



Statutory guidance

Careers guidance and access for education and training providers

Updated 8 May 2025

Applies to England

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Relevant legislation

This is statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) issued under [Section 45A of the Education Act 1997](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/44/section/45A) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/44/section/45A>).

This guidance refers to:

- Section 42A, 42B, 45 and 45A of the Education Act 1997
- Section 72 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
- Schedule 4 (15) of the School Information (England) Regulations 2008

Who should use this guidance

Maintained schools and academies in England must have regard to this guidance when carrying out their duty to ensure that a range of providers are able to access and inform pupils about technical education and apprenticeships.

Institutions that must have regard to this guidance when carrying out their duty or funding requirement to provide learners with independent careers guidance include:

- maintained schools
- academies
- further education (FE) colleges
- sixth form colleges

Independent training providers (ITPs) and other post-16 providers that provide careers guidance but don't have a specific careers requirement should follow this guidance as a statement of good practice.

Colleges also have a legal requirement to provide all their learners with guidance materials and a wide range of up-to-date reference materials relating to careers education and career opportunities, as described in section 45 of the Education Act 1997.

This guidance is for:

- governing bodies, proprietors, school and college leaders, careers leaders and staff in:
 - maintained schools
 - academies
 - free schools (including alternative provision academies and free schools) and colleges
 - ITPs (that provide secondary education and post-16 education or training)
- local authorities that maintain pupil referral units providing secondary education and post-16 education

The guidance applies to:

- all pupils in school from year 7 to year 13
- all learners in colleges and ITPs up to and including the age of 18
- learners aged 19 to 25 with a current [education, health and care plan \(EHCP\)](https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help) (<https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help>) in place under section 37 of the Children and Families Act 2014

Definitions of terms used in this guidance

'Careers guidance' covers the full range of activity delivered under the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks.

The term 'must' is used when the person in question is legally required to do something.

The term 'should' is used when the advice should be followed unless there is good reason not to.

The word 'school' refers to maintained schools, academies and free schools.

A 'maintained school' is:

- a community, foundation or voluntary school
- a community or foundation special school (other than one established in a hospital) that provides secondary education
- a pupil referral unit

The word 'college' refers to both FE and sixth form colleges.

The use of 'independent training provider' (ITP) refers to independent providers of vocational education, apprenticeships, and professional development tailored to industry and workforce needs within the FE sector.

'Independent' is defined as external to the school or college. External sources of careers support could include employer visits, mentoring, website, telephone and helpline access and personal guidance provided externally to the school or college. Taken together, the external sources must include information on the range of education and training options, including apprenticeships and T Levels. Personal guidance does not have to be external – it can be delivered by school or college staff, if trained to the appropriate level and delivered impartially. Where this advice or any other element of the careers programme is internal, it must be supplemented by external sources of support to ensure compliance with the legal duty.

We use the term 'institution' where the guidance applies to schools, colleges and ITPs. We otherwise specify which types of institution the guidance applies to.

The word 'learner' refers to pupils, students, learners and young people. Where another term is used, such as 'pupil', this is used to reflect the original wording of legislation or the Gatsby Benchmarks.

The word 'parent' refers to parents, carers and guardians of learners, pupils, students and young people and all those with parental responsibility for the young person.

Value of careers guidance

High-quality careers guidance helps:

- young people make informed choices about their futures, so they can develop their interests and potential, and follow the path that is right for them to progress into work
- break down barriers to opportunity
- improve skills needed for success in work
- improve national productivity and grow the economy

The government's vision for careers guidance is to improve careers advice in schools and colleges and to guarantee 2 weeks' worth of work experience for every young person.

To support this, DfE is funding:

- [The Careers & Enterprise Company \(CEC\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>) to support schools and colleges to develop careers programmes in line with their careers requirements and the Gatsby Benchmarks
- [National Careers Service](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>) to provide free, impartial careers information, advice and guidance to students, parents and teachers through a website, web chat service and telephone helpline

Changes to statutory guidance

This statutory guidance replaces 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: statutory guidance for school and guidance for FE colleges and sixth form colleges', published in January 2023.

There are no changes to the careers legislative framework since the last update. The associated duties and equivalent requirements in funding agreements continue to rest with schools and colleges.

The statutory guidance has been updated to reflect the government's policy priorities. Changes include:

- an overview of the changes to the [Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance](https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/) (<https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/>) following extensive research led by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation
- detailed information on the amendments to the descriptive and measurable elements of the 8 benchmarks
- DfE's expectations of what schools, colleges and ITPs should do to meet the updated benchmarks
- preparing for the future introduction of a guarantee of 2 weeks' worth of work experience for every young person
- signposting and links to resources, support and further information

This guidance will be kept under review and updated versions will be published if necessary.

What you need to know

High-quality careers provision is an essential part of the government's missions to break down barriers to opportunity and to drive economic growth. Economic growth relies on individuals having the skills, ambitions and opportunities they need to succeed in fulfilling careers, so that we can meet skills gaps in priority sectors and improve national productivity.

Careers choices start at school. Every young person, regardless of their background, must be able to achieve at school to develop the knowledge and skills they need for life. This can be achieved by:

- improving school standards with excellent teachers and leaders who develop and adopt best practice
- improving attendance, health and wellbeing in and out of school
- addressing inequality and adopting an inclusive approach to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- ensuring access to a broad curriculum with wider enrichment opportunities

CEC's [research on what is happening in careers education today](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-evidence/evidence-and-reports/careers-education-2022-23-now-next/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-evidence/evidence-and-reports/careers-education-2022-23-now-next/>) shows that good careers education and guidance can result in better attainment, engagement and outcomes for learners, particularly young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. There is well developed evidence linking good careers guidance to reduced levels of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) at post-16 and post-18. Young people in schools and colleges with the highest quality careers provision are 8% less likely to become NEET. This reduction in NEET rates can reach 20% for the most disadvantaged schools.

Providing independent careers guidance

Schools, colleges and ITPs must ensure that young people have the careers education, information and guidance to follow a pathway that is right for them and aligns with employment opportunities.

Schools and colleges must meet their statutory or contractual requirements to provide independent careers guidance, acting impartially and not showing bias towards any route. Under the [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/21/section/14) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/21/section/14>), schools must meet their statutory duty to provide at least 6 opportunities for providers of technical education and apprenticeships to talk to all pupils, during school years 8 to 13, about their education or training offer.

These requirements open up opportunities to learners from all backgrounds. They empower learners to make informed decisions about their future by understanding the benefits of the full range of academic and technical pathways, including:

- apprenticeships
- T Levels
- Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)
- other approved technical education qualifications

DfE expects headteachers, principals and governing boards to:

- support their careers team, especially their careers leader
- invest in personal guidance provided by a qualified careers adviser

This allows for high-quality, progressive careers programmes that help all learners acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve and thrive.

The Gatsby Benchmarks

From September 2025, DfE expects all institutions to use [the updated Gatsby Benchmarks \(https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/updated-benchmarks/\)](https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/updated-benchmarks/).

Building on the internationally recognised framework of the last decade, the benchmarks have been updated following almost 2 years of extensive research and stakeholder engagement. This update has taken account of changes, including:

- technological revolution
- innovation in schools and colleges
- shifts in the labour market
- changes in the career choices available to young people

Overview of changes to the Gatsby Benchmarks

Evidence of the impact of the benchmarks continues to grow year-on-year. Changes have only been made where the evidence suggests this will lead to even better outcomes for young people. The core of the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks remains the same, but important changes include:

- careers at the heart of education and leadership so that careers guidance is both a whole-staff and a whole-institution endeavour. Updates emphasise:
 - linking careers and the institution's vision and strategic plans
 - acknowledging the importance of staff development
 - including distinct responsibilities for leadership, governors, careers leaders and advisers
- inclusion and impact for every young person. Updates to multiple benchmarks emphasise:
 - tailoring to the needs of each young person
 - paying particular attention to any additional or different support that may be needed by vulnerable or disadvantaged young people, or those with SEND
- meaningful and varied encounters and experiences. Updates emphasise:
 - the importance of offering a variety of encounters and experiences
 - giving young people time to prepare and reflect
 - using technology alongside, but not instead of, in-person activity
- focusing on the use of information and data. Updates emphasise:
 - all young people must be able to explore all future pathways equitably
 - using information to inform decision-making
 - refocusing data collection to include aspirations and intended destinations, to help tailor support
 - keeping longer-term and sustained destinations data as part of the evaluation process
- engagement of parents and carers. Updates emphasise:
 - embedding parent and carer engagement into planning, as parents and carers are one of the biggest influences on young people's career decision-making
 - sharing information with parents and carers and supporting them in using it with their children

These updates are being embedded into government policy as part of our commitment to improve careers guidance. The changes ensure that the benchmarks remain fit for the future as the government's world-class framework for secondary schools, colleges and ITPs to design careers programmes for young people.

