts (MATs) encourage the sharing of good practice through their networks. Some institutions also choose to pay for the Quality in Careers Standard,⁴⁸ which uses external advisers to review provision. When criteria have been met, an award is given, which can then be used in communications with a variety of audiences, including parents and carers.

SECTOR EXAMPLE I

THE CEC'S CAREERS IMPACT SYSTEM

The Careers Impact System is a process, rolled out by the CEC, to improve and assure the quality of careers leadership and careers guidance in schools and colleges.

It provides a step-by-step approach and shows how improving careers guidance can lead to overall school and college improvement. It has four main elements:

1. Internal leadership reviews – key colleagues in the school or college, including the careers leader and members of the senior leadership team, assess the current performance against a maturity model. They then identify what good would be and how they can achieve it.
2. Peer-to-peer reviews – these are regional reviews, organised by trained careers hub or Trust facilitators. Careers leaders in a local area or across a multi-academy trust (MAT) share good practice and their progress against the benchmarks to get an understanding of what works and what can be improved.
3. Expert reviews – these are administered centrally. They moderate the peer-to-peer approach and inform the continuous improvement of the Careers Impact System. They contribute to long-term impact evaluation.
4. National system reviews – these centrally-administered reviews examine system-wide themes, good practice and challenges. This contributes to national intelligence on careers to inform targeted, system-wide improvements.

ENGAGING PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers remain one of the biggest influences on many young people's career decisions,^{49 50} yet the extent to which schools, colleges and ITPs engage with parents and carers about careers guidance varies.⁵¹

Although a considerable amount of information is shared with parents and carers, they are not always supported to make best use of it or to get involved in the opportunities offered. Parent and carer engagement goes beyond just sharing information or encouraging them to attend individual events. It equips parents and carers to have informed careers conversations and ensures they can better support their child's career decisions.

Research by Gatsby and the CEC⁵² shows that for a careers programme to be most effective, an embedded, whole-institution approach to parent and carer engagement is needed. Parents and carers should know about the programme, what it will cover, what resources are available to them and how they can access support.

We have added a new criterion that careers programmes should set out how parents and carers will be engaged throughout.

VALUE OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Partnerships are crucial to the implementation of the benchmarks. As well as employers, each school, college and ITP should decide who they will work with. Institutions told us they were working closely with a huge range of organisations, including careers hubs, SEND agencies, providers of careers advice, further education and apprenticeship providers, higher education institutions, charitable programmes, local and combined authorities, and many others. **To support stakeholder partnerships, we have included that school careers programmes should be known and understood by other agencies**, mirroring the expectation that already existed for colleges and now for ITPs.

A WHOLE-STAFF ENDEAVOUR

Young people talk about careers to many different people in their school, college or ITP. They told us that they discuss careers with everyone from teachers and support assistants to librarians and job coaches. They are trusted adults and young people value the information they provide. **All staff who support young people, not just teachers or subject staff, should know about the careers programme and how to signpost to further information and support.**

SECTOR EXAMPLE 2



HONG KONG: CAREERS GUIDANCE AS A WHOLE-STAFF ENDEAVOUR

The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust initiated the development of a set of careers benchmarks informed by Gatsby's work.⁵³ This has helped to encourage increasing involvement in careers guidance from school principals and senior management teams. Previously, the work of careers teams in Hong Kong schools was isolated from the wider staff. This is now changing, thanks to schools having a clear framework to work towards which emphasises the value of engaged leaders.

Careers is increasingly seen as part of everyone's responsibility, and training is being provided for teachers. These staff have started to expand their horizons beyond the school boundaries, actively seeking external opportunities and building employer networks in order to better support their students. Approximately one-third of secondary schools had adopted the Hong Kong careers benchmarks by 2024.⁵⁴

Partnerships are crucial to the implementation of the benchmarks. As well as employers, each school, college and ITP should decide who they will work with.



PUBLICISING THE CAREERS PROGRAMME

Schools now publish details of how other education institutions and training providers can engage with them, and this represents good practice for colleges too. It ensures that young people receive impartial information from the full range of education and training options available to them.⁵⁵

Most schools and colleges also publish their careers programme on their website, improving communication and awareness of careers provision among employers, parents and carers, young people, staff and other agencies.

The best examples of published careers programmes include the intended learning outcomes for the activities in each year group, Key Stage and for the programme overall. They also share the impact of the programme, which often includes leavers' sustained destinations.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING

Different stakeholders engage differently. Some young people told us they were not aware of the whole careers programme, and despite publication on the website, some parents and carers were also unaware.

The most effective schools, colleges and ITPs we visited tailored their information and their approaches to those different needs. The purpose and content of their careers programme were explained and shared using multiple channels, including social media, intranet sites, digital publications and live or recorded webinars. It also considered the needs of those who rely on non-digital communication, have English as an additional language or have literacy needs. **We have retained the requirement for online publication of the careers programme but clarify that it should also be communicated in ways that enable young people, parents and carers, staff and employers to access and understand it.**



CASE STUDY 3

The ethos of **Learning Curve Group**, an ITP, is to transform lives through learning. A full-time careers leader is responsible for developing the institution's careers strategy and implementing the careers programme. The careers programme outlines the whole-institution approach to careers and its objectives, as well as setting out the responsibilities of everyone involved. The careers leader ensures every young person receives the careers support they need to make well-informed choices.

BENCHMARK 2

LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

All pupils, parents and carers, teachers and staff who support pupils should have access to good-quality, up-to-date information about future pathways, study options and labour market opportunities. Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents and carers may require different or additional information. All pupils will need the support of an informed adviser to make the best use of available information.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

All learners, parents and carers, subject staff and other staff who support learners should have access to good-quality, up-to-date information about future pathways, study options and labour market opportunities. Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents and carers may require different or additional information. All learners will need the support of an informed adviser to make the best use of available information.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 2

Benchmark 2 is one of the most consistently achieved benchmarks. It has had a significant impact on the understanding and use of labour market information (LMI)⁵⁶ in schools and colleges.

LMI continues to “strengthen the signals about what the labour market needs and what skills and qualifications are needed to succeed in it”.⁵⁷ LMI helps young people understand job availability in different sectors and skills needs. It can indicate future demand and salaries and is useful when considered alongside training and qualification paths for different occupations. It can help address misconceptions and be used to challenge stereotypical thinking about what a young person can aspire to. **We have retained the expectation for good-quality, up-to-date LMI to be accessed and used.**

POSITIVE IMPACT

Research shows that when a young person is supported to understand the labour market, their career choices are more in line with the needs of the economy instead of being influenced by the media or peer pressure.⁵⁸ Their choices are also less gender-biased: young women who understand LMI are twice as likely to choose engineering as their peers, for example.

Even though the situation has improved, we found that some young people still do not always understand relevant LMI and how it can inform their ambitions.

ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

It remains important to ensure young people and their parents and carers have access to good-quality information about occupations and career paths. Schools and colleges have met this need by having well-stocked careers libraries, displaying posters, including information in prospectuses and giving talks to young people and their parents and carers.

Technology has also made LMI more available. Government funding for LMI for All,⁵⁹ making LMI freely available both to the public and to web developers to create careers guidance tools, has led to LMI being embedded in hundreds of websites, products and services.⁶⁰ Practitioners particularly value government-assured sources of LMI, such as the government’s National Careers Service⁶¹ and Skills for Careers website,⁶² but there are also many third-party platforms.

LOCAL INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT

It is important that young people understand the businesses around them, the skills those businesses need and the routes into employment with them.

We saw a variety of good practice where regions used local labour market insights to support regional economic development plans. For example, we saw the Tees Valley Combined Authority working with special schools to make sure LMI resources are inclusive and feature local businesses and young people alongside local data. We also saw the North East Combined Authority's Our Region Your Future resources,⁶³ which include LMI presentations, lesson plans and resources for schools and colleges. The resources highlight key sectors in the local economy, raise awareness of skills needs, such as green and digital skills, and showcase local businesses.

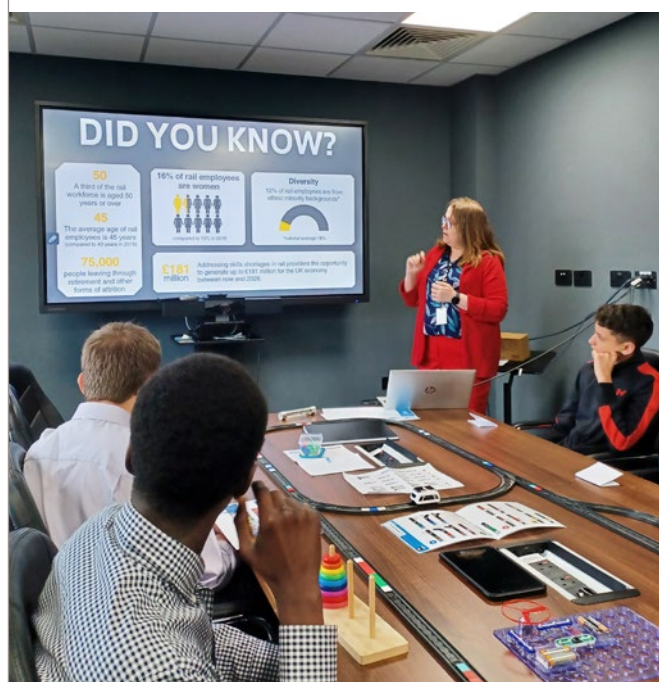
Some multi-academy trusts (MATs) have invested in digital tools to provide up-to-date LMI, and we saw many schools and colleges embed the LMI for All Careerometer widget⁶⁴ on their websites and feature LMI in course prospectuses.⁶⁵

We also saw colleges with curricula that explicitly addressed the local skills needs. In these colleges, local LMI informs the training delivered to all staff. LMI is also shared with young people from the moment they consider joining the college, through the website and prospectuses.

CASE STUDY 4

Weston College staff have developed strong relationships with employers and their local combined authority to get insights about the local labour market. Senior leaders ensure staff receive annual briefings on trends in the labour market so that these insights can be embedded into curriculum delivery. More broadly, as well as underpinning curriculum design, LMI informs the development of careers resources and events, such as the annual careers convention attended by college learners and a bespoke 'what's next?' event for young people and parents and carers from local schools.

LMI relating to each subject features in the college prospectus to help young people choosing courses. Young people are encouraged to use LMI even before they join the college as a key stage in the applicant journey. As soon as they join the college, learners have ongoing access to an LMI platform throughout their studies so that they can explore sectors and job roles. Their exploration of LMI is recorded on the platform and informs their conversations with tutors, subject staff and careers advisers.



TEACHER AND STAFF USE OF CAREERS AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

With LMI being more readily available, the focus should turn to its effective use. The challenge is ensuring LMI is available in user-friendly formats and presents consistent insights. Research has identified more than 120 LMI sources at local, regional, national and sectoral level,⁶⁶ that largely draw their data from four main sources, including the Office for National Statistics.

Research suggests that there can be misconceptions and a lack of understanding about options people are less familiar with.⁶⁷ Teachers and other staff who support young people have significant influence on young peoples' career decisions. **We have specified that teachers in schools, teaching staff in colleges and all other staff supporting young people have access to good-quality, up-to-date information about future pathways, study options and labour market opportunities.** Access to this information, alongside the new focus on staff development in Benchmark 4, will reduce any misunderstandings about different pathways. It will support staff members to have well-informed careers conversations and signpost young people to reliable sources, including to the careers adviser.

YOUNG PEOPLE USING CAREERS AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

In addition to quantitative data about average salary levels, young people engage most with qualitative LMI.⁶⁸ This includes information about what doing a particular job is like, and the skills and attributes needed to succeed in it. Young people like hearing from a real person in an engaging way. However, these insights must be reliable and representative – based on robust intelligence and up-to-date data about the role in general.

Good-quality qualitative and quantitative LMI can lead to a better understanding of the implications of different choices and to more informed decision-making, for example young people may be drawn to a job role but find that typical rates of pay are below their expectations.

The availability of quality information about different study options has also improved and can be used to help young people make informed decisions. For example, Discover Uni⁶⁹ is the government's website which helps young people compare different higher education options.