Implementing the updated benchmarks

The benchmarks are non-statutory, but support schools and colleges in:

- meeting their legal and contractual careers requirements
- acting as an improvement tool for institutions to ensure every learner benefits from the very best careers guidance

This statutory guidance is structured around what schools, colleges and ITPs should do to deliver against the updated benchmarks. All institutions are strongly encouraged to begin planning as soon as possible to embed the updated benchmarks into their practice, before implementing them from September 2025.

The updated benchmark framework, rationale for changes and examples of impressive practice are available in the [Good Career Guidance: The Next Ten Years report on the Gatsby Benchmarks website](https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/) (<https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/>).

Gatsby Benchmark toolkits and guides that support the meaningful achievement of all 8 benchmarks are available through [The CEC resource directory](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>). This directory and the [Careers & Enterprise Digital Academy](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/educators/the-careers-enterprise-academy/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/educators/the-careers-enterprise-academy/>) offer a curated collection of high quality, trusted careers tools, guidance and information. CEC provides [support to meet the updated Gatsby Benchmarks](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/meaningful-achievement-gatsby-benchmarks/) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/meaningful-achievement-gatsby-benchmarks/>).

Institutions are expected to continue working towards the [original benchmarks](https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf) (<https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf>) during the 2024 to 2025 academic year. Resources to support delivery of the original benchmarks remain available on The CEC resource directory.

The Careers & Enterprise Company

The national careers system in England is overseen by the CEC, which delivers improvements in careers provision, in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Careers hubs are partnerships between the CEC and strategic and local authorities, covering all areas of England. They work directly with secondary schools, colleges, specialist institutions, apprenticeship providers and employers. Each careers hub improves careers performance through co-ordination, challenge and support. Hub leads oversee the work to align national strategic priorities with local intent and delivery.

Enterprise coordinators, co-funded with local delivery partners, work with clusters of schools and colleges, connecting them with local employers and careers providers and supporting the achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks. All secondary schools and colleges should take the opportunity to join their local careers hub. In September 2024, 93% of schools and colleges in England were part of a careers hub.

In September 2024, 3,708 careers leaders at the school and college level had completed fully-funded initial training to gain the skills and knowledge to fulfil the role effectively. [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/the-careers-enterprise-academy/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/the-careers-enterprise-academy/>) also provides free online learning for careers leaders and all those who work with them to plan and deliver strategic, progressive careers programmes.

A national network of cornerstone employers, of all sizes and from all sectors, are supported by careers hubs to target intervention in disadvantaged areas. Cornerstones provide the employer voice and leadership and work nationally, with other cornerstones, on shared careers-related priorities. There were 416 cornerstone employers in September 2024,

Business volunteers, called 'enterprise advisers', work with secondary schools or colleges, through the careers hub model, to provide strategic support in developing a careers plan and building employer networks. All schools and colleges are encouraged to [sign up to the careers hub network](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/enterprise-adviser-network-register/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/enterprise-adviser-network-register/>). There were 3,810 enterprise advisers in September 2024.

Resources

[Compass and Compass+](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/digital-products-and-resources/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/digital-products-and-resources/>) are free digital tools that help institutions to benchmark, manage, track and report on their careers provision. Both enable institutions to quickly and easily evaluate their careers activity against the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks, and review the maturity of their careers leadership using the Careers Impact System. Institutions can use:

- Compass+, which integrates with compatible management information systems to offer eligible schools and special schools access to learner-level data that can help to personalise careers interventions, and support more targeted careers programme planning and delivery

- Compass, which enables all institutions, including colleges and ITPs, to complete an evaluation, measuring careers provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks and recording Careers Impact internal leadership review responses to effectively identify strengths and discover areas for improvement within their careers provision

The [Future Skills Questionnaire \(FSQ\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/future-skills-questionnaire) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/future-skills-questionnaire>) is a learner self-completion questionnaire. It measures career readiness at points of transition across institutions. Insights help careers leaders make targeted interventions, evaluate the careers programme and identify the impact of careers guidance in their institution.

The [Careers Impact internal leadership review](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review>) is based on the Careers Impact maturity model, which provides a shared language of how careers can be positioned as a driver for school, special school and college improvement. The digital feature allows for responses agreed in your internal leadership review discussion to be centrally recorded in Compass or Compass+. Institutions also have instant access to a summary of responses, including a visual snapshot of areas of strength and priority action areas.

As part of continued efforts to track the progress of their careers programmes, all schools, colleges and ITPs should self-report progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks termly. DfE recommends the use of Compass or Compass+ for this purpose. Institutions may choose to share the data with governors, parents, colleagues and Ofsted.

Evaluation and analysis: Compass data

Compass evaluation data charts the sustained progress that institutions are making with improvements across every dimension of careers support. The CEC produces annual insight briefings showing how careers guidance is developing in England. The [CEC's 2023 to 2024 Insight briefing](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/insight-briefing-gatsby-benchmark-results-for-2023-24/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/insight-briefing-gatsby-benchmark-results-for-2023-24/>), based on a national dataset of 4,751 state-funded mainstream secondary schools, special schools and colleges who reviewed their provision against the 8 benchmarks, shows that:

- schools and colleges achieved, on average, 5.8 benchmarks out of 8, compared to 1.87 in 2016 to 2017
- schools and colleges that are part of a careers hub, complete the careers leader training and use the available digital resources achieve higher benchmark scores than those not part of a hub – an average of 6.3 compared to 3.8

This means that with the right level of support, the benchmarks represent a demanding but achievable standard that DfE expects all schools and colleges to meet.

DfE strongly recommends that schools use the FSQ as an evaluation tool for their careers programmes. The FSQ measures learners' career readiness: the key aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are important for successful transitions. The results highlight activity that is working well and where more support is needed to improve career outcomes. These insights can inform the targeting of support to specific groups or individuals.

In the academic year 2023 to 2024, over 230,000 learners completed the FSQ in England. The [results of the FSQ](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/student-career-readiness-in-2023-24/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/student-career-readiness-in-2023-24/>) indicate that:

- 68% of year 11 learners felt career ready
- 83% of learners had a plan for their next steps
- disadvantaged young people are less confident in talking about their skills when applying for courses or jobs

Further analysis of the career readiness of key stage 4 learners

(<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/r2afiagk/careers-education-and-career-readiness.pdf>) demonstrates a positive association between careers provision and career readiness. The analysis shows that a learner in a school achieving all 8 benchmarks would have a higher career readiness score, of 3.5 percentage points, than a learner in a school achieving one benchmark.

The National Careers Service

The government's ambition for a new jobs and careers service will enable everyone to access good, meaningful work and support them to progress in work, including through an enhanced focus on skills and careers. In the meantime, the National Careers Service continues to provide free impartial information, advice and guidance on careers, skills and the labour market to adults and young people aged 13 years and over.

Young people can access support through:

- the website

- local community-based careers advisers via:
 - a web chat service
 - a telephone helpline

Tools on the National Careers Service website include:

- [skills assessment](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/discover-your-skills-and-careers) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/discover-your-skills-and-careers>)
- [explore careers](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers>)
- [find a course](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course>)

Careers advisers can support young people to make informed choices by providing insights into all the different routes, including:

- apprenticeships
- T Levels
- HTQs
- other technical qualifications
- academic options

This supplements support available to learners through their school or college, particularly outside of term time. The National Careers Service offers transition support after exam results for school and college leavers.

Accountability and quality

Accountability is essential to improving standards. The government is committed to improving the inspection system. From autumn 2025, Ofsted is proposing to introduce:

- a renewed Education Inspection Framework
- changes to inspection methodology
- a new Ofsted report card

The changes should provide more information to parents on the strengths and weaknesses of institutions and proportionate accountability for staff.