SEQUENCING

LMI is most impactful when used by young people on an ongoing basis, with the careers leader carefully planning its use into each stage of the careers programme.⁷⁰ This sequenced approach supports young people to make informed decisions at each stage and supports effective transitions. **Benchmark 2 now specifies that schools use information about careers, pathways and the labour market during each Key Stage.** This will ensure that the use of LMI and the learning that comes from it develops through the careers programme. **We have retained the expectation that in colleges and independent training providers (ITPs), information about careers, pathways and the labour market is used throughout a young person's programme.**

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers have significant influence on a young person's career and education decision-making.⁷¹ But many do not feel they know enough about different employment sectors, or about the skills and qualifications required for different jobs, to properly support their child in making decisions about their future career.⁷²

We saw many institutions successfully sharing information with or signposting parents and carers, but they told us it was more difficult to ensure it was being used effectively. Parents and carers typically start discussing careers and education with their children early in secondary school, which is usually before they have received information or signposting from their child's institution.⁷³ Many parents and carers rely on internet searches, their own experiences and those of friends and family because they either have not been aware or have not had access to good-quality sources of information and support.

We have added that parents and carers should be encouraged and supported to access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their support to their children.

In practice this means ensuring parents and carers use and understand good-quality, up-to-date information about all the pathways available, what different education routes and qualifications involve and where they can lead. It is important for institutions to understand the differing needs within their parent and carer community and consider how best to engage them.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 3

TALKING FUTURES PROGRAMME HELPING CAREERS LEADERS SUPPORT PARENTS

The Gatsby Foundation and the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) have developed Talking Futures,⁷⁴ which includes a suite of training and resources that support careers leaders to enhance parent and carer engagement in careers in their institutions. There is also an associated campaign directly aimed at parents.⁷⁵

Some of the training is specifically designed to help careers leaders to plan a progressive learning journey for parents and carers that maps onto the young person's learning journey. This includes considering when to introduce parents to key sources of high-quality LMI and different pathways at a time that matches when their child will learn about these things, helping them to have more impactful careers conversations.

Information, opportunities and support need to be tailored and sequenced to meet the needs of each young person with SEND and their families.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES AND THEIR PARENTS AND CARERS

Young people with additional needs, those in care, those with English as a second language and those from mixed or multiple ethnic groups are less likely to use LMI tools.⁷⁶ All young people should have equity of access to information, opportunities and experiences during their educational journey. To ensure this equity, LMI should be tailored to individual circumstances.

Benchmark 2 now specifies that young people with SEND and their parents and carers may require different or additional information.

Information, opportunities and support need to be tailored and sequenced to meet the needs of each young person with SEND and their families. The need for different levels and types of support may change over time. The professionals working regularly with young people with SEND are the experts. They have the skills and should be trusted to adapt careers guidance and activities to the needs of their young people in a way that recognises those young peoples' individual skills, talents and aspirations, keeping focused on what they can achieve. Careers leaders should work closely with specialist SEND colleagues to ensure any bespoke support is part of the young person's careers programme. We heard about lots of good practice including careers advisers working closely with parents, carers and young people over an extended period to help them understand the local offer, such as how to access support groups and community learning when the young person is in supported living.

We have expanded the criteria of Benchmark 2 beyond decisions about study options to include next steps. This recognises that while study options or employment will be the goal for most young people, for some with complex SEND, employment may not be the next step. Institutions should ensure information is provided about all potential progression pathways, with careers leaders working closely with SEND coordinators (SENDCOs), young people, and their parents and carers to prepare the young person for adulthood and to provide the bespoke support they may need to have positive transitions.

SUPPORT BY INFORMED ADVISERS

Many institutions already make excellent use of careers advisers to help young people understand the options available to them. Research continues to show transition is most effective when careers activities and information are integrated with personal guidance delivered by trained careers advisers.⁷⁷ Other adviser roles can complement this work. For example, employees can give talks in schools and colleges about different sectors in the local labour market, skills advisers from careers hubs can deliver staff training on labour market trends and the needs of the local economy, and many colleges use industry advisers to support young people with labour market insights as part of their curriculum learning.

We have retained the expectation that all young people will need the support of an informed adviser to make best use of the available information.

BENCHMARK 3

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH YOUNG PERSON

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Pupils have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Careers programmes should help pupils navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression. In addition, opportunities should be tailored to the needs of each pupil, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those who are absent.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Learners have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Careers programmes should help learners navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression. In addition, opportunities should be tailored to the needs of each learner, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those who are absent.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 3

Addressing the needs of each young person requires considerable effort, especially as young people have different needs at different stages and for different elements of the careers programme. A wide range of information must be collected to build a picture of each individual and be used to inform the careers guidance support that is provided. While this benchmark has had one of the lowest achievement rates in the past, it is a challenge that institutions are rising to.

Young people may be concerned about encountering barriers to their career progress after compulsory education, often because of their own experience or that of others in similar circumstances.

CASE STUDY 5

At **Connell Co-op College**, individual needs and career aspirations are included in the application process for the college. When a young person joins, they record their vision and where they would like to progress to next, which makes destinations a priority from the outset. Their aspirations and intentions are reviewed throughout their time at college, including during meetings with the careers adviser.

As young people move through the careers programme and gain more knowledge, they are given opportunities to reflect on their vision. Every student's vision is shared with their subject teachers, their progression tutor, the careers adviser and a destinations manager. Visions are used to identify the types of employers and industries to invite to careers days. They are also used to identify additional visits and experiences that would be helpful for some students. During personal guidance meetings, careers advisers and students create a personalised action plan.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE BARRIERS YOUNG PEOPLE MAY FACE

Young people may be concerned about encountering barriers to their career progress after compulsory education, often because of their own experience or that of others in similar circumstances. They may see and hear how others entering the workforce have experienced barriers because of protected characteristics, such as sex or race, or other factors such as socio-economic background, family circumstances or migrant status. Throughout the benchmarks we have strengthened the need to ensure young people can get accurate and honest information from employees and students they can identify with. This should include insights into how they navigated any barriers to their own progress.

Each young person's journey into work or continuing education will be different, so Benchmark 3 now states that throughout the careers programme institutions should help young people navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Good careers guidance challenges disadvantages and inequalities. Careers programmes should continue to embed equality, diversity and inclusion considerations into every benchmark. To support this, we have removed equality and diversity from the summary of this benchmark.

We have made the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion part of the required criteria across all the benchmarks.

We have retained the requirement that staff should work together to ensure opportunities across the careers programme are tailored to the needs of each young person.⁷⁸ We have added the clarification that this includes any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, young people with SEND and those who are absent. It is encouraging that the national professional qualification (NPQ) for special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs)⁷⁹ also reflects this through the expectation that they will work closely with careers leaders to help tailor careers provision.

CASE STUDY 6

The Heights Blackburn, an alternative provision school for young people, seeks to ensure careers guidance support is provided for learners who are absent. The careers adviser, who is commissioned externally, works closely with the careers leader and other key staff including the designated safeguarding lead, SENCO and attendance leads to identify the needs of learners who are absent. Adaptations are then made to the delivery of the careers programme. For example, the careers adviser will host personal guidance meetings online, visit the young person at home or in neutral settings such as youth centres. The approach is monitored by a wider pastoral support team, which includes the assistant headteacher. The school's approach to personal guidance is shared with parents and carers every year, including key contact information and signposting to local support services.

STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Stereotypical thinking can limit young people's beliefs about what is possible for them in the future. Good careers guidance should still actively seek to tackle any assumptions about what the next steps can be for people with different characteristics or from different backgrounds.

Therefore, challenging stereotypical thinking remains an important indicator of good careers guidance but should not be addressed in isolation.

Some young people misunderstand what opportunities are available to them and what they involve.⁸⁰ For example, some young people we spoke to believed they had to pay fees to go to college or sixth form, or that they could not study at university as part of an apprenticeship. Careers advisers told us they encountered similar misconceptions. **We have added a measurable criterion to Benchmark 3 that careers programmes should challenge misconceptions.** Schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) should work to understand and actively address any misconceptions their young people, parents and carers may have.

Throughout the benchmarks we have strengthened the need to ensure young people can get accurate and honest information from employees and students they can identify with.



ROLE MODELS

We have added a criterion that careers programmes showcase a diverse range of role models. Using role models challenges career stereotypes⁸¹ and can inspire and motivate young people. Role models should be varied, including employees, apprentices or entrepreneurs. We heard about several projects and organisations working in specific areas or with specific groups of young people. For example, ThinkForward's Future Leaders programme⁸² supports young Black men who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from school to make a successful transition into a post-16 destination through coaching, mentoring and access to employers.

Many institutions draw on their alumni when setting up talks, mentoring programmes, encounters, visits and experiences of workplaces. It motivates young people to see people like them, who have sat where they are and are a few steps ahead in their journey. This is especially true when alumni and young people share similar backgrounds. **Together with the requirement to showcase a diverse range of role models, we have added the criterion that schools, colleges and ITPs should use alumni to support their careers programme.**

CASE STUDY 7

The Limes College is an alternative provision setting, which uses role models to inspire current pupils. Young people appreciate this and find it valuable:



I really like seeing and hearing from people who are like me and who are on the same journey I want to be on. It makes me feel like I can go on and do really good things as well and it's good being able to ask them questions and then talk to teachers about what I need to do next.

Year 11 Student, The Limes College

CASE STUDY 8

At **Emmanuel College**, encounters with alumni are carefully planned and sequenced throughout the careers programme. Alumni success is highlighted in the visual culture around the school building and is regularly celebrated in the school magazine, in assemblies, on social media and in newsletters shared with parents and carers. At annual celebration evenings, alumni provide insights into their own study or career journeys. This is done to show what can be achieved, and that success takes many forms. Alumni are involved in all aspects of the careers programme, delivering talks and workshops to groups of students, including as part of the subject curriculum.

ASPIRATIONS AND DESTINATIONS

Research shows that young people often form ideas about their future career early and that these can become entrenched during secondary school, limiting what some believe they can do.^{83 84} To combat this, alongside challenging stereotypical thinking, institutions should be aware of each young person's aspirations and provide timely support or challenge.



A focus on aspirations has helped to turn our school around. The future can be daunting for young people, but by gathering information about their aspirations and working together to shape these into realistic intentions, we can support young people to have confidence about their next steps.

Executive Principal, Grace Academy

Ensuring that young people are informed and supported to make successful transitions when they leave school, college or training is fundamental to good careers guidance. This makes where they go – their destination – a good indicator of the impact of both the programme and the institution. We have extended the focus of the benchmarks to include the aspirations and intended destinations of current cohorts.

We have updated Benchmark 3 to state that institutions should collect, maintain and use accurate data for each young person on their aspirations, intended and immediate education, training or employment destinations to inform personalised support.

Using aspirations and intended destinations data alongside academic and pastoral information helps institutions understand who could aim higher and who is at risk of not getting to their intended destination, and means they can tailor timely interventions and appropriate support. This also contributes to wider strategies, often involving the local authority, preventing students becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

SECTOR EXAMPLE 4

USING ASPIRATION AND INTENDED DESTINATIONS DATA

Some multi-academy trusts (MATs), for example Ark Schools and Lift Schools (formerly the Academies Enterprise Trust), already take a proactive approach to helping young people secure and sustain destinations, based on regularly gathering and analysing aspiration and intended destination data.

The data is analysed and used to support each young person, but the data is also aggregated into different groups of learners to identify trends and patterns. This informs the development of the careers programme, which in turn enables better personalised support and challenge before key transition points.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 5

LOCAL AREAS SUPPORTING THOSE AT RISK OF BECOMING NEET

We saw many local areas working together to support students at risk of becoming NEET. An example is the Steps to Success programme,⁸⁵ which aims to prevent persistently absent 14-16-year-olds in East Sussex from becoming NEET. One-to-one coaching and experiences of workplaces are matched to the young person's career goals to re-engage them in the purpose of education. The programme is designed by the employability and skills team and is facilitated by the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) careers hub.

Another example is Durham County Council, who work closely with schools to review data and monitor indicators for students at risk of becoming NEET. Young people identified in the data are offered a range of support through the Durham Works scheme.⁸⁶ For example, programmes targeted at Year 10, 11 and 12 students can include a range of work exposure activities, including visits to employers and discussions and mentoring with business ambassadors.

Ensuring that young people are informed and supported to make successful transitions when they leave school, college or training is fundamental to good careers guidance.

DESTINATIONS DATA TRACKING

Evidence shows that the more benchmarks a school achieves, the more likely it is that their young people will still be in their intended destination six months after leaving, known as a sustained destination. This is particularly true for the most disadvantaged young people.^{87 88}

Institutions have invested significant time and effort into tracking the destinations of young people who left up to three years before. This has raised the profile of destinations, and senior leaders increasingly see it as an important indicator of outcome. However, many practitioners find that the emphasis on collecting data, which they can do little to change or influence, is time-consuming and frustrating. Consistently, schools and colleges told us that a better use of their time, expertise and resources would be to focus on their current students and most recent leavers and on helping them secure and sustain a destination.⁸⁹

The emphasis is now on using sustained and longer-term destination data as part of evaluation processes. We found local areas are working hard to improve data sharing and, despite there being a time-lag in publication, sustained and longer-term destination data continues to be of real value to understanding the impact of a careers programme. Understanding where young people have progressed to can also help institutions build networks so they can use alumni to support the careers programme and it can inform curriculum development. Providing the data in a timely way and in user-friendly formats is something schools, colleges and ITPs identified as something that would help them.

SUPPORT FOR TRANSITION BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS

Young people do not only change institution at age 16 or 18. Some young people move schools, and it is important that where they move to understands the careers guidance support that they have already received. **We have added the criterion that for pupils who change schools during the secondary phase, information about participation and the advice given previously should be integrated into a pupil's records, where this information is made available.**

The outgoing school should make available records about the young person's participation in careers activities, their aspirations, intended destination and the advice that has already been given to them. For the incoming school, records should begin to be kept from the first point of contact or from the point of transition and the previous records should be integrated with the new record. This will ensure one coherent record, enabling the incoming school to tailor the support they offer the pupil.

This addition to the framework for schools mirrors the criterion in the benchmarks for colleges and ITPs that applies when a young person joins a sixth form, college or training provider.





Employers told us that when young people speak about the things they had been involved in and what they had accomplished, it increased their chances of being successful in the recruitment process.

RECORD-KEEPING

Record-keeping helps to ensure that each young person receives the encounters, experiences and support they need. **We have broadened the requirement of systematic record-keeping to include the participation of young people in all aspects of the careers programme, including the individual advice given to each young person and subsequent agreed decisions.** Records should also be used to help evaluate and consider the impact of a range of interventions on outcomes for young people.

AGENCY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Employers told us that when young people speak about the things they have been involved in and what they have accomplished, it increases their chances of being successful in the recruitment process. However, we heard from young people that they can struggle to recall everything they have done. Young people want access to a record of the careers activities they have been involved in and we have retained this need for access. **We have added that records of a young person's careers activities should be used to support their next steps and career development, including ahead of any key transition points.** For records to be most useful, young people need to be given time to reflect on the knowledge and skills they have developed and be supported to articulate compelling stories to support future applications and interviews.

BENCHMARK 4

LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

As part of the school's programme of careers education, all teachers should link curriculum learning with careers. Subject teachers should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of the knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of career pathways.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

As part of the providers programme of careers education, all subject staff should link curriculum learning with careers, even on courses which are not specifically occupation led. Subject staff should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of future career paths.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 4

Benchmark 4 recognises that important careers learning takes place in curriculum subjects. Young people should be helped to connect and apply the knowledge and skills they gain through the curriculum to real-world contexts and to the range of potential pathways. Some teachers have not previously seen this as their role, but mindsets are shifting and practice is evolving.⁹⁰ Responses to our consultation showed that 97% of stakeholders recognised the importance of linking curriculum learning to careers.⁹¹ Careers leaders told us that Benchmark 4 helped them engage subject staff and teachers in embedding careers learning.

In 2024, 80% of schools and colleges successfully implemented this benchmark.⁹²

80%

In 2024, 80% of schools and colleges successfully implemented this benchmark.

WHOLE-INSTITUTION PROGRAMME OF CAREERS EDUCATION

Careers learning is increasingly seen as everyone's responsibility, like other whole-institution issues such as safeguarding. Discussions in curriculum lessons between subject staff and young people about the subject's relevance for future choices make the classroom an important place for career exploration.

Benchmark 4 now describes how linking curriculum learning with careers should be part of the institution's overall programme of careers education. We have also highlighted the need for all teachers in schools and all subject staff in colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) to link curriculum learning to careers.

This means that every year, in every subject, every young person in schools, colleges and ITPs should have had the opportunity to learn how the knowledge and skills developed in that subject helps people gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of careers.

CASE STUDY 9

Leaders at **Southmoor Academy** have developed a whole-institution approach to integrating careers into the curriculum, which helps pupils understand the relevance of what they are learning.

Staff define the skills being developed in the curriculum and use the Skills Builder Universal Framework⁹³ (see sector example 6) to ensure a shared language and understanding of those skills. One-third of every lesson is dedicated to careers and skills and this approach is fully embedded in the school's teaching and learning strategy.

Because careers learning is planned into every lesson, in every subject and in every year group, young people make connections between different subjects. They use this understanding to inform their decisions about potential career paths and study options. The careers leader told us:



Our careers programme links our pupils to their future and our subject curriculum links them to the skills the future values.

The careers leader also works with other leaders to plan careers learning into a proportion of ASPIRE, the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme for every year group. The school's quality assurance processes monitor the implementation of this whole-institution approach.

Careers is included in the induction for new staff and the careers leader delivers continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and all staff who support pupils.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 6

THE SKILLS BUILDER UNIVERSAL FRAMEWORK

The Skills Builder Universal Framework defines eight essential skills that are needed in any job:

- listening
- speaking
- problem-solving
- creativity
- staying positive
- aiming high
- leadership
- teamwork

The framework provides a consistent understanding of what are often referred to as 'employability skills'. It also provides a way to track progress of each skill through a series of steps from beginner through to mastery.

The framework can be used in different ways. Educators can use it to develop employability skills with young people. Employers can use it to support their engagement with education institutions and to support the career progression of their staff. Individuals can also use the framework to help develop their skills throughout life.

CLARIFYING THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

Integrating careers into the curriculum can help young people see the relevance of their learning and become familiar with a wider range of career pathways.⁹⁴ Like other aspects of a strong careers programme, it can be a great motivator and improve engagement, confidence and readiness for the future.⁹⁵



It helps pupils to connect what they are learning in the classroom and begin to see, practically, why this is important – how this knowledge or these skills can be applied in the future – whether that be in further study or in work.

Assistant Headteacher,
St Thomas More Catholic School

However, not all teachers and subject staff are sure about the role they should play in careers guidance.^{96 97} **Benchmark 4 now makes it clear that teachers and subject staff should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of the knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of future career paths.**

The careers leader can support teaching staff to link curriculum learning to careers in a planned and progressive way.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 7



SPAIN: CAREERS GUIDANCE AND THE CURRICULUM

Effective careers guidance can enhance both the educational experiences of students and their preparation for their future careers. Inspired by the Gatsby Benchmarks in England, the Bertelsmann Foundation in Spain has developed its own framework for careers guidance, called the Xcelence model. This has prompted deep reflection among teaching staff about the critical nature of bridging the gap between the curriculum and the world of work. Adopted in over 300 schools across the Catalonia and Madrid regions by 2024, the Xcelence framework has improved young people's career readiness, heightened their engagement with school and increased their enthusiasm for exploring diverse career opportunities.⁹⁸

Integrating careers into the curriculum can help young people see the relevance of their learning and become familiar with a wider range of career pathways.



VARIED APPROACHES

There are a variety of effective ways to achieve Benchmark 4. For example, careers-related projects can be included in the curriculum using real examples from employers to reinforce subject learning. Departments could also develop careers-focused starter activities or a progressive series of careers-focused lessons for every topic.

Some teachers and subject staff make explicit links, highlighting the skills that are being developed in each lesson and exploring related career paths and progression options. Carefully planned encounters with employers (Benchmark 5) and experiences of workplaces (Benchmark 6) also bring curriculum learning to life for young people as well as enriching their career development.

CASE STUDY 10

Cowes Enterprise College, a coastal school on the Isle of Wight, have developed a Key Stage 3 curriculum contextualised by the maritime sector, a sector that is of both local and national importance. Delivery is planned by teachers from different departments working together and supported by the careers leader. Local maritime employers advise on curriculum content and help deliver some lessons. For example, pupils visit employees from industry at the Centre of Excellence for Composites, Advanced Manufacturing and Marine at the Isle of Wight College, where they learn how to construct a circuit that produces a morse code signal while exploring careers linked to safety at sea.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 8

CAREERS GUIDANCE AT THE SCIENCE MUSEUM

Technicians: The David Sainsbury Gallery at the Science Museum⁹⁹ has interactive exhibits that directly reference specific careers, with content linked back to many subjects. The gallery gives visitors the chance to try out typical tasks for a variety of technician roles across industry, from a lighting technician on a Marvel Studios film set to a pharmacy technician in the National Health Service (NHS). The gallery hosts school visits, including interactive sessions with real technicians.

The gallery is supported by a website showcasing over 100 technician case studies and resources to support teachers to deliver careers in the curriculum.¹⁰⁰



CASE STUDY II

Lift Schools (formerly the Academies Enterprise Trust), one of the largest multi-academy trusts (MATs) in England, implemented a strategic approach to linking curriculum learning to careers.

Groups of teachers developed resources that embedded careers into the curriculum, to be used by all schools in the Trust. For example, maths teachers worked together to identify areas of the curriculum that they felt were particularly challenging concepts, either to teach or for pupils to grasp. A lead teacher was appointed to engage with an employer who was sourced through the careers hub network. The lead teacher and employer discussed the maths learning objective, with the employer providing context to be used in the resource on how the topic applied to their sector.

Teachers do not see this as extra work, but as a way to deliver what is expected of them, using the context of the workplace to do it differently. The curriculum objective remains the driver, with subject learning underpinned by careers learning. Resources have been created for maths with Pinewood Studios, English with Tesco, science with Pfizer and geography with the National Trust.¹⁰¹



These resources are a clever blend of context and authentic mathematical content. They are engaging and real but the workplace context doesn't dilute any of the maths elements. Instead, the tasks offer a brilliant alternative to traditional delivery approaches for maths topics found in every curriculum. The resources bring mathematics alive in the real world, rooting classroom maths in the glorious and challenging reality of real data and problems faced in the workplace.

Head of Curriculum, Lift Schools

CAREERS IN EVERY SUBJECT

Practitioners wanted this benchmark to recognise the importance of all subjects, not just science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. This approach has already been adopted in many institutions, including during the pilot of the benchmarks.¹⁰² Many employers agreed and several exam board specifications now include references to careers-based skills or they encourage careers links in different disciplines.

Broadening the scope beyond STEM to include all teachers and subject staff in every curriculum area helps schools, colleges and ITPs build the whole-institution approach to careers that we know is effective. **Benchmark 4 has therefore been broadened and now covers every subject.**

Broadening the scope beyond STEM to include all teachers and subject staff, in every curriculum area helps schools, colleges and ITPs build the whole-institution approach to careers that we know is effective.

CASE STUDY 12

Newcastle College has 20 subject departments, organised into four faculties. The careers leader works closely with the faculty directors and heads of curriculum who are responsible for embedding careers learning effectively in each subject and programme of study. The aim is for every faculty to support the development of the skills that students need for their next steps. Curriculum staff are encouraged to actively collaborate with industry sectors by building strong networks with business partners. Every faculty has an advisory board of employers to ensure that future skills needs are understood and that evolving work practices are integrated into curriculum design. The assistant principal told us:



We have to provide a curriculum offer that addresses the current and future skills needs of employers and prepares young people for their future. The Gatsby Benchmarks have helped us to organise our careers provision so that it has a clear purpose and is prevalent in all of our faculties.

In practice, this means every taught session includes activities to prepare young people for their chosen sector. Teachers support young people to link the development of their skills, knowledge and behaviours to their personal career and progression goals. Staff also provide opportunities for all young people to regularly reflect on what they have learnt.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

While Benchmark 2 ensures all staff who support young people have access to careers information, Benchmark 4 emphasises the importance of staff being supported to use careers information in their curriculum delivery, so they can signpost to sources of support and have informed conversations with young people.

We have added that careers should form part of the ongoing staff development programme for teachers and all staff who support young people. There are many effective approaches to building careers into staff development programmes, including whole-staff meetings, departmental CPD or bespoke training for individuals. Each institution should decide on the approach that will have maximum impact on each member of their staff.