In the meantime, institutions should continue to refer to:

- Ofsted's [Education Inspection Framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>)
- individual handbooks for:
 - [maintained schools and academies](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>)
 - [FE and skills providers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook-eif) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook-eif>)

The education inspection framework includes careers guidance as part of personal development. In an inspection report [Ofsted is legally required](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/section/125) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/section/125>) to comment on the careers guidance provided at colleges to 16 to 18 year olds and students aged up to 25 with an EHCP. Ofsted inspectors will also inspect and comment on careers guidance on short and full inspections of all FE and skills providers as appropriate.

The Ofsted [school inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif>) includes a focus on careers guidance, clarifying that inspectors will always report where a school falls short of the requirements of the provider access legislation, as well as considering how it affects a school's inspection grade. In assessing a secondary school's personal development offer, inspectors will assess the quality of careers information, education, advice and guidance and how well it benefits pupils in choosing and deciding their next steps. This includes looking at the school's implementation of the provider access arrangements to allow a range of education and training providers to speak to students in years 8 to 13. Ofsted expects that schools or colleges will:

- prepare all students for future success in education, employment or training
- provide unbiased information about potential next steps
- provide high quality, meaningful opportunities for encounters with the world of work

Tracking destinations of learners

A successful careers guidance programme is also reflected in higher numbers of learners progressing to positive and sustained destinations such as apprenticeships, technical routes, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, FE colleges, universities or employment. [Destination measures \(https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics) provide clear and comparable information on the success of schools and colleges in helping all their learners take qualifications that offer them the best opportunity to continue in education, training or employment.

Local authorities have a range of statutory duties to track the destinations for young people, and to identify and support young people who are not in education, employment and training. To facilitate this, schools should ensure that they maintain contacts with the local authority in their area. DfE publishes key stage 4 and key stage 5 (16 to 18) education destinations in [performance tables \(https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables\)](https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables), which are an established part of the accountability system. The Gatsby Benchmark 3 section of this guidance provides further detail on destinations data.

Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Institutions should ensure the quality assurance and continuous improvement of their careers programmes. This should form part of their careers programme planning (more detail in Benchmark 1) and include regular evaluation from stakeholders, including learners, parents and employers, alongside reviewing progression data.

We strongly recommend the use of the [Careers Impact System \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-system/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-system/) which supports a quality assured, sustainable and strategic approach to careers leadership and establishes a shared and standardised language of quality improvement for careers, aligned to school and college improvement.

Schools, special schools, colleges and ITPs can take a free [Careers Impact internal leadership \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review) review via Compass or Compass+. The review needs a collaborative approach and is a reflection on the maturity of careers leadership across a school, special school or college.

Careers Impact peer-to-peer reviews are being rolled out across careers hubs and academy trusts. They involve careers leaders in a local area:

- sharing practice and progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks
- identifying what works well and areas for improvement
- exploring how careers can enable wider improvement

The CEC also perform National System Reviews to support high-quality careers leadership and help education leaders develop impactful careers programmes for all learners. The [insight briefing from National System Review 1 \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/careers-impact-national-system-review-1/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/careers-impact-national-system-review-1/) focuses on achieving Gatsby Benchmark 1: a stable careers programme. The [insight briefing from National System Review 2 \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/) focuses on careers as a vehicle to achieve equity for all and address the disproportionate impact of disadvantage.

Quality standards

We strongly recommend that all schools and colleges work towards the [national Quality in Careers Standard \(https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/what-is-the-quality-in-careers-standard/\)](https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/what-is-the-quality-in-careers-standard/) to support the development of their careers programme. This external assessment allows independent judgement of the quality of careers provision, including its impact upon learners' career-related learning. Schools and colleges can gain formal accreditation of their careers programme through the Quality in Careers Standard – the national quality award for all aspects of careers education and guidance. The Standard is owned by the [Quality in Careers Consortium \(https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/the-consortium/the-quality-in-careers-consortium-board/\)](https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/the-consortium/the-quality-in-careers-consortium-board/) which involves the major professional associations of school and college leaders alongside the Career Development Institute (CDI) and Careers England. The Standard is fully aligned with the updated Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Standard is externally assessed by one of the [Licensed Awarding Bodies \(https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/2019/09/01/licensed-awarding-bodies/\)](https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/2019/09/01/licensed-awarding-bodies/), appointed by the Consortium. A key part of an assessor's evidence gathering is 'learner voice' – the impact the careers programme has on learners' career-

related learning – with [evidence from independent detailed analysis \(https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/2025/01/21/quality-in-careers-standard-award-holders-achieve-highest-gatsby-benchmark-scores-january-2025/\)](https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/2025/01/21/quality-in-careers-standard-award-holders-achieve-highest-gatsby-benchmark-scores-january-2025/) showing that schools and colleges achieving the Standard have higher Gatsby Benchmark performance.

We require colleges to hold the [matrix Standard \(https://matrixstandard.com/\)](https://matrixstandard.com/) if they are in receipt of funding from the DfE adult skills budget. We also encourage ITPs to hold the matrix Standard. The matrix Standard:

- is a national quality standard that helps organisations to assess, measure and improve the management and delivery of their information, advice and guidance services
- focuses on leadership and management and how the institution:
 - provides their service, including the quality of delivery
 - provides benefit to its customers
 - evaluates and continuously develops their service

What the governing body is expected to do

The governing body should provide clear advice and guidance to the school or college leader on which they can base a strategic careers plan which meets the legal or contractual requirements of the school or college. The plan should:

- be developed in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks
- be informed by the requirements and expectations set out in this document
- show how the careers programme will be implemented
- show how its impact will be measured

Every school and college should have a member of their governing body who takes a strategic interest in careers education and guidance and encourages employer engagement. The CEC's [understanding how to create a strategic careers plan \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/understanding-how-create-strategic-careers-plan\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/understanding-how-create-strategic-careers-plan) supports careers leaders to ensure that the careers provision has explicit backing of governors and leaders, and that it is linked to the whole school, special school or college development plan.

Careers legislation

The governing body must make sure that independent careers guidance is provided to:

- all learners throughout their secondary education (for all 11 to 18 year olds)
- learners aged up to 25 with an EHCP

Careers guidance should:

- be impartial, showing no bias or favouritism towards a particular institution, education or work option
- include information on the range of education or training options, including apprenticeships and technical education routes
- consider the best interests of the students to whom it is given

Provider access legislation

In schools, the governing body must make sure that learners in years 8 to 13 receive at least 6 encounters with a provider of technical education or apprenticeships.

As a minimum, schools must offer:

- 2 encounters that are mandatory for all pupils to attend that take place any time during year 8 or between 1 September and 28 February during year 9

- 2 encounters that are mandatory for all pupils to attend that take place any time during year 10 or between 1 September and 28 February during year 11
- 2 encounters that are mandatory for the school to put on, but optional for pupils to attend, to take place any time during year 12 or between 1 September and 28 February during year 13

These 6 meetings are timed to inform consideration of post-14, post-16 and post-18 options and progression to the next stage of education or training.

Schools should encourage all pupils to attend the encounters. However, optional attendance for older pupils recognises that, while many 16 to 18 year olds will benefit from finding out more about post-18 technical options, some will already have made a firm decision to pursue their chosen pathway.

All 6 encounters must happen for a reasonable period of time during the standard school day. Provider encounters that take place outside of school hours, for example parents evenings, do not count towards fulfilment of the legal requirement for 6 provider encounters, but schools are still encouraged to provide these complementary experiences for pupils and their parents.

Schools and providers should work together. Schools should ask each provider to inform pupils about:

- the provider
- the approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships that the provider offers
- the careers those technical education qualifications or apprenticeships might lead to
- what learning or training with the provider is like

Providers should also answer questions from pupils.

Provider access policy statement

Schools must prepare and publish a policy statement setting out the circumstances in which education and training providers will be given access to pupils. The policy statement must include:

- any procedural requirements about requests for access
- grounds for granting or refusing requests
- details of premises or facilities available to a person who is given access
- the times access can be given
- how they will meet the legal requirement to put on 6 provider encounters

The careers leader should review the policy statement annually and agree it with the governing body. An [example of a suitable policy statement \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/example-provider-access-policy-statement\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/example-provider-access-policy-statement) can be found on the CEC resource directory.