For some, staff development goes further. We observed that when teaching staff had meaningful encounters with industry, they gained valuable insights into the world of work, developing their understanding of the careers available to young people.^{103 104} It also gave them opportunities to network. Teaching staff used these insights to enrich their teaching, provide better information about opportunities and highlight the transferable skills needed for different industry roles. In an evaluation of the Careers & Enterprise Company's (CEC's) Teacher Encounters Programme of more than 1,000 teachers who had encounters in industry, it was found that their confidence and ability to have constructive careers conversations with young people had improved.¹⁰⁵

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

Some practitioners said they wanted more support to implement Benchmark 4. There are now resources designed to help institutions link curriculum to careers.

The CEC has developed a national resource directory that includes several resources to support the implementation of Benchmark 4. For example, My Learning My Future¹⁰⁶ is a suite of materials designed to support subject teaching staff link careers to the curriculum in 27 subjects at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and post-16.

The CEC also offer a development course for teachers and the wider education workforce to help them understand their role in careers education and how they can support young people consider their next steps. Schools and colleges can also contact their local careers hub to hear about impactful practice being developed by institutions nearby.

Many other organisations also offer products, such as posters and booklets, which can be used to link curriculum learning to careers. Several websites, such as Forum Talent Potential,¹⁰⁷ BBC Bitesize,¹⁰⁸ and STEM Learning¹⁰⁹ have a wealth of case studies showing what is possible, by highlighting where subject teachers have worked closely with employers to bring learning to life. Sector-specific organisations also have resources, for example the Royal Society of Chemistry¹¹⁰ and ScreenSkills,¹¹¹ and the national membership body for the careers guidance profession, the Career Development Institute (CDI), has created an audit tool that helps practitioners link curriculum to careers.

BENCHMARK 5

ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Every pupil should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment opportunities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include pupils' own part-time employment where it exists.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Every learner should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment activities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include learners' own part-time employment where it exists.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 5

Having encounters with employers, employees and the self-employed gives young people real insights into the world of work, it broadens their knowledge and understanding of different career options and helps shape aspirations.¹¹² In 2023, 96% of secondary school students had at least one encounter with an employer.¹¹³

The OECD found that students with low socio-economic status (SES) are less likely to engage in careers development activities, despite being more likely to benefit from such engagement.¹¹⁴ As a result, young people from low SES backgrounds may have less insight into what an employer is looking for. This makes it vital for schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) to work with employers, employees and the self-employed to help all young people see themselves in work, understand how to transition into it and know what it takes to be successful.

The evidence supporting the importance of employer encounters has strengthened considerably in recent years.¹¹⁵ **We have made minimal changes to Benchmark 5. However, one change is the updated definition of ‘meaningful’ which confirms the importance of focusing on the impact that encounters have on young people.**

DEFINING ‘MEANINGFUL’

Definitions of ‘meaningful’ in Benchmarks 5, 6 and 7 share common elements, including considering the specific support needed by different students, communicating a clear purpose, having learning objectives, experiencing what it is like to work or learn in that environment, meeting a variety of people, engaging in two-way interactions, and creating space and time for young people to prepare and reflect (see Definitions of ‘Meaningful’ on page 35).

A specific focus in the definition of ‘meaningful’ for Benchmark 5 is that young people experience employers of different sizes and specialisms throughout the careers programme. This should include the self-employed and reflect trends in the labour market, regionally and nationally. It is also important that each encounter builds on previous encounters.

Evidence has started to suggest that virtual encounters can increase access to a wider variety of employers. Young people have also reported that virtual encounters can help improve their employability and confidence.¹¹⁶ We have therefore clarified that encounters can be delivered in person or through a combination of in person and virtual.

Some encounters, such as an awareness-raising talk by an employer, might be planned in such a way that it can be meaningful for all, while other encounters will need to be tailored to most benefit the individual. Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may need adapted, additional or different support. We were also told that young people may need multiple encounters before they find something that truly resonates with them. Having time to reflect on the insights, knowledge or skills they have gained through their encounters will help with this.



OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYERS

Encounters with employers, employees and the self-employed help young people transition from education to work. They also result in better outcomes for young people, including being more ready for the workplace; having a reduced likelihood of not being in education, employment or training (NEET); and increased careers awareness, motivation and confidence. Encounters with employers can also boost academic attainment, especially for lower-performing students, and have been linked to increased adult earnings.¹¹⁷

There are tangible benefits for employers too. More than nine in ten say business engagement with education is a good way to close skills gaps, improve growth and increase the diversity of their workforce.¹¹⁸

RANGE OF APPROACHES

Employer encounters should be broad, inclusive and well-sequenced throughout the careers programme.

We saw lots of examples of successful approaches, including:

- employers giving talks or co-leading activities as part of curriculum lessons, assemblies or form time
- careers fairs
- employers leading careers events, such as careers speed networking and mock interviews
- employer workshops covering topics such as CV writing, recruitment processes or work simulations
- employer participation in enterprise competitions, events or projects
- employees mentoring young people

Whatever approach is taken, the focus should be on the encounters being meaningful.

CASE STUDY 13

At **Grace Academy**, all pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 have multiple, carefully planned encounters with employers and employees. These encounters take place both during and outside curriculum lessons. For example, Year 8 pupils meet employers at the Big Bang science event;¹¹⁹ Year 10 pupils interact with employers through curriculum subjects, including employer-led workshops in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons; and Year 11 pupils have a mock recruitment and selection event with employers.

A bespoke logbook is shared with each young person, showing what workshops they have attended, helping them reflect on the skills they feel they gained.

The school's enterprise adviser¹²⁰ helps arrange employer encounters. This also includes visits to the school from employees from the construction and property services company, Willmott Dixon. They co-deliver industry-relevant lessons on building electronic circuits and problem-solving. Young people can ask them questions about pathways, such as apprenticeships.

The school has built a database of contacts to help them maintain and grow employer relationships.



SECTOR EXAMPLE 9

THE CEC'S EMPLOYER STANDARDS

Created by the CEC, the Employer Standards for Careers Education is a framework to help businesses self-assess and plan their work with education institutions. It supports businesses to ask the right questions upfront, cut through complexity, evaluate, improve performance and create the impact they are looking for.

Employer encounters should be broad, inclusive and well-sequenced throughout the careers programme.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO A RANGE OF ENCOUNTERS

We have observed some employers engaging strategically with education. Resources such as Gatsby's *The Education Landscape: A Guide for Employers*,¹²¹ the Youth Employment UK Good Youth Employment Benchmark Tool¹²² and the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) Employer Standards¹²³ (see sector examples 9 and 10) are helping employers navigate the practical challenges of working with the education sector, such as communication and scheduling, and showing different ways to get involved. We saw many different organisations supporting education to successfully connect with employers, for example the CEC's enterprise adviser scheme,¹²⁴ Speakers for Schools¹²⁵ and Inspiring the Future.¹²⁶

SECTOR EXAMPLE 10

THE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Written specifically with employers in mind, *The Education Landscape: A Guide for Employers* provides a simple, impartial and independent guide to ways employers can benefit and interact with education providers. A skilled workforce is at the heart of every successful business, so understanding the education and skills system – and how a business can benefit from it – is crucial.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 11

THE CEC'S ENTERPRISE ADVISERS IN CAREERS HUBS

The CEC's enterprise advisers are senior business leaders who volunteer through careers hubs to work with careers leaders, senior leaders and governors. Enterprise advisers use their employer networks and help ensure that careers activities reflect the local labour market.

Research suggests the value of the contribution of enterprise advisers is estimated at £6.7 million.¹²⁷ Through their work supporting careers leaders and senior leadership teams, enterprise advisers are helping improve the delivery of careers education programmes in schools and colleges. The longer an enterprise adviser's tenure, the greater their influence on improving the quality of careers provision.

There are many approaches to providing meaningful encounters. Schools, colleges and ITPs are best placed to decide what will work best for them and what will benefit their young people most and they have the infrastructure that has been developed specifically to support connection and collaboration between education and employers.

We heard about employers and providers working together. For example, some large employers provide opportunities for apprentices to spend time in different departments and experience a variety of roles and working environments within the business. Some smaller employers worked with providers to ensure their apprentices were supported to understand their business by visiting suppliers, attending trade fairs or shadowing employees as they engage with clients. This helped contribute to the young person understanding the sector they are interested in.



Young people should meet employers of different sizes and observe employees covering multiple roles. They should understand that there are different types of employers and different sized workplaces. We need to focus on developing the future talent.

Employer, Gatsby roundtable

EARLY-CAREER EMPLOYEES, APPRENTICES AND ALUMNI

Young people should meet employees at different stages of their career journeys, including those early on in their career, apprentices and alumni from their own institution. As we explored in the updates to Benchmark 3, encounters can be particularly powerful when they are with someone from a similar background.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 12

EXAMPLE OF MENTORING BY CAREER ACCELERATOR

Mentoring by employers can have significant impact on some young people. For example, Career Accelerator¹²⁸ is a youth organisation that supports young people to prepare for professional careers. They provide employer-led workshops and employer mentoring.

Mentors are carefully chosen and supported so that sessions can be tailored for young people who are neurodivergent or are from diverse, including disadvantaged, backgrounds. Professionals from a range of companies are carefully matched with young people based on their needs. These mentors help young people recognise their value and imagine themselves in a career. They also connect them with a network of employers and other young people.

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

Engaging with employers of different sizes and sectors is crucial to helping young people better understand the realities of the labour market they will be entering. It gives them experience of different recruitment and working practices used by different sectors, such as remote interviews.

Building a rich picture of the world of work, and hearing first-hand about the reality of different occupations, helps limit young people's misconceptions about the future of work. Messages about a changing labour market should be delivered carefully, with reference to the available evidence and without overemphasis. As explored across the benchmarks, misconceptions can be powerful and pervasive. Meeting employers should build young people's confidence about the world of work, their future place in it and their ability to be prepared, rather than reinforce their anxieties about unmanageable change.

Building a rich picture of the world of work, and hearing first-hand about the reality of different occupations, helps limit young people's misconceptions about the future of work.

CASE STUDY 14

University Technical College (UTC) Leeds works closely with employers to understand the skills they value in young people and what they look for during recruitment and selection processes:



One of the core skills we focus on now is oracy. Employers told us how important this is and it's crucial that our pupils can reflect on their learning, convey their knowledge and understanding, and articulate the skills they have developed.

Headteacher, UTC Leeds

A traditional mock interview day with employers has now evolved to include an online element to reflect modern recruitment practices.

All staff at UTC Leeds are responsible for making links with employers. For example, a local small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) specialising in manufacturing jukeboxes, gives talks to engineering students about the manufacturing process. The students then apply this to their curriculum project work by constructing a jukebox of their own. In computing, students meet a range of different employees from the digital skills sector. One commented:



Actually meeting the great people that teachers have told us about, from these companies, has really inspired me. I know I'll look back on my time at this school and say: 'This is where I became a programmer'.