Further guidance

The CEC has produced [Guidance for Middle Schools, \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/guidance-middle-schools\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/guidance-middle-schools) to help middle schools understand their requirements and how best to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Further information on legal requirements that apply to governors (for example, publishing information about the careers programme and the name of the careers leader on the website) is available for:

- [academy trusts \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/-governance-in-academy-trusts\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/-governance-in-academy-trusts)
- [maintained schools \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/governance-in-maintained-schools\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/governance-in-maintained-schools)

Complaints

If someone has a complaint about a maintained school not complying with these duties, or considers a school has not complied with this statutory guidance, this should be resolved locally. This will usually include

considering a complaint in line with the school's published complaints procedure, which all schools are required to have by law. Complainants should be able to lodge their complaints or objections easily. We expect governing boards or schools to consider complaints impartially. If a complaint remains unresolved and is raised with DfE, we can review whether the school has failed to have regard to this statutory guidance.

For complaints relating to academies, the complainant should first complain to the academy and follow the academy's complaints procedure before escalating the complaint to DfE. We cannot change an academy's decision about a complaint. The role of DfE is to make sure the academy handles the complaint properly. For further information please refer to [How DfE handles complaints about academies](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy#esfas-remit-in-relation-to-academy-complaints) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-an-academy/complain-about-an-academy#esfas-remit-in-relation-to-academy-complaints>).

Colleges comply with the conditions of their contracts and DfE funding rules. For further information on complaints about colleges and training providers please refer to DfE's [Complaints procedure](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure#complain-about-a-post-16-training-provider-college-or-employer-we-fund) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency/about/complaints-procedure#complain-about-a-post-16-training-provider-college-or-employer-we-fund>).

Meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks

Benchmark 1: A stable careers programme

Every school, college and ITP 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.

- Every school, college and ITP should have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of those in governance roles, the headteacher, 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 institution'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, teachers, subject staff and other staff who support learners, careers advisers and employers, to increase its impact.

A stable, structured and embedded careers programme is the foundation of a high-quality careers offer that adheres to legal and contractual requirements and meets the needs of all young people. Institutions should design a careers programme that:

- is underpinned by learning outcomes
- gives all young people opportunities to achieve and thrive
- has clearly defined staff responsibilities
- is evaluated regularly to ensure continued effectiveness
- helps young people develop career readiness and essential skills for the workplace, or their progression transition pathway
- enables young people to make well-informed decisions about education, training, apprenticeship and employment opportunities

DfE expects careers guidance to have the support of senior leaders in every institution. Those in governance roles are responsible for:

- providing strategic oversight of the institution's legal and contractual requirements for careers guidance
- holding senior leaders to account for delivering against those requirements

Headteachers, principals and those in governance roles should all be actively engaged in setting the direction for a whole-institution approach to careers guidance. They should all give explicit backing to the institution's careers programme.

Appointing a careers leader

Every institution should appoint an [appropriately trained careers leader](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/careers-leader-training/) to develop and direct the careers programme, in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks. The careers leader should have the skills, commitment and support from their senior leadership team. They should be given protected time and sufficient budget to carry out the role effectively.

Based on examples of good practice, an effective careers leader should:

- be responsible and accountable for the planning and delivery of a progressive careers programme, underpinned by learning outcomes and working towards meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks in a meaningful way
- coordinate and manage the various elements of the careers programme and its budget
- work with the senior leadership team to ensure the careers programme is informed by a strategic careers plan aligned to institution priorities
- make sure that parents and carers are engaged throughout
- establish and develop key relationships to drive progress and continuously improve the careers programme
- engage colleagues across the institution, including senior leaders, governors, teaching staff, careers advisers, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENCO), young people and their parents and carers
- build links externally with employers, external agencies, learning providers and careers organisations
- evaluate and continuously improve the careers programme, drawing on feedback from all stakeholders and the destinations of learners

Support for careers leaders

DfE strongly recommends that schools, colleges and ITPs engage with [DfE's funded, flexible, careers training offer](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/careers-leader-training/) designed to support the growth of careers leaders at all levels. This includes training for new careers leaders as well as top-up training for experienced careers leaders and senior leadership. The training focuses on using high-quality careers provision for wider school or college improvement.

The [Careers & Enterprise Academy](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/the-careers-enterprise-academy/) hosts free learning content on careers leadership to support strategic, progressive careers programmes. This includes:

- education leaders and governors: introduction to careers
- careers leaders: foundational content and opportunities for further learning, including:
 - induction
 - understanding the Careers Impact internal leadership review
 - understanding the updates to the Gatsby Benchmarks
 - using digital tools to drive impact
 - engaging parents and carers
- wider education workforce: learning modules, for:
 - subject teachers
 - SENCOs
 - the wider education workforce
 - training providers

Many careers hubs have networks and support designed specifically for new careers leaders.

Effective careers leadership

Effective careers leadership means embedding careers in the institution's structures and ensuring a strategic focus on outcomes. The careers programme should be aligned with the institution's vision, priorities and development plans. This helps to establish a whole-institution approach where the careers programme can play an important part in addressing wider improvement priorities, including:

- attendance
- behaviour
- wellbeing
- inclusion
- attainment

The [Careers Impact internal leadership review](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review>) sets clearly defined standards on what good careers leadership looks like: it is directly linked to wider school and college improvement. The review supports a journey to maturity in key elements of careers leadership. We recommend annual completion of the review in line with the institution's strategic planning cycle.

Institutions should make sure that experiences and encounters within their careers programme are well-sequenced and build on prior knowledge, with clear learning outcomes for every young person. Schools and colleges can use the [Career Development Framework](https://www.thecdi.net/resources/cdi-framework) (<https://www.thecdi.net/resources/cdi-framework>), published by the CDI, to plan a progressive programme. The framework sets out how common elements of careers guidance and activities can be tailored by setting different expectations and learning outcomes at primary, key stage 3, key stage 4 and post-16.

Engaging parents and carers

Every institution should have a clear approach to engaging parents and carers throughout their careers programme. [Research from the Institute for Employment Research](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/researchthemesoverview/researchprojects/careerguidanceparents) (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/researchthemesoverview/researchprojects/careerguidanceparents>) shows that parents and carers are one of the biggest influences on their child's education and career decision-making. Parents and carers should be:

- given relevant, current careers information
- supported to make the best use of current information
- encouraged to get involved in opportunities offered

Careers leaders can complete [2 short CPD sessions](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/careers-leader-training/further-cpd-training/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/careers-leader-training/further-cpd-training/>), developed by the CEC, to support the development of a progressive, targeted and integrated approach to parent and carer engagement. The training is supported by a [suite of parent facing resources](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/talking-futures) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/talking-futures>).

The Gatsby Foundation's [Talking Futures](https://www.talkingfutures.org.uk/) (<https://www.talkingfutures.org.uk/>) campaign provides information, tips and resources to equip parents and carers with the tools they need to have more informed, supportive conversations with their children about education and careers. Information is also available for parents and carers on the [Skills for Careers website](https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/) (<https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/>).

Publishing information about the careers programme

[Maintained schools must](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online#careers-programme-information) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online#careers-programme-information>) and [academies and colleges should](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-academies-free-schools-and-colleges-should-publish-online) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-academies-free-schools-and-colleges-should-publish-online>) publish information about their careers programme online, including:

- the name and contact details of the careers leader
- a summary of the careers programme
- details of how students, parents, teachers and employers can access information about the careers programme

- how the institution measures and assesses the programme's impact on learners
- the date by which the institution will review information

This information should relate to how the institution is meeting the requirements and expectations set out in this statutory guidance and how they are working towards meeting all 8 Gatsby Benchmarks.

Schools should also incorporate the policy statement on provider access that they are required to publish under section 42B of the Education Act 1997.

Inviting feedback

Institutions should invite regular feedback on the careers programme from learners, parents and carers, teachers, subject staff and other staff who support learners, careers advisers and employers.

This evidence should feed into overall development plans to make it easier to evaluate, improve and adapt the careers programme to ensure it meets the needs of all young people.

Benchmark 2: Learning from career and labour market information

All learners, parents and carers, teachers and 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 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.

- During each key stage or 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 to access and supported to use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their support of the learners in their care.

Reliable, high-quality, up-to-date career and labour information is critical for promoting well-informed decision making. An effective careers programme should provide good information about:

- career pathways
- education, training or employment options
- labour market opportunities

Information should cover a diverse range of progression pathways, including technical routes, to strengthen the capacity of learners to make effective choices and transitions.

The government's [Skills for Careers website](https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/) (<https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/>) provides information about skills training options and careers. The website guides users through the government's skills offer including higher and technical education, apprenticeships and supported internships. Users can access content directly on platforms including:

- the [National Careers Service](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>)
- the government's [Discover Uni](http://www.discoveruni.gov.uk) (<http://www.discoveruni.gov.uk>) website, which helps users search for and compare information and data for individual undergraduate courses across the UK, alongside researching other sources of advice they may need, such as application and funding information

Labour market information

Labour market information (LMI) provides the knowledge and understanding of how the labour market functions. LMI is crucial for making sense of changing economic circumstances. Institutions should use LMI to help learners understand:

- what jobs and skills employers are looking for
- wage rates
- skills gaps
- future trends, including growth-driving sectors

The LMI should include local information that showcases growth sectors in the local economy and helps learners understand local skills needs and local businesses. Through understanding the future employment prospects for different occupations, LMI can help learners from all backgrounds identify careers that they may not have considered.

Careers leaders should sequence the use of LMI during each key stage, or throughout a programme of study. This will ensure that the learning that comes from LMI can develop throughout the careers programme, supporting learners to make informed decisions at each stage.

LMI tools are less likely to be used by:

- young people with additional needs
- those in care
- those with English as a second language
- those from mixed or multiple ethnic groups

Supporting those with SEND to access LMI

Careers leaders should ensure equity of access to LMI by tailoring it to individual circumstances. Information, opportunities and support need to be personalised and sequenced to meet the needs of each young person with SEND and their families.

The expansion of the benchmark criteria beyond decisions about study options to include next steps and all transition and progression pathways, recognises that while study options or employment will be the goal for most young people, employment may not be the next step for some with complex SEND. Careers leaders should work closely with SEND coordinators, young people, their parents and carers to prepare the young person for adulthood and to provide tailored support to make positive transitions.

To ensure everyone can make the best use of the available information, institutions should ensure that young people are supported by informed advisers. For example:

- careers advisers are expert at interpreting LMI and using this with learners, including those with SEND, to enable them to make effective career decisions
- employees and industry advisers can offer labour market insights
- teachers and staff who support young people should have access to good-quality, up-to-date careers and LMI and be encouraged and supported to use it to have informed career conversations and signpost young people to further support

Institutions should consider how best to support parents and carers in accessing and using career and LMI. Parent and carers can have differing needs so institutions may need to supply additional information or support – for example, in an accessible and relevant format, to support understanding.

Support for Schools programme

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), through the Jobcentre Plus 'Support for Schools' programme, provides information to schools and colleges (including mainstream secondary, Special Educational Needs schools and pupil referral units as well as sixth form and FE colleges), their learners, teachers and parents on the local labour market and employer expectations.

Jobcentre Plus school advisers respond to local schools and colleges who identify learners at risk of leaving education without entering employment or FE or training.

The initiative is designed to facilitate school-to-work transition, training or further study for young people better suited to a vocational qualification, such as apprenticeships, instead of a traditional academic route, to help them fulfil their career ambitions.

Further support

Organisations like Chambers of Commerce, strategic authorities and local authorities can help institutions to access and interpret local LMI. Various sources can be used to inform careers advice and decision making:

- [Skills England](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/skills-england) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/skills-england>) aims to form a coherent national picture of where skills gaps exist by providing data and research to help understand current and emerging skills gaps
- the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket) (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket>) provides information on people in work and out of work
- [ONS local indicators](https://explore-local-statistics.beta.ons.gov.uk/indicators#economy) (<https://explore-local-statistics.beta.ons.gov.uk/indicators#economy>) has information on local factors including employment rate and weekly gross pay
- [ONS labour market overview](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/#publications) (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/#publications>) provides information on employment rates
- [National Careers Service \(Explore careers\)](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers>) provides information at an occupational level including salary, entry requirements and skills

Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each young person

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.

- An institution's careers programme should actively seek to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical thinking, showcase a diverse range of role models and raise aspirations.
- Schools and colleges 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.
- For school pupils who change schools during the secondary phase, information about careers participation and advice given previously should be integrated into a pupil's records, where this information is available. Records should begin to be kept from the first point of contact or from the point of transition.
- For colleges and ITPs, 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 any key transition points to support their next steps and career development.
- Schools and colleges 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.
- Schools and colleges should use sustained and longer-term destination data as part of their evaluation process and use alumni to support their careers programme.

Challenging stereotypes

Institutions should tailor careers activities and educational goals to the needs of each learner, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, young people with SEND and those who are persistently absent. This includes taking account of each young person's prior knowledge and skills, and the choices and transitions they face. The government wants to break down barriers to opportunity that young people may face as a result of protected characteristics, such as disability, sex or race, or other factors such as socio-economic background or family circumstances. Institutions should provide any additional support that may be needed to help young people to navigate these barriers to career progress.

Stereotypical thinking can limit the beliefs of young people about what is possible for them in the future. Careers programmes should tackle assumptions about what the next steps should be for people with different characteristics or from different backgrounds. All learners, including those with SEND, should be encouraged and supported to consider the widest possible range of careers. Schools and colleges should also work to understand any misconceptions that young people and their parents or carers may have about what opportunities are available and what they involve. These misconceptions should be addressed through the careers programme.

Role models and alumni

Benchmark criteria include clear expectations that school, college and ITP careers programmes should showcase a diverse range of role models and make use of alumni. This approach can provide extra motivation, allowing young people to hear about the career journeys of employee, employer or entrepreneur role models or alumni who share similar backgrounds. Alumni can also be a great source of support across the careers programme, for example offering to host learners in the workplace.

Keeping records to support pupils' transition

Institutions should keep comprehensive and accurate careers education records that 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. The careers education record is most effective when integrated with academic and welfare records to give a more complete picture of progress.

To support transitions for pupils who move to a new school during the secondary phase, the outgoing school should provide records about the pupil's participation in careers activities, their aspirations, intended destinations and advice given previously. The incoming school should integrate old records with a new record, kept from the point of transition.

Supporting pupils' transition to post-16 education or training

Schools and colleges should work together to aid the transition between those institutions at age 16, including by sharing careers education records and giving pupils an opportunity to meet college staff prior to enrolment.

Providers are encouraged to use the '[Get information about pupils \(GIAP\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-information-about-pupil-giap)' (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-information-about-pupil-giap>) tool, that provides access to pupil-level census and attainment data. The service also provides access to [pupil premium](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium>) funding allocation, helping schools effectively manage the financial aspects of new student enrolment from the start.

Colleges can also carry out a matching exercise using the students home postcode (provided at enrolment) to match against the Index for Multiple Deprivation, used to cross check and allocate funding uplifts for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Colleges and ITPs should consider the individual needs of new intakes of learners. They should plan for and accommodate learners' additional needs, where they arise. For example, learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds who may benefit from additional support but may not be easily identifiable or choose not to self-declare their status.

Young people may sometimes struggle to recall the encounters, experiences and support that they have received through their careers programme. Institutions should use records of a learner's careers activities to support learners' next steps and career development. When learners are making transitions, they can reflect on these records of their careers experiences and the knowledge and skills they have developed, using them to develop a compelling story for applications and interviews.

For schools, Compass+ makes it easier to target and personalise support by allowing schools to record and track individual learner careers interventions. It offers learner-level data and integrates with school's management information system data for effective and targeted careers programme planning and delivery.

Destination data

By regularly gathering and analysing the aspiration and intended destination data of current cohorts, institutions can support and challenge learners. For example, interventions could be tailored to support those who could aim higher or who are at risk of not reaching their intended destination. This information can also contribute to work with the local authority on NEET prevention strategies.

Schools and colleges should collect and analyse education, training and employment destinations data for all learners. This data may help schools and colleges to identify pathways, subjects or courses with low take-up that

could be addressed by changes to the careers programme.

We have removed the expectation to track the destinations of young people who left up to 3 years before to allow resources to be focused on helping current learners secure and sustain a destination. Sustained and longer-term destination data continues to be valuable and should inform the evaluation of careers programmes and help schools and colleges build and maintain alumni networks.

Aggregated sustained and longer term destination data can be found at:

- [Longer term destination measures \(https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/longer-term-destinations\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/longer-term-destinations)
- [16-18 destination measures \(https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/16-18-destination-measures\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/16-18-destination-measures)

Supporting young people who are NEET to transition to post-16

Institutions may also wish to collect individual level data by contacting former learners, or through a data-sharing agreement with their local authority. Timely and effective collaboration between schools and local authorities can result in positive action to support young people who are at risk of NEET.