Year 12 Student

SECTOR EXAMPLE 13

SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS

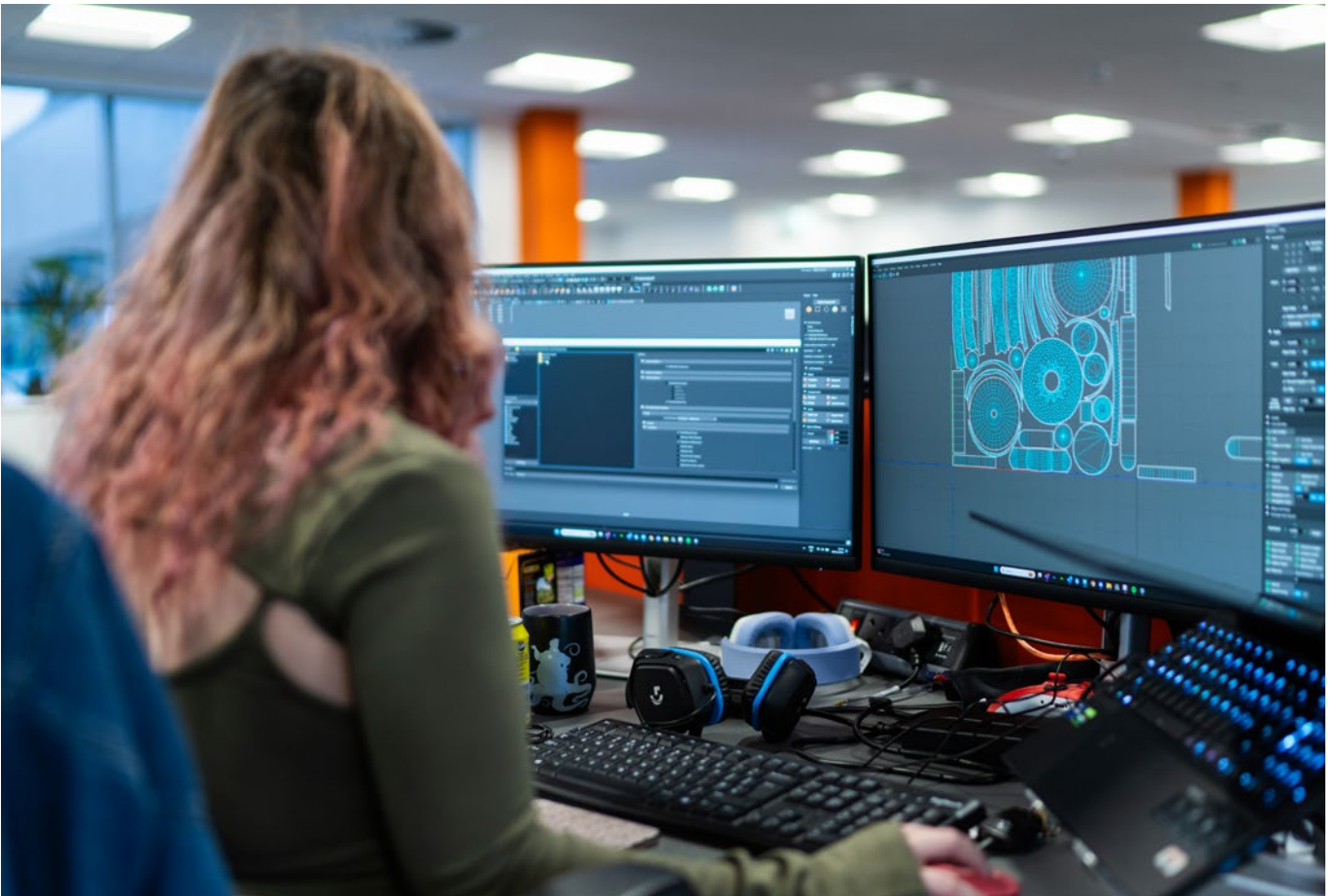
Speakers for Schools is a social mobility charity that aims “to level the playing field for 11-19-year-olds from state schools and colleges”.¹²⁹ They provide encounters with inspirational figures from the world of work through in-person talks and live online broadcasts.

In addition to supporting employer encounters (Benchmark 5), Speakers for Schools also offer employer-led, in-person work placements, as well as virtual or hybrid work experience placements from anywhere in the UK (Benchmark 6).

PART-TIME WORK

We have revised Benchmark 5 to recognise that meaningful encounters could include pupils’ own part-time employment, where it exists. This is because it can give them an opportunity to learn about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace.

However, the evidence of the benefit of multiple meaningful encounters with different types of employers and employees is compelling.¹³⁰ Even when a young person works part-time, other meaningful encounters that are planned and organised by the institution are especially powerful. These encounters open young people’s eyes to a variety of sectors and roles, including those they may never have considered before.



BENCHMARK 6

EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Every pupil should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Every learner should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 6

Ninety-seven per cent of all those who responded to our open consultation from the education, business and careers sectors said that providing experiences of workplaces is critical to good careers guidance. Careers leaders told us that having experiences of workplaces can motivate young people, give them focus and help them develop important skills. These sentiments were echoed by headteachers, college principals and young people.¹³¹ Young people want more opportunities to experience workplaces and a wider range of experiences so they can see what different workplaces are like and how they function.



My experience was really important to me. It was fulfilling. It gave me insights about working practices, provided me with experiences I will use in my applications and it was really motivating.

Year 12 Student

DEFINING 'MEANINGFUL'

To highlight the importance of experiences of workplaces being meaningful, we have added this wording to the benchmark criteria and clearly defined its meaning. Definitions of 'meaningful' in Benchmark 5, 6 and 7 share common elements, including considering the specific support needed by different students, communicating a clear purpose, having learning objectives, experiencing what it is like to work or learn in that environment, meeting a variety of people, engaging in two-way interactions, and creating space and time for young people to prepare and reflect (see Definitions of 'Meaningful' on page 35).

In addition to these common elements, for experiences of workplaces to be meaningful they should be varied, include a task or piece of work set by or relevant to the employer, and recognise the importance of employer feedback. Experiences can include visits to workplaces, work shadowing and/or work experience. The definition should encourage institutions to take a flexible approach to experiences of workplaces, prioritising their impact on young people.

We have also clarified that part-time work can be considered part of a young person's careers programme. Some young people gain a huge amount from working part-time alongside their study. However, part-time work should not automatically replace the need for other experiences of workplaces. Institutions and young people should work together to consider the impact of their specific part-time role to make sure they are not missing out. For example, to ensure their experience is meaningful, institutions should think about how young people are supported to reflect on the insights, knowledge and skills gained from their part-time work. Further experiences that would be beneficial should be identified, made available and sequenced appropriately.

A RANGE OF APPROACHES

Benchmark 6 has always provided the opportunity to create innovative approaches to experiencing workplaces that meet the needs of young people and employers. As a result, practice has been evolving over the last decade.

Experiences of workplaces go beyond the traditional understanding of the term ‘work experience’, which is a block placement of one or two weeks for every young person with one employer. Many institutions continue to offer this in both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. This type of experience can have a positive impact on young people, but it is not the only way to provide experiences that have impact.

Crossing the threshold into a workplace can be an important step for many young people. Sustained and meaningful engagement with an employer can give them deeper insights into these industries and careers and help bridge the gap between theoretical learning and application in the workplace. These experiences can also help young people develop essential skills, motivation and confidence.¹³²

Research shows that young people who have had multi-day experiences of workplaces tend to have higher wages when they are in full-time employment. Those that have had additional types of experiences, whether virtual or face-to-face, have even higher wages.¹³³ The benchmarks now make it clear that experiences of workplaces should not be restricted to a single block placement, which can benefit some young people more than others. We heard that some inequalities exist in current practice: young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have multiple experiences of workplaces, while young people in independent schools are twice as likely to have them compared to their peers in state education.¹³⁴ This is why Benchmark 6 continues to encourage using a broad range of approaches.



As with other aspects of the careers programme, it is important that schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) have the flexibility to plan progressive and well-sequenced experiences of workplaces in a way that suits their context and their young peoples’ needs. Without this flexibility, some of the most impactful approaches we have seen would not have been possible. While schools have typically offered experiences of workplaces in Key Stages 4 and 5, many are now considering how experiences can be offered from Key Stage 3, with the learning outcomes of each experience building progressively as part of the careers programme.

Schools, colleges, ITPs and employers are creating effective programmes of experiences of workplaces, with multiple elements delivered at carefully planned points. They include workplace visits, shorter episodic workplace projects, work shadowing and extended work experience.

We have expanded from ‘at least one experience’ to ‘experiences’: by the age of 16, every young person should have had meaningful experiences of workplaces and by the age of 18, every young person should have had at least one further meaningful experience.

CASE STUDY 15

VolkerRail, a railway systems and infrastructure contractor based in Doncaster, use strong partnerships with education to both address skills gaps in their workforce and help young people understand what it is like to work in the rail industry. The experiences of the workplace they offer to young people vary in format and length, but all are designed to give an insight into the wider sector, an overview of the business and an opportunity to experience different departments.

Young people meet staff, including apprentices and senior managers, and are set practical work tasks. Those experiencing multi-day visits are assigned mentors who provide support with tasks or projects. Employees provide feedback and young people are asked to reflect on their experiences, which supports their development and informs programme improvements. VolkerRail staff also provide in-person or virtual talks and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities linked to the curriculum, attend school and college careers fairs, and take part in larger events, such as national science and engineering roadshows.

Research shows that young people who have had multi-day experiences of workplaces tend to have higher wages when they are in full-time employment.

MULTIPLE APPROACHES AS PART OF A WELL-SEQUENCED PROGRAMME

The legacy of Covid-19 and advances in technology have changed working practices in many sectors. Lots of employers now split their workforce's time between the workplace and remote working. Seventy-six per cent of businesses surveyed in 2023 by the British Chambers of Commerce offered flexible working to staff.¹³⁵ Only 47% of the businesses surveyed expected their workforce to spend most of their time in the workplace by 2029.

Employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), told us that they find providing work experience in blocks of one or two weeks for individual young people challenging, because it no longer reflects the reality or capacity of their workplace. Some employers have started providing experiences in different ways. For example, some business parks have offered schools extended visits where young people experience several different workplaces in succession without overburdening any individual business. Some employers set simulated work tasks that young people begin in school or college. They include several visits to the employer and a session with the employer to reflect on the skills and knowledge that have been developed.

CASE STUDY 16

Astrea Academy Dearne used to offer a two-week work experience programme, but it became clear that young people whose families had stronger professional connections benefited more than those who did not. Therefore, the school now offers young people an employer project-based approach to workplace experiences.

Activity takes place over the full academic year. Young people are given preparation time to research job sectors during personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education sessions and in form time. Lessons cover application forms, interviews, professional conduct, health and safety in the workplace and how to use public transport.

Young people are selected from the application forms they complete in lessons and are allocated to their employer who sets them a workplace-related small-group task. They visit the employer in groups to learn about the company, meet staff in different roles and work on their task. Each employer mentors their group once a month, either at the school, in the workplace or online.

After all young people have completed their experiences, a business networking event is held at the school. Each employer is invited to attend, along with other businesses from across South Yorkshire. Groups of young people, supported by their employer mentor, present their work to their peers, leaders from industry and senior leaders from the school and multi-academy trust (MAT).



Experiences of workplaces are an important part of some qualifications and training. For example, young people employed as apprentices spend most of their time in the workplace, learning on the job, and for young people studying a T-level, a substantial industry placement is an intrinsic part of their course.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 14

T-LEVEL INDUSTRY PLACEMENT

T-levels are large Level 3 programmes with content that is developed in collaboration with employers and aligned to the same national occupational standards as apprenticeships. Approximately 20% (typically 45 days) of a young person's time during a T-level is spent on industry placement with an employer relevant to their subject. The placement develops the knowledge, skills and behaviours specified in the T-level, while giving young people a window into the world of work to support their decision-making.

T-levels have been gradually rolled out across the country since 2020, and young people have progressed from them into skilled employment, apprenticeships and related further or higher education.



It's like they've just been with us for years, they've been brilliant. They've captured the culture of our business.

Head of Corporate Services,
Ocean Ecology



I enjoy the [industry placement] because it provides me with inside knowledge on what a business is actually like and how I can develop that knowledge to progress.

Digital T-level Student

VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON EXPERIENCES

In sectors where technology has changed ways of working and the nature of the workplace, it is increasingly important for young people to know how to take part and interact remotely with colleagues. Virtual experiences can also break down barriers of geography, allowing young people to explore workplaces where an in-person visit would be out of reach.

However, although virtual experiences are valuable, they should complement in-person experiences of workplaces and not fully replace them. In-person experiences still have much to teach young people about how to present themselves and how to behave and interact with colleagues, allowing them to fully experience a new environment first-hand. All experiences, whether in person or virtual, should be meaningful.

THE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTION

Schools, colleges and ITPs should determine the best way to set up, facilitate and manage experiences for their young people. The institution playing an active role in experiences can be particularly important for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. Young people having to organise their own experiences of workplaces, often supported by parents and carers, is unlikely to be the best option because not all have extensive networks to call on and this can reinforce disadvantage.¹³⁶ By taking greater ownership, we saw institutions building closer links with employers. These relationships are sustainable and can support experiences for more young people in future years or encourage involvement in other elements of the careers programme.



Collaboration is key to establishing these relationships and maximising capacity in the system. Several platforms and structures are now in place to connect educators and employers. For example, the Careers & Enterprise Company's (CEC's) national careers hub network, enterprise advisers and engaged cornerstone employers,¹³⁷ alongside education-business partnerships and online workplace experience brokerage platforms, can all help education institutions and employers engage at local, regional and national levels.

ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY

Some young people need additional support to access workplaces. It is important that schools, colleges and ITPs work closely with employers and other organisations to ensure vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have experiences that reflect their needs. Some young people with SEND may need placements to be organised in a different way which may involve additional support.¹³⁸

The supported internship approach can serve as inspiration. This approach places young people with an employer for an extended period and focuses on the preparation and adjustments that can be made to give them the best chance of success.

The Disability Confident scheme¹³⁹ and organisations like the British Association for Supported Employment¹⁴⁰ can help employers consider what reasonable adjustments they would be required to provide for employees, and therefore the kind of adjustments that could support all young people to have meaningful experiences of their workplace. Employer engagement with these initiatives makes it easier for schools, colleges and ITPs to identify suitable employers and to plan appropriate experiences.

CASE STUDY 17

At **River Tees Secondary Academy**, an alternative provision school, experiences of workplaces have been prioritised:



Our young people need to be out there, and they need to see the real world so that they can learn how to cope in that unfamiliar environment. Once they see that they can cope, we often see them thrive.

Careers Leader,
River Tees Secondary Academy

Small groups are given opportunities for multi-day visits, for example Year 10 students have visited a thermal insulation company. As part of each visit, young people are given a company overview, meet key staff and are set tasks, receiving feedback on what they have done.

Preparation and familiarisation are key. Each young person or group is taken on a pre-experience visit to the workplace to explore the placement environment and find out where they will be working, who they will be working with and what they need to wear. This process is overseen by a member of school staff who knows the needs and aspirations of each young person and plans the experience with the employer accordingly.

CASE STUDY 18

Fairfield College, a specialist college for young people with additional needs, has introduced an innovative tiered approach to Benchmark 6. Young people explore the college as a workplace and participate in work-based learning at college sites in roles such as hospitality, animal care, administration and retail. If appropriate, they then progress to multi-day workplace visits outside the college, which are supervised and supported by a member of staff. Some young people then progress to an unsupervised external work placement.

Community-based travel training helps make sure the experiences are accessible to all and the careers leader works closely with other key staff to ensure that the young people and the employers are fully prepared.



CASE STUDY 19

Job coaches at **Catcote Academy**, a special school, work closely with employers before workplace experiences and provide ongoing support to young people in the employment setting. Support is gradually removed when the young person and the employer are ready. Experiences are integrated into the curriculum as part of the process of preparing young people for adulthood.

Experiences include opportunities with local and international businesses such as the National Museum of the Royal Navy and NTH Solutions, a subsidiary of the NHS. They are always tailored to the individual needs of the young person, which are matched to the needs of the employer. Catcote Academy staff, including the lead for autism, provide professional development training for employers so that they feel confident they can meet the young people's needs.

CONSIDERING LABOUR MARKET TRENDS

High-quality experiences of workplaces could help address the skills challenges that persist in the economy. They can motivate young people by showcasing the sectors and roles that are in demand, especially in their local area, while helping them develop the employability skills and career readiness¹⁴¹ needed to embrace these opportunities.

Young people gain valuable understanding and preparation for the future labour market by experiencing a workplace, including the awareness of issues that are relevant to every employer. For example, the UK government has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and being net zero by 2050. The shift to a net zero economy means sustainability considerations will alter many job roles. Green skills and careers have been identified as a key action area in the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy. We heard that some large multi-academy trusts (MATs), like Oasis Community Learning and the Harris Federation, have national sustainability managers who work with their careers team to integrate green skills and sustainability opportunities into the careers programme.

With sustainability and climate change anticipated to touch every career, 'green jobs' are not niche. Providing young people with multiple experiences of workplaces will give them a good understanding of how different sectors are changing. Given that sustainability and the environment are important concerns for many young people,¹⁴² there is a good opportunity to incorporate sustainability into young people's experiences of workplaces.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 15

WWF SUSTAINABLE FUTURES PROGRAMME

The WWF Sustainable Futures programme¹⁴³ equips young people to thrive in a green economy, whatever their career path. It provides careers leaders and teachers with the tools and guidance to help students to build a sustainable career.

The programme was created with Villiers Park Educational Trust¹⁴⁴ and Founders4Schools,¹⁴⁵ and includes a student course, careers talks and experiences of workplaces, with sustainability threaded throughout. The experiences of workplaces are delivered through insight days, where students meet a variety of employees and work on a real sustainability challenge associated with that business or industry.

Experiences of workplaces allow students to explore how sustainable thinking applies in different work contexts and how they can incorporate it into any career.

High-quality experiences of workplaces could help address the skills challenges that persist in the economy.

CASE STUDY 20

The **West of England Mayoral Combined Authority** has integrated its commitment to net zero in their employment and skills plan.



Green skills and jobs will continue to grow, becoming more wide-ranging as industries work towards a sustainable net zero future. Developing a green skilled workforce is essential to how we transition towards a greener economy and meet our net zero emissions targets in the West of England ... Across sectors, the green transition requires the evolution of both new and existing jobs.¹⁴⁶

The mayoral combined authority are embedding careers information and green skills into resources and experiences. This supports careers leaders and careers advisers to help young people explore local opportunities in the green sector. We heard about one project that supports schools to align their careers activity, including workplace experiences, with the regional green skills agenda.

BENCHMARK 7

ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

All pupils should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them, including academic, technical and vocational routes. This should incorporate learning in schools, colleges, independent training providers (ITPs), universities and in the workplace.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

All learners should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them, including academic, technical and vocational routes. This should incorporate learning in schools, colleges, independent training providers (ITPs), universities and in the workplace.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 7

Young people should be made aware of the full range of education and training options available to them and what next steps they can take.¹⁴⁷ Benchmark 7 complements the careers and labour market information (LMI) accessed and used in Benchmark 2, focusing on first-hand encounters with the providers of learning or training that may be a young person's next step.

Many young people will not have trusted contacts who have pursued every pathway: study at college or university, progression into training, completion of an apprenticeship or supported internship, or going straight into work. A young person's encounters with secondary and further education should provide them with rich opportunities to explore all their options.

DEFINING 'MEANINGFUL'

We have clarified the definition of a meaningful encounter with further and higher education and training providers. Definitions of 'meaningful' in Benchmarks 5, 6 and 7 share common elements, including considering the specific support needed by different students, communicating a clear purpose, having learning objectives, experiencing what it is like to work or learn in that environment, meeting a variety of people, engaging in two-way interactions, and creating space and time for young people to prepare and reflect (see Definitions of 'Meaningful' on page 35).

A meaningful encounter with further and higher education is one where the young person has an opportunity to explore what it is like to learn, develop and succeed in that environment. **We have retained the expectation in Benchmark 7 that encounters will give young people the opportunity to meet both staff and learners.** This is because the most impactful encounters can be those with other young people who are currently participating in that study or training. As explained in Benchmark 3 and Benchmark 5, relatable role models, including alumni, can be especially powerful.



It's been great to hear from ex-students of my college. I've been able to talk to them about their journey and it's really helped me to decide what I want to do.

Year 12 Student



Encounters should be sequenced throughout the careers programme, so a young person can build up a clear picture of the opportunities available to them, and they should be underpinned by learning outcomes. Developing a progressive careers programme of encounters helps support young people's decision-making ahead of key transition points and ensures they do not feel overwhelmed.

Encounters can be in person or a combination of in person and virtual. They may include providers delivering sessions in young people's settings, as well as young people visiting providers.



The careers programme has helped me discover things and pathways I never knew were possible and had never thought about. It's widened my idea of what I can do and has stopped me thinking so narrowly.

Year 12 Student

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FULL RANGE OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The terminology used in Benchmark 7 now better reflects the education and training landscape, with technical education now being explicitly referenced.

Updates to the benchmarks do not change the overall purpose of Benchmark 7, which is still focused on young people understanding the full range of learning opportunities available to them. **ITPs are now listed as a provider type that all young people should encounter because they are an important education and training option for many young people.**

BENCHMARK UPDATES FOR SCHOOLS

For young people in schools, Benchmark 7 now refers to visits to higher education institutions (rather than university) for all young people considering this option.

This acknowledges that higher education includes universities, further education colleges and other training providers, and includes Level 4 and 5 qualifications as well as degrees and higher apprenticeships.

We have updated the schools framework to state that by the age of 16, young people will have had meaningful encounters with the full range of provider types. This better reflects the need for young people to have sufficient interactions with providers to make informed decisions. It is important that young people have an understanding of what is involved in the different types of learning and training available to them.

The benchmark criteria that by the age of 18, all pupils who are considering applying to higher education should have had at least two visits to higher education institutions has been retained. Entering higher education involves significant financial investment by young people and their families, it may mean moving home and adapting to a very different learning environment. Visits help to give young people the experience and information they need to make these important decisions.



The opportunity that the school gave me to visit a university was incredible. I had never been to one before so it was difficult to imagine myself there. It was absolutely amazing to meet tutors, current students, sit in a lecture and see where I would live. I've applied to university now and I'll be the first in my family to get a degree.

Year 13 Student

BENCHMARK UPDATES FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

For young people in colleges and ITPs the benchmark now refers to meaningful encounters with universities, alongside further education colleges and ITPs. This acknowledges how young people can benefit from exploring learning and training settings that are different from their current setting. It also recognises that for many young people in further education, university is the next step.

Benchmark 7 for colleges and ITPs continues to state that learners should have a meaningful encounter with a range of providers of learning and training by the end of their programme of study. The institution is best placed to determine what will meet the needs of each young person, and ITPs and colleges should help their young people have the encounters they need to understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them.

These encounters could focus on the longer-term career development and progression of the young person, not just their next step. This can motivate young people, particularly if they are already clear about their immediate next step. Examples of good practice that we have seen in ITPs include hair and beauty trainees having encounters with providers who offer business management and financial training, and bricklaying trainees having encounters with universities about degree apprenticeships in quantity surveying. **To encourage discussions about longer-term career ambitions, we have updated Benchmark 7 to refer to the next stages of a young person's career.**

A meaningful encounter can take many forms. Encounters could include talks with guest speakers from different providers, workshops and careers fairs where young people can interact with different students and staff from providers. Institutions should determine the most appropriate approaches for each of their learners. We found a wide range of support available including provider-specific outreach, regional schemes and national initiatives (see sector examples 16 and 17, and case study 21). Organisations including the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)¹⁴⁸ and the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) have also created resources.¹⁴⁹

Research has also suggested practical approaches to maximise the impact of encounters.¹⁵⁰ For example, engaging with regional infrastructure such as careers hubs, regularly updating website details with ways to engage and gathering data on young people's awareness of different options to focus on any gaps in understanding.

It may also be beneficial for young people to hear from learners or staff in other departments of their own institution who are involved in a potential future pathway, this could include young people studying classroom-based learning in colleges hearing about apprenticeships. But it is critical that young people also understand the offers available at providers beyond their own institution.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 16

UNI CONNECT PROGRAMME

Uni Connect¹⁵¹ is a scheme run by the Office for Students which “brings together ... universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college”.

The programme seeks to ensure that a young person's “access to higher education is not limited by their background, location or characteristics”.

The programme uses existing local infrastructure, and evaluation of the programme states that it has proven to be an “efficient and low-burden” way for schools and colleges to engage with higher education.



CASE STUDY 21

Sunderland College offers encounters to local schools that are tailored to their individual requirements. These can be based either at the college or in school.

The encounters complement the information, advice and guidance that pupils have already been given. The college maps all the encounters it offers against provider access legislation requirements, showing how each can help schools fulfil the legislation. Activities offered as part of an encounter include:

- talks to classes or assemblies delivered by college curriculum staff, pastoral staff and current students
- participation in careers fairs for all year groups
- application clinics and mock interviews
- college campus visits for all year groups
- discovery days and subject-specific visits for different age groups to either explore what studying at the college is like, or explore different subject facilities and courses
- college staff attending school parents' and carers' evenings and other events, to speak to parents and carers directly

A meaningful encounter can take many forms.

THE ROLE OF VIRTUAL ENCOUNTERS

Evidence shows that some practitioners have struggled to arrange encounters with further and higher education and training providers. This is often due to geographical limitations and associated costs, particularly for transport. The increased use of hybrid learning, which combines in-person and remote learning, in many education and training settings has created opportunities for virtual encounters. As long as virtual visits or talks are meaningful (such as involving two-way interaction) they can help mitigate these barriers on both sides.