We recommend that schools work with local authorities on Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) to improve NEET prevention and support effective post-16 transition. Sharing destinations data can help with reporting on the Gatsby Benchmarks, via Compass+, and RONI processes.

DfE is supporting local authorities, schools and post-16 providers take a data-based approach to preventing NEET. By using risk factors to identify young people at risk of disengaging, these young people can be supported to transition into post-16 options. [RONI good practice guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-supporting-young-people-at-risk-of-neet\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-supporting-young-people-at-risk-of-neet) was published for local authorities in 2025.

A complementary guidance product for schools and post-16 providers will be published later this year. A new automated RONI tool in the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS) is also in development. Careers leaders are key to an effective RONI approach between schools and local authorities. CEC is developing a Risk of NEET Indicator feature in Compass+ to support the identification of at-risk learners. Guidance and support will be published in autumn 2025.

Targeting support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners

Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, including looked after children and previously looked after children, care leavers and learners from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds, may need particularly targeted support to ensure high levels of ambition and successful transition to post-16 education or training. CEC have published an [educator guide resource \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/driving-equity-and-tackling-disadvantage-through-your-careers-provision-educator-guide\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/driving-equity-and-tackling-disadvantage-through-your-careers-provision-educator-guide) to support colleagues in schools, special schools and colleges drive equity and tackle disadvantage through the careers provision.

For looked after and previously looked after children, the careers leader should engage with the school's [designated teacher \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/designated-teacher-e-booklet\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/designated-teacher-e-booklet) to ensure:

- they know which learners are in care or who are care leavers
- understand their additional support needs
- ensure that, for looked after children, their personal education plan can help inform careers provision

Careers leaders and the school's designated teacher, should also engage with the relevant virtual school head or personal adviser (a statutory local authority post that provides support to care leavers up to the age of 25) to ensure a joined-up approach to identifying and supporting their career ambitions.

Schools should continue to work with local authorities, particularly children's social care and virtual school heads for looked-after and previously looked-after children, to identify learners who need targeted support or who are at risk of not participating post-16. As per the [Education and Skills Act 2008 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/part1\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/part1), local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and support 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education, employment and training. The [statutory guidance on participation of young people \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-of-young-people-education-employment-and-training\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-of-young-people-education-employment-and-training) places duties on local authorities to support participation, including by:

- collecting information to identify young people who are not participating, or who are at risk of not doing so – the information collected must be in the format specified in the [NCCIS management information requirement \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nccis-management-information-requirement\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nccis-management-information-requirement)

- targeting their resources on those who need them most
- working with schools to identify those who need targeted support or who are at risk of not participating post-16
- leading the [September guarantee \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/september-guarantee-offers-of-education-or-training-for-16-to-17-year-olds\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/september-guarantee-offers-of-education-or-training-for-16-to-17-year-olds) process which aims to ensure that all 16 and 17 year olds are offered a suitable place in education or training
- paying particular attention to young people who are NEET, working with local partners to develop provision and referring those who are eligible for support

Schools will need to agree how these learners can be referred for support from education and training support services available locally. This may require multi-agency working with other professionals involved in supporting the learners, such as careers advisers, social workers and virtual school heads. Schools should also work with their local authority and local post-16 education or training providers to share data on learners who are likely to need support with post-16 participation costs, such as care leavers or those on free school meals.

Alternative provision providers

All pupil referral units, alternative provision academies and free schools should have high aspirations for all learners, including those who may lack confidence and need encouragement to broaden their horizons. They should help learners explore career options and understand the variety of pathways including degrees, A Levels, HTQs, T Levels and apprenticeships.

Transition to post-16 provision is a crucial stage but not an end in itself, and it is important for learners to have a pathway to a future career. To provide support and advice on transitional pathways into FE or training and beyond, alternative provision providers should work in partnership with their:

- commissioning schools
- local authorities
- careers advisers
- post-16 providers

Providers of alternative provision should consider the particular needs of the learner and what different or additional support they may need to succeed on leaving school. They should work closely with post-16 providers to support transition.

Careers guidance for learners with SEND

The overwhelming majority of learners with SEND, including those with high levels of needs, can access fulfilling jobs and careers with the right preparation and support. They should all be supported with a careers programme that follows the Gatsby Benchmarks. Some benchmarks need may different interpretation in special schools, specialist settings (including special independent schools and special post-16 institutions) and for some learners with SEND in mainstream schools and colleges.

Careers leaders can use [vocational profiling \(https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/vocational-profile\)](https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/vocational-profile) as an effective way to identify a young person's aspirations from an early age to:

- understand a learner's experience, skills, abilities, interests, aspirations and needs in relation to employment
- identify their strengths and preferences
- matched them suitable transition options, job opportunities or work experience placements
- create a comprehensive profile that guides the individual towards FE or employment that aligns with their interests and strengths

Resources for schools and colleges working with learners with SEND

Resources for schools and colleges working with learners with SEND include:

- [CEC resources \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources-send-specialists\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources-send-specialists), including teacher guides and practical advice for schools and colleges on how their careers programme can support those with SEND
- [SEND Gateway resource pack \(https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/resources/securing-good-transitions-resource-pack-support-next-steps-key-stage-4-pupils-send\)](https://www.sendgateway.org.uk/resources/securing-good-transitions-resource-pack-support-next-steps-key-stage-4-pupils-send) to support key stage 4 learners with SEND to secure good transitions
- [Compass for Special Schools \(https://cec-compass.zendesk.com/hc/en-gb/articles/12469141438748\)](https://cec-compass.zendesk.com/hc/en-gb/articles/12469141438748), a free digital tool for special schools and specialist colleges to evaluate their careers provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks

A number of special schools are also working towards or hold the [national Quality in Careers Standard](https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/what-is-the-quality-in-careers-standard/getting-started-with-the-standard/) (<https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/what-is-the-quality-in-careers-standard/getting-started-with-the-standard/>).

The careers leader should work closely with the relevant teachers and professionals in their school or college, including the SENCO and inclusion teams, and the careers adviser, to identify the guidance needs of all learners with SEND and put in place personalised support and a transition plan. This may include helping learners with SEND and their families understand the full range of relevant education, training and employment opportunities, such as apprenticeships, supported internships (for learners with EHCPs) or routes into higher education.

The transition plan should include the ways employees with SEND can be supported in the workplace, covering:

- disability rights
- supported employment
- how jobs can be adapted to fit a person's abilities
- job coaching
- reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the workplace
- [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) (<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>)
- advice on self-employment (for example, micro-enterprise) which can also be especially relevant for some learners with SEND

The CEC has an inclusion community of improvement, via careers hubs, that aims to support schools and colleges working with learners with SEND through the sharing of good practice and the development of resources. SENCOs may also access support and development through an [online learning module](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/senco-development-course) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/senco-development-course>).

Schools should make use of the SEND local offer, published by the local authority. Where learners have an EHCP, their annual reviews must include a focus on preparing for adulthood, including employment. Include employment as soon as possible, and from at least year 9 onwards. Planning must centre around the individual, their aspirations and abilities when they leave post-16 education or training, and the support they need to achieve their ambitions. Transition planning must be built into revised EHCPs with clear, agreed outcomes that are ambitious, stretching and will prepare children and young people for adulthood. Schools should ensure these reviews are informed by good careers guidance, including impartial personal guidance provided by a qualified careers adviser.

The CDI provides [accredited training](https://www.thecdi.net/cdi-academy/cdi-professional-certificate) (<https://www.thecdi.net/cdi-academy/cdi-professional-certificate>) for qualified careers advisers who work with learners with additional needs, including SEND. Schools must co-operate with local authorities, who have an important role to play through their responsibilities for SEND support services, EHCPs and the promotion of participation in education and training. Statutory guidance on the SEND duties is provided in the [0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25). (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>)

Sharing information

Local authorities have statutory functions in relation to supporting young people's participation in education and training. To identify and support those who need help to re-engage, or to find work, they rely on information that schools and colleges hold on their learners. Under [section 72 of the Education and Skills Act 2008](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/72) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/72>), schools and colleges have a statutory duty to provide information to local authority services so that they can carry out their relevant duties, and track and maintain contact with these young people. This information might include:

- student's name, address and date of birth
- students' contact details such as phone numbers
- information to help identify those at risk of becoming NEET post-16
- students' post-16 and post-18 plans
- offers of places students receive in post-16 or higher education

If a local authority asks a school or college for information about young people living in the local area, to fulfil their statutory duty, the school or college is under a corresponding statutory duty to give it to the local authority. The Information Commissioner's Office contains [guidance about sharing information](https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/data-sharing/a-10-step-guide-to-sharing-information-to-safeguard-children/) (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/data-sharing/a-10-step-guide-to-sharing-information-to-safeguard-children/>).

Schools and colleges (including academies and other state-funded educational institutions) must notify local authorities whenever a 16 or 17 year old leaves an education or training programme before completion, as per section 13 of the [Education and Skills Act 2008 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/13\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/13). This notification must be made at the earliest possible opportunity to enable the local authority to support the student to find an alternative place. Schools and local authorities should agree local arrangements for ensuring these duties are met.

Benchmark 4: Linking curriculum learning to careers

As part of the institution's programme of careers education, all teachers and subject staff should link curriculum learning with careers, even on courses which are not specifically occupation led.

Subject teachers and 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 career pathways and future career paths.

- For schools: 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.
- For colleges and ITPs: 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 institution's ongoing staff development programme for teachers, subject staff and all staff who support learners.

A high quality curriculum is key to ensuring that every child receives an excellent education. In July 2024, the government commissioned Professor Becky Francis CBE to convene and chair a panel of experts to conduct the [curriculum and assessment review \(https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-review), and published a [set of principles \(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d196b7d107658faec7e3db/Curriculum_and_assessment_review_-_aims_terms_of_reference_and_working_principles.pdf\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d196b7d107658faec7e3db/Curriculum_and_assessment_review_-_aims_terms_of_reference_and_working_principles.pdf) to inform the scope of the review. The review's aims include ensuring that the curriculum ensures meaningful, rigorous and high-value pathways for all at 16 to 19 and developing a cutting-edge curriculum, equipping children and young people with the essential knowledge and skills which will enable them to adapt and thrive in the world and workplace of the future.

The review will play a vital role in the government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give every child the best life chances. At the heart of this mission is the department's objective to ensure high and rising standards for every child. The [interim report \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-interim-report\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-interim-report) examines the current state of our national curriculum, identifying areas of strength and where further progress can be made to deliver a curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive and innovative.

When careers is embedded in curriculum subjects, or programmes of study, there are more opportunities for learners to explore where their education could take them. In schools, each subject should help pupils identify the essential skills they are developing and how the skills can help potential pathways to future careers.

All 16 to 19 study programmes support the development and progression of learners in line with their career plans. They can provide a substantial work placement to prepare the learner for an apprenticeship or other employment, as well as other non-qualification activity to develop learners' broader character, skills, attitudes and confidence.

English and maths

Schools and colleges should ensure learners know the importance and labour market value of achieving a good standard in maths and English.

If learners on a 16 to 19 study programme (or T Level) do not achieve a grade 4 or above in maths and English GCSEs by the end of key stage 4, they must continue working towards these qualifications, or a pass in level 2 Functional Skill, if they have achieved a grade 2 or below, as part of their 16 to 19 study programme. DfE has made this requirement a condition of funding.

All students should be supported and given the opportunity to study English and maths under the condition of funding wherever possible, to enable them to seize opportunities in life, learning and work. There are a wide range of approved qualifications under the condition of funding that should enable this in most cases, from entry level upwards. However, students with SEND and an EHCP who are not able to study towards any qualifications may be exempted from the maths and English condition of funding, provided they are still offered literacy and numeracy at an appropriate level.

Support for teachers

Linking curriculum learning with careers should be part of a whole-institution programme of careers education. All teachers and subject staff should play an active role in highlighting 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. Career exploration will help every young person see future opportunities to thrive as individuals and to contribute to economic growth.

In order to deliver benchmark 4, staff need to be supported to use careers information in their curriculum delivery, so they can signpost to sources of support and have informed conversations with young people. Institutions should build careers into ongoing staff development for teachers and all staff who support young people. Institutions should choose effective approaches for their staff, but training could include:

- whole-staff meetings
- departmental CPD
- bespoke training

[CEC's teacher development course \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/the-careers-enterprise-academy\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/the-careers-enterprise-academy) is designed to support subject teachers in understanding the role they play in careers education and how they can, through their subject, help young people make informed choices about their best next step and potential career pathway.

Curriculum plans may show how careers will be embedded into their teaching. The CEC has produced '[My Learning, My Future](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/my-learning-my-future)' (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/my-learning-my-future>), a suite of resources that can be used and applied by subject teachers through lessons, homework and extra-curricular sessions. The resources span over 20 subjects at key stage 3 and 4.

[Arts Council England's Artsmark programme \(https://www.artsmark.org.uk/\)](https://www.artsmark.org.uk/) empowers teachers to embed arts, culture and creativity across the whole curriculum. In partnership with Curious Minds, they have produced an [Artsmark Careers and Employability Toolkit \(https://www.artsmark.org.uk/support-resources/artsmark-resources-guidance-and-templates/artsmark-careers-and-employability\)](https://www.artsmark.org.uk/support-resources/artsmark-resources-guidance-and-templates/artsmark-careers-and-employability) linking the Artsmark Framework to careers education. Arts Council England has recently launched the [Cultural Education Network \(https://www.artsmark.org.uk/cultural-education-network\)](https://www.artsmark.org.uk/cultural-education-network) to provide ongoing career professional development and support to teachers and cultural educators in England.

[Discover Creative Careers \(https://discovercreative.careers/#/\)](https://discovercreative.careers/#/) is an industry-led programme which gives young people the opportunity to learn more about career pathways and engage directly with creative workplaces and employers.

Career learning

Career learning can also be provided as a subject in its own right, alongside embedding careers into subject disciplines. Many schools currently deliver careers, employability and enterprise lessons through the curriculum as part of their commitment to [personal, social, health and economic \(PSHE\) education \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe) and [citizenship education \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study), which includes finance education. Citizenship education supports the development of knowledge and understanding about:

- society and democracy
- finance and the economy
- employer and employee rights and responsibilities

Resources

The [Skills Builder Universal Framework](https://www.skillsbuilder.org/universal-framework) (<https://www.skillsbuilder.org/universal-framework>) provides a model for building essential skills into the school or college curriculum. The 8 essential skills that enable young people to find work and succeed in their careers are:

- speaking
- listening
- creativity
- problem solving
- adapting
- planning
- teamwork
- leadership

The FSQ is aligned to the [Universal Framework](https://www.skillsbuilder.org/universal-framework) (<https://www.skillsbuilder.org/universal-framework>), asking questions to understand learners' essential skill levels.

There are teaching resources aligned to the Universal Framework on [Skills Builder Hub](https://hub.skillsbuilder.org/resources/) (<https://hub.skillsbuilder.org/resources/>). Educators can help learners link essential skills to different career paths using the [Careers Explorer tool](https://www.skillsbuilder.org/essential-skills-profiles) (<https://www.skillsbuilder.org/essential-skills-profiles>).

[The CDI's Career Development Framework](https://www.thecdi.net/resources/cdi-framework) (<https://www.thecdi.net/resources/cdi-framework>) sets out the learning outcomes to gain career management skills that help you manage your career throughout your life. This framework provides a useful resource that can both underpin the PSHE curriculum and support careers leaders to map career development outcomes across the curriculum.

In colleges, subject staff can be powerful role models, drawing on their industry experience to attract learners towards their specialist field and careers that follow from it. Colleges should ensure that all subject specialist teachers are equipped to support the career development of learners through their subject teaching.

Benchmark 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 opportunities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include learners' own part-time employment where it exists (part-time work can contribute to benchmark 5 but should not replace the need for other meaningful employer encounters).

- For schools: every year, from the age of 11, pupils should participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer.
- For colleges and ITPs: every year, alongside their programme of study, learners should participate in at least 2 meaningful encounters with an employer. At least one should be delivered through their curriculum area.

The government's [modern industrial strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy>) will support growth sectors to create high-quality, well-paid jobs across the country. The industrial strategy will focus on the sectors which offer the highest growth opportunity for the economy and business. Institutions can help young people understand the career opportunities across these sectors by adopting a strong employer focus within their careers programme.

Providing employer encounters

Institutions should provide opportunities for learners to meet a variety of employers, employees and the self-employed. Institutions should engage fully with a broad mix of national, regional and local employers of different sizes, across a range of different industries and sectors of the economy, as well as professional networks. In particular, learners should have opportunities to learn about jobs and careers in the government's 8 priority sectors for economic growth:

- advanced manufacturing
- clean energy industries
- creative industries
- defence
- digital and technologies
- financial services
- life sciences
- professional and business services

Using [learner data from the FSQ \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/careers-education-202223-now-next/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/careers-education-202223-now-next/), we know that pupils become more career ready as they progress through school and, in turn, their interests become more aligned with the labour market. By year 11, pupils' most popular industries include critical sectors linked to the government's industrial strategy, including healthcare, construction and digital. This reflects the impact of young people having more encounters with employers, so they gain insights into careers across a range of sectors.

Learners with access to meaningful encounters with employers will acquire essential skills, expand their networks, and gain insights into the evolving job market.

What a meaningful encounter should look like

A meaningful encounter gives the young person the opportunity to learn:

- what work is like
- what skills are valued in the workplace
- what the recruitment processes involves
- what it takes to be successful

Throughout a careers programme, young people should encounter employers of different sizes and specialisms, including the self-employed. Encounters should reflect trends in the labour market, regionally and nationally.

The encounters could be in person, or a combination of in person and virtual. 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 SEND.

A meaningful encounter will:

- have a clear purpose, which is shared with the employer and 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

Visiting speakers should reflect:

- different levels of seniority within an organisation
- individuals who have followed a variety of pathways into employment, including technical and academic routes
- the enterprise and employability skills, experience, and qualifications that employers want

Schools and colleges should help learners develop the confidence to compete in the labour market by providing opportunities to gain the practical know-how and attributes that are relevant for employment. This should include the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills for self-employment.

Schools and colleges should ensure that employer encounters are broad, inclusive and well-sequenced throughout the careers programme. Successful approaches could include:

- alumni activity
- business games and enterprise competitions

- careers fairs
- employer encounters with parents
- employers co-leading activities as part of curriculum lessons, assemblies or form time
- employees mentoring young people
- employer talks
- mock interviews
- employer workshops covering topics such as CV writing, recruitment processes or work simulations
- mock assessment centres
- speed networking or careers carousels

Employer encounters can be delivered in person, or through a combination of in person and virtual encounters. Virtual encounters can increase access to a wider range of employers, particularly where there are geographical or time constraints on visiting in person. Virtual encounters can also aid preparation for the modern workplace, which often involves remote work and virtual communication.

CEC has published guidance on [understanding how to embed progressive employer encounters and work experiences](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/understanding-how-embed-progressive-employer-encounters-and-work-experiences) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/understanding-how-embed-progressive-employer-encounters-and-work-experiences>).

Encounters for learners with SEND

Encounters with employers can be transformational for learners with SEND. Institutions should facilitate this, where possible. It can be especially powerful to hear from adults with disabilities who have succeeded in their careers.

Schools and colleges should prepare learners well for these encounters, so they know what to expect and what is expected of them, match them carefully to each employer and provide any special support the learner may need to benefit fully from the experience.

Support to provide encounters

Schools and colleges can work with the CEC to identify a [business volunteer \(enterprise adviser\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/enterprise-adviser-survey-insight-briefing-2024/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/enterprise-adviser-survey-insight-briefing-2024/>) who can support them to connect to the labour market. These volunteers can draw on their business background to help schools and colleges improve relationships with employers and create innovative opportunities for learners to meet local employers.

Jobcentre Plus can play a role in facilitating links between schools and employers through the 'Support for Schools' programme. Jobcentre Plus works with many employers that are keen to engage with schools, support careers fairs, or provide work experience or work taster opportunities.

Evidence of success

Meaningful employer encounters provide tangible benefits for both young people and employers. Research from Education and Employers: [Contemporary transitions: Young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college](https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/contemporary-transitions-young-britons-reflect-on-life-after-secondary-school-and-college/) (<https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/contemporary-transitions-young-britons-reflect-on-life-after-secondary-school-and-college/>) shows that a young person who has 4 or more meaningful encounters with an employer:

- is 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training
- can earn up to 22% more during their careers

[Data from employers](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/employer-standards-for-careers-education-one-year-on/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/employer-standards-for-careers-education-one-year-on/>) who complete the [CEC's Employer Standards](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/employer-standards/) (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/employer-standards/>) framework, designed to raise the quality of business-led outreach to education, show that employers working most extensively with young people are 47 percentage points more likely to report their outreach is helping close skills gaps. 81% of employers say their work in schools and colleges is helping develop new talent pipelines.

Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces

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

For schools:

- 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

For colleges and ITPs:

- 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

Work experience is a key part of any high-quality careers programme, helping to ensure that young people develop relevant skills for work and supporting transitions from education and training into skilled employment.

Young people want more opportunities to experience a wider range of workplaces to help them to make more informed decisions about their future. So, in addition to the strengthened Gatsby Benchmark, the government is reforming work experience to break down barriers to opportunity so that every pupil will have the opportunity to take part in 2 weeks' worth of work experience during key stages 3 and 4.

Implementing the strengthened benchmark

From September 2025, all institutions should adopt the strengthened benchmark. Schools should ensure that every pupil has multiple first-hand experiences of workplaces by the age of 16 and at least one further such experience by age 18. Colleges and ITPs should ensure that every learner has had at least one experience of a workplace during their programme of study. High quality and meaningful experiences of workplaces are a key component of [16 to 19 study programmes \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-study-programmes-guide-for-providers\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-study-programmes-guide-for-providers).

The benchmark places a much stronger emphasis on ensuring that all learners have multiple, meaningful and varied workplace experiences. The increased flexibility in this model is also intended to reduce barriers for both young people and employers. The approach will support schools with strategic planning working towards the government's guarantee of work experience.

What a meaningful experience should look like

A meaningful experience of the workplace 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 or work experience. 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 ITPs can take into account any part-time work a young person may have, if it genuinely offers them a meaningful experience. Part-time work can contribute to benchmark 6, but should not replace the need for other meaningful experiences of workplaces.

Implementing 2 weeks' worth of work experience

Our vision is that 2 weeks' worth of work experience will be based on the following set of principles, building on the benchmark 6 definition of meaningful.

Two weeks' worth of work experience should be broken down into:

- one weeks' worth of work experience activities in years 7 to 9
- one weeks' worth of work experience placement(s) in years 10 to 11

Experiences should be aspirational and inspirational, giving young people the opportunity to access a wide range of career opportunities, aligned to their interests and talents, local skills needs and national growth sectors. Opportunity should go beyond the horizons of their immediate friends and family.

They should be co-designed and delivered in partnership with schools and involve two-way employer-pupil interaction.

Work experience activities in years 7 to 9

Work experience activities in years 7 to 9 should consist of multiple, varied and meaningful employer-led activities to explore different industries and careers and involve active engagement with a diverse range of employers, including small and medium sized enterprises. Activities could include:

- multi-day work visits involving employer-set tasks or projects
- work shadowing
- in-person or virtual employer talks in the workplace, including technical demonstrations or tours of working premises.

These could be undertaken individually or as part of a group or class-based activity. Some or all of the activities can be in person, with virtual activities contributing but not replacing in person.

Work experience placement(s) in years 10 to 11

Work experience placement(s) in years 10 to 11 should allow pupils to experience a real working environment and begin to develop work-based skills and behaviours.

Pupils should be free to undertake their 5 days' worth of work experience placement(s) in years 10 to 11 with more than one employer, irrespective of sector, and be able to spread their placement time across a number of days or weeks at any point during the year 10 to 11 curriculum. This might be advantageous to young people who are undecided on their careers interests, by offering scope to try more employers and sectors.

We expect that the work experience placement(s) in years 10 to 11 be in-person, but acknowledge that in exceptional circumstances meaningful hybrid or virtual approaches may be impactful in removing barriers to access. In those circumstances, we would expect best endeavours to use remote engagement alongside, but not instead of, in-person activity.

Planning work experience programmes

From September 2025, schools should be planning and, where able, reforming their work experience programmes according to these principles so that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities, development and learning that work experience provides.

Schools should consider how to build meaningful experiences of workplaces, delivered under benchmark 6, into a structured work experience programme. The CEC has [information on modern work experience \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/modern-work-experience/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/modern-work-experience/), including a framework of structured learning outcomes to help schools implement a modern, progressive