As stated in the updates to Benchmarks 5 and 6, while meaningfully delivered virtual encounters can be valuable to young people, they should not completely replace in-person encounters.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 17

APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT & KNOWLEDGE (ASK) PROGRAMME

The Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge (ASK) programme¹⁵² supports schools and colleges to increase the awareness of apprenticeships and T-levels among young people, their parents and carers, teachers and careers advisers. It offers a variety of activities, workshops, webinars and resources that are delivered by local experts.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 18

INSTITUTES OF TECHNOLOGY

Institutes of Technology (IoTs),¹⁵³ located across England, are “a national network of FE [further education] colleges, universities and leading industry employers, working in close partnerships to deliver world-class technical education and training” across a range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) occupations.

The IoT partnership model means they are well placed to provide pathways from 16-18 education into higher technical qualifications (HTQs), apprenticeships, degrees and employment in their regions. IoTs work closely with schools to offer meaningful encounters to young people.

REDUCED BIAS AND GREATER IMPACT

All those supporting young people in institutions should present all routes with equity, this aligns with Benchmark 2. It can be easy to focus on those routes and learning locations that are most familiar or that are considered a default option for certain young people. Research shows that there can also be misconceptions about certain pathways,¹⁵⁴ so institutions may need to make more effort gathering information and encouraging encounters with providers that are less well understood by staff, parents and carers, and young people. All young people deserve to know and understand the full range of options open to them, and this knowledge can have a profound impact. For example, uptake of apprenticeships is 16% higher in schools that provide information on apprenticeships to most or all pupils, compared with schools who provide information to only a minority.¹⁵⁵



Ofsted's 2023 thematic review of careers observed that biased outcomes most commonly result not from institutional self-interest but from a lack of strategic planning based on young people's individual needs.¹⁵⁶ Careers leaders should be aware of any potential biases and combat these through staff development, as outlined in Benchmark 4.

We have heard from careers leaders who are using aspiration and destinations data, alongside LMI and regional skills plans, to inform their engagement with providers who offer different progression routes.¹⁵⁷ Carefully planned and sequenced encounters help young people to build an equitable awareness and understanding of their options ahead of key transition points.

Encounters with providers are becoming increasingly embedded in a young person's journey through their careers programme. Research highlights that earlier and progressive engagement leads to greater impact, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged learners.¹⁵⁸ Provider access legislation, introduced in 2023, requires all schools and colleges to provide opportunities for all Year 8 to 13 pupils to hear from a range of providers about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. It sets out what these encounters should include and makes it clear that "the focus should be on the individual student and what is best for them".¹⁵⁹

All young people deserve to know and understand the full range of options open to them, and this knowledge can have a profound impact.

TAILORING TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

For an encounter to be meaningful it needs to be tailored to a young person's individual needs. Every young person has their own aspirations, preferences and individual needs and it is important to consider these when determining the encounters and experiences they will most benefit from.

Early transition planning can be crucial for some young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) because it can help them articulate their post-school, college or training goals and become more familiar with their next destination.¹⁶⁰

It is never in anyone's best interest for young people to have encounters that are not appropriate for them. Equally, they should not miss out because of assumptions made about their abilities and ambitions. The benchmarks continue to hold high aspirations on behalf of all young people.

The practitioners who work regularly with young people with additional needs, including SEND coordinators (SENDCOs) and others with SEND expertise, are best placed to determine what is most appropriate to fully prepare their young people for their next steps.

We heard from special schools, such as the Chiltern School, who arrange visits to higher and further education institutions for those young people it is appropriate for. In the most effective examples, meetings take place regularly between the careers leader, specialist support staff, each young person and their parents and carers. This helps to establish the individual aims of each young person and identify the support they may need to make an effective transition. Young people often attend multiple provider visits to meet key staff and students, take part in activities and familiarise themselves with the environment before attending.

BENCHMARK 8

PERSONAL GUIDANCE

SUMMARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Every pupil should have opportunities for guidance meetings with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of school staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These meetings should be available for all pupils whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all pupils but should be scheduled to meet their individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCO) and other key staff to ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme.

SUMMARY FOR COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS

Every learner should have opportunities for guidance meetings with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of provider staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These meetings should be available for all learners whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all learners but should be scheduled to meet individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCO) and other key staff to ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme.

IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARK 8

Personal guidance delivered by professional careers advisers is an essential part of a careers guidance programme. Young people told us that they value the opportunity to talk to a professional, reflect on their experiences and discuss their skills and interests. This helps them make informed decisions about their future.¹⁶¹

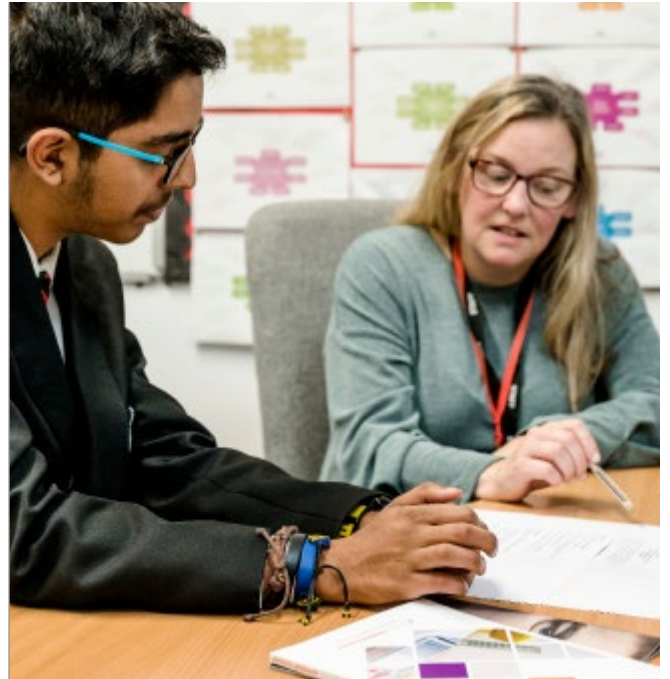


My careers meeting helped to reduce my confusion and helped me make sense of everything. My careers adviser helped me think about practicalities for me and I really think they helped me to make an educated decision not only about my next step but my next, next step and even the step after that.

Year 12 Student

The evidence base for the value of personal guidance has grown over the last decade.¹⁶² A 2020 study found that for every £1 invested in personal guidance, the government can expect to recoup at least £3 because of the impact personal guidance has on lifelong earnings, the decrease in those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and the decrease in higher education drop-out rates.¹⁶³

Therefore, evidence still supports the need for young people to have personal guidance meetings with a qualified careers adviser.



UPDATED TERMINOLOGY

We have updated the term ‘guidance interview’ to ‘guidance meeting’. Referring to personal guidance taking place in an interview was viewed as unhelpful by young people as it suggested they were being judged, or that it was something they could pass or fail. Careers advisers also told us that the term ‘interview’ was not the best representation of effective practice. Using the word ‘meeting’ better reflects the purposeful and supportive conversations that take place between careers advisers and young people, where options are explored, plans are agreed and decisions are made.

SECTOR EXAMPLE 19

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH
DESCRIBING FEATURES OF
GOOD PERSONAL GUIDANCE

Research from the last decade suggests personal guidance is most effective when it is:

- **supported by senior leadership**, including being appropriately resourced
- **young person-centred** and tailored to their individual needs
- **conducted by qualified careers guidance professionals** who adhere to ethical standards and use up-to-date and evidence-based approaches to ensure successful outcomes for young people
- **integrated** with other careers guidance activities and embedded in the institution's comprehensive careers programme
- **part of a sequence that includes preparation and follow up**, that supports young people to prepare for personal guidance meetings and to implement the plans they formulate, including through follow-up meetings
- **delivered in appropriate spaces**, which are private, comfortable and an appropriate size
- **fostering proactivity**, using a range of approaches designed to encourage young people to proactively manage their own future and career, such as goal setting, agreeing clear next steps and boosting self-efficacy
- **timely**, including ensuring personal guidance meetings are an appropriate length and that they take place at the most appropriate point(s) in the young person's learning

AWARENESS AND TIMING OF
PERSONAL GUIDANCE

It is important that young people, staff, and parents and carers understand what personal guidance support is available and how it is accessed. Young people want to know not just how and when they can access support, but what they should do to prepare for it.¹⁶⁴ **Benchmark 8 has been updated to state that information about personal guidance support and how to access it should be communicated to young people and parents and carers, including through the institution's website.**

Young people particularly want to be able to access personal guidance before making key decisions and before transition points. **Benchmark 8 now states that meetings should be scheduled in the careers programme to meet the individual needs of the young person.**

For over-16s who are in a school sixth form, this benchmark now matches those for over-16s at a college or independent training provider (ITP). **Benchmark 8 for schools now states that every young person should have a further meeting by the age of 18, where it previously required them to have the opportunity for a further meeting.**

TAILORED PERSONAL GUIDANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S NEEDS

Research suggests that personal guidance can be especially beneficial for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with SEND.¹⁶⁵ It is particularly important that young people with SEND know how to access personal guidance, understand what will take place in the meeting and which staff will be involved. Both the content of the meeting and the way it is delivered should be tailored to individual needs.

We heard there is a concern that careers guidance could destabilise an apprenticeship. However many young people taking apprenticeships told us that careers guidance is important to them. They want personal guidance so they can better understand how to progress at their employer, plan for the end of their apprenticeship and think about their longer-term career and how they can be successful in their chosen sector.



CAREERS ADVISERS AND KEY STAFF

Careers advisers told us they are most effective when they are known by staff, are visible to young people, parents and carers, and have access to data to inform their personal guidance meetings with young people.

In some of the most impactful approaches, careers advisers are highly regarded, their work is integrated with different departments in the school, college or ITP, such as pastoral teams, and they contribute to the overall development and evaluation of the careers programme.

To ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme, we have updated Benchmark 8 to state that the careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, SENDCO and other key staff. For example, this could include subject teachers, mentors and senior leaders.

Trained careers advisers, whether a member of internal staff or externally commissioned, will be skilled in guidance techniques and have up-to-date knowledge of the full range of future pathways and labour market opportunities.

THE CAREERS ADVISER WORKFORCE

Implementing Benchmark 8 depends on having a trained and well-distributed workforce of careers advisers available to work in schools, colleges and ITPs. Trained careers advisers, whether a member of internal staff or externally commissioned, will be skilled in guidance techniques and have up-to-date knowledge of the full range of future pathways and labour market opportunities. This gives them the tools to provide personal guidance meetings that meet the needs of young people and focus on their interests alone.

Discussions with careers advisers suggest that workforce supply varies across the country, with some areas reporting shortages of trained careers professionals. Externally commissioned personal guidance in schools, colleges and ITPs is supplied by careers guidance companies and self-employed careers advisers, who also work with adults in the community through national and local government services, charities or privately. Careers guidance companies have also indicated that there are issues with recruitment and retention. National datasets on careers adviser numbers do not show a sustained decline and are usually insufficiently detailed to identify how many are working in different sectors.¹⁶⁶

The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK's professional body for careers work, providing training and professional development. They maintain the register of career development professionals¹⁶⁷ whose members adhere to a code of ethics and commit to taking annual professional development. Schools and colleges can use this register to find suitable careers advisers. The CDI also provides advice on the right qualifications for various roles and how to conduct effective personal guidance meetings, suggesting that they should take at least 45 minutes.

CASE STUDY 22

At **Meadowhead School** in Sheffield, the careers leader is also a qualified careers adviser. In addition the school commissions external careers advisers who work closely with the careers leader as part of a careers team.

Young people have scheduled meetings at key decision points, but anyone can request meetings at other times if they need support. In Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, every pupil has at least one meeting with a careers adviser. In Key Stage 5 a triage system is in place, where group guidance is used to inform one-to-one follow-up meetings. Group guidance is also available to support pupils with tasks such as completing applications.

Personal guidance is embedded in the careers programme and the careers adviser attends events for specific year groups. These include Key Stage 3 assemblies and parents' and carers' events, and Key Stage 4 and 5 options talks, open evenings and application advice sessions.

The careers leader and careers advisers work closely with heads of year, pastoral managers, the SENDCO and the inclusion team to identify pupils who would benefit from tailored intervention. This includes pupils who lack motivation or a clear aspiration, disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils, those with SEND or those at risk of becoming NEET.

CASE STUDY 23

At **Wigan & Leigh College** all young people access personal guidance. A one-to-one meeting is part of the colleges' student entitlement and is mandatory for those aged 16 to 18 and those up to the age of 24 with an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Delivery of personal guidance is tailored to the needs of young people. Guidance from a careers adviser is available to prospective students, during enrolment and ahead of key transition points. Records of careers discussions are available on a central system that supports students when making decisions. A letter detailing what the young person has indicated they want to do after their course and the next steps for achieving this is shared with parents and carers.

The team of careers advisers, known as careers coaches at the college, are based on each campus and work closely with other key staff. They work with curriculum teams to plan and deliver suitable careers activities, often informed by labour market information (LMI), and provide training for wider staff. They also develop and deliver conferences, tutorials, group work and one-to-one sessions for students and their parents and carers.

MAKING THE SYSTEM WORK

LOOKING AHEAD

Schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) are, and will continue to be, at the centre of making careers guidance happen for young people. But they cannot do it alone. It is essential that they are supported by a strong accompanying system. Our evidence points to several essential elements of infrastructure that must continue. Looking forward to the next 10 years of internationally recognised good careers guidance in England, Gatsby strongly recommends:

The government retain the Gatsby Benchmarks as the national standard for careers guidance. The benchmarks should be used to underpin careers guidance policy and associated statutory guidance for schools and the equivalent guidance for colleges and ITPs. The updated benchmarks are a world-class framework for careers guidance in schools, colleges and ITPs. This report shows overwhelming evidence that the benchmarks have impact on young people's outcomes. The benchmarks also serve as an organising framework for any additional support, innovations and projects.

Ofsted continue to use the benchmarks to inform their understanding of what good looks like for careers. Inspectors have welcomed the benchmarks as a tool to guide discussions about careers guidance. They should be made aware of the updates as part of their annual training and inspection handbooks should be updated to reflect the changes. There should also be parity in the reporting of careers guidance between schools and colleges. Currently only college inspection reports are required to include descriptions of careers guidance, this should also apply to schools. Making this information more prominent, potentially moving it to the front of any reporting, would help institutions showcase their work to stakeholders, particularly parents and carers.

The government continue to invest in existing careers guidance infrastructure. The main body of the report outlines the importance and impact of each of the following core elements that are primarily managed by the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC):

- **Careers leader training** – Careers leaders are the driving force behind improvements in careers guidance in schools and colleges. The national training programme has ensured careers leaders have the tools to succeed in their role. However, there is, and will continue to be, significant staff turnover, with many careers leaders moving into other leadership positions. This means a continuous programme of training is still needed to support new careers leaders and also to help experienced careers leaders design programmes using the updated benchmarks. Training programmes should be regularly updated to take account of changes to education, careers guidance and the world of work.

- **Compass benchmark measurement tool** – The free online evaluation tool, Compass, helps schools and colleges track their progress and develop their strategy in implementing the benchmarks. Alongside this, the Future Skills Questionnaire measures the career readiness of young people. Aggregated data from these surveys has also been essential in identifying national priorities for investment and measuring the impact of careers guidance across the country.
- **Regional careers hubs** – Regional hubs ensure that careers guidance in an area aligns with the local labour market and skills priorities. They also act as an essential mechanism to disseminate national information, such as education policy reforms, share good practice across the country and partner with regional authorities to support specific objectives. Regional hubs also play a critical role in bridging the gap between employers and education – encouraging, developing and sustaining new relationships with business and recruiting new employers to act as ambassadors for employer engagement. This helps careers leaders who may otherwise struggle to initiate new contacts with employers and it lessens the risk of employers feeling overwhelmed with requests from education.

- **Careers Impact System of peer review** – Gatsby and the Department for Education funded a pilot of the Careers Impact System (see sector example 1). The pilot involved careers leaders and headteachers from different institutions reviewing each other's leadership and delivery of careers guidance and providing feedback to drive improvement. The peer review model has been successfully used in other areas of education^{168 169 170} and is already leading to improvements in careers guidance. It should be rolled out to all regional hubs, using the expertise of careers leaders. Alongside driving improvements, the model embeds consistency and increases confidence in the reliability of careers guidance reports for regional hubs and policymakers.
- **Resources and online platform** – Resources should continue to be created, hosted and shared with careers leaders to help them work towards the benchmarks. Good practice developed across the country should also be shared, as should up-to-date information about education and labour market changes. They should continue to be made available on a central platform to avoid duplication of effort.

National infrastructure should be funded for periods of at least three years at a time.

Careers guidance is most effective when it can be well planned and coordinated. Short-term funding cycles undermine the effectiveness and efficiency of those in charge of national infrastructure, which then has implications for schools and colleges. Stability is essential so that the many stakeholders involved in developing and implementing good careers guidance can provide continuous, high-quality support for young people going through the education system.



In addition to the essential recommendations there is other activity that we think would help ensure continued high-quality delivery of careers guidance and should be a priority for this parliamentary term.

The government should consider how best to ensure young people studying in ITPs and those following an apprenticeship can access good careers guidance. Many ITPs are already using the benchmarks by applying them to their specific setting. We have drawn on their experiences to ensure the benchmarks meet the needs of young people in that setting. However, we know that the funding and accountability systems for ITPs differ to those for schools and colleges, and that young people following apprenticeships are employees rather than students. Therefore work needs to be done to understand what is needed to ensure all young people, whatever their setting or pathway, get access to the careers guidance described in the Gatsby Benchmarks.

National guidance, based on the core principles of the benchmarks, should be developed to help shape tailored local provision for young people out of formal education. Examples of good practice are emerging from local government and organisations developing a careers guidance offer for young people not in formal education, specifically those who are electively home educated and those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). It is important that young people not in formal education have access to good careers guidance. However, the different contexts, working arrangements and needs of young people in these settings means directly replicating the benchmarks is not appropriate. The government should work in collaboration with local areas to develop guidance to showcase good practice which can then be used to develop local strategies in all areas of the country.

Improvements could be made to provide sustained and longer-term destination data to schools, colleges and ITPs in a more timely way. The quality of destination data has improved significantly over the last 10 years with the introduction of the government publishing Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data.¹⁷¹ This has enabled the destinations of young people when they leave school to become part of the suite of headline measures for education. This was an important step in recognising the significance of progression alongside the value of qualification results. However, so it can better inform strategic evaluation of careers programmes, improvements to the granularity and speed with which it can be provided back to education institutions should be made.

Government-assured labour market information (LMI) should continue to be provided to schools and colleges in a way that helps them look at different occupations and larger economic trends. Local areas should also combine national data with regional and local insights from their economic forecasting and skills planning and this should be distributed to education and training providers in their area through careers hubs. We also found LMI has often been used too narrowly, resulting in significant national trends not being included in careers guidance. For example, the transition to a net zero economy is universal and increasingly important, affecting a wide range of jobs and careers, but it has sometimes been treated as a niche topic, reserved for discussion with those young people most interested in it.

Education leaders should be supported to understand the impact careers guidance has on outcomes for young people. A key theme of this report is the increasing evidence that an engaged leadership accelerates institutional improvements in careers guidance. Many careers leaders reported that they felt “lucky” to have supportive leaders. We think more can be done to ensure high-quality careers guidance is not left to chance. For example, careers guidance content should be embedded into existing headteacher and principal training such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). There could be additional opportunities to embed careers into other professional development and training frameworks, such as the government’s proposed Excellence in Leadership programme.



Consideration should be given to how all careers advisers working with young people could join the Career Development Institute (CDI) register of career development professionals. The importance of young people having access to high-quality careers advisers continues to be embedded in Benchmark 8. One way for careers leaders to identify high-quality advice is to find careers advisers registered with the CDI. To join this register careers advisers must be qualified, committed to a minimum of 25 hours of professional development each year and adhere to the professional code of ethics, which centres young persons' best interests. Not all careers advisers are currently on this register, therefore the education and careers sector, including government, should work with the CDI to explore how to make this happen. This should include ensuring the register is fit for purpose, exploring ways of encouraging and supporting qualified careers advisers to register themselves and considering an appropriate registration offer for Level 4 careers professionals. This would have multiple benefits, as well as helping careers leaders externally commission specialist careers advisers, it would drive access to professional development, for example in relation to labour market changes, technical education reforms and supporting young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and provide critical insights into any shortages and training needs in the workforce.

A key theme of this report is the increasing evidence that an engaged leadership accelerates institutional improvements in careers guidance.

The role of careers hubs could be expanded to improve the volume, quality and coordination of experiences of workplaces.

Our work has shown that we need more employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to offer meaningful experiences of workplaces. Employers need to be supported to understand the variety of experiences they can offer – moving away from the misconception that experiences must be blocks of one or two weeks. Clarification in the updated benchmark wording will help and good resources already exist, such as Gatsby's *The Education Landscape: A Guide for Employers*¹⁷² (see sector example 10), the CEC's *Employer Standards*¹⁷³ (see sector example 9) and Youth Employment UK's *Good Youth Employment Benchmark tool*,¹⁷⁴ but more could be done to help. Local careers hubs already play a role in bringing local employers and skills priorities together with careers guidance in schools and colleges, but this could be grown, drawing on existing programmes, for example the CEC are piloting *equalex*,¹⁷⁵ in selected regions as an approach to supporting the design and delivery of workplace experiences throughout a young person's time in education. The key features of *equalex* are quality, equity and flexibility.

During our extensive consultations other ideas emerged that had strong support from stakeholders and therefore merit further consideration, including scoping the feasibility of delivery and resource implications.

Reviewing existing approaches to helping young people articulate what they have learnt from careers guidance and driving consistency in the language used to do this.

We heard there was a persistent challenge for young people in communicating their knowledge, skills and behaviours effectively to potential employers. The updated definitions of 'meaningful' outline the importance of giving young people time to prepare for and reflect on encounters and experiences, but we heard more could be done to help young people with this process and to increase the consistency with which it is done across the country. Tools already exist to support this reflection process, but we heard that there was value in reviewing good practice and encouraging greater usage. We also heard there was an appetite for improving the consistency in language used by young people to describe what they have learnt from careers guidance. Different frameworks already exist that describe some elements of the knowledge, skills and behaviours gained through careers guidance. An example is the Skills Builder Universal Framework (see sector example 6), which brought together employers and education institutions to develop a progressive framework of the 'essential skills', sometimes referred to as employability or transferable skills, that employers value. These skills are mapped to occupational standards and the same language has been used to inform elements of the CEC's Future Skills Questionnaire. Any activity in this area should avoid duplicating efforts by building on existing frameworks.



Exploring whether there would be value in creating a national institute of careers guidance research. Good-quality evidence is essential to ensuring our careers guidance system is both responsive and stable in the long-term. Stakeholders suggested that a central organisation helping to coordinate, deliver and disseminate this evidence would help support a mature and sustainable system. Such an organisation could be conceived as a national institute of careers guidance research which could focus investments and the efforts of academics, government and wider stakeholders. This could be achieved in several ways, such as the expansion or creation of a new What Works Centre.

CONCLUSION

The updated benchmarks are an opportunity to celebrate the passion and commitment of education, careers professionals and employers across the country. Major progress has been made by schools, colleges and independent training providers (ITPs). The evidence of impact continues to grow year-on-year and it is clear that careers guidance is moving in the right direction and delivering enormous benefits for young people.

We are hugely grateful to the hundreds of individuals and organisations that have supported this work. With their help and input, the updated benchmarks are now based on the most up-to-date evidence and impactful practice from across the country and continue to represent world-class provision.

Careers guidance is about doing a variety of things, as described by the benchmarks, and doing them well and consistently over time. That depends on the support of a community of professionals spanning careers guidance, education and the world of work, and giving young people the space to prepare for and reflect on the information, encounters and experiences they have had. With schools, colleges and ITPs in the driving seat, we can be sure the next generation of young people will benefit from the world-class careers guidance they deserve.

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Gatsby is a foundation set up by David Sainsbury to realise his charitable objectives. We focus our support on a limited number of areas:

- Plant Science Research
- Neuroscience Research
- Education
- Economic Development in Africa
- Public Policy Research and Advice
- The Arts

We are proactive in devising projects to achieve our aims. We are enthusiastic about supporting innovation. We are analytical as we believe it is important to understand the opportunities and problems we tackle. We take a long-term view as we do not think much can be achieved by short, one-off projects. We are always eager to form partnerships with organisations who share our goals.

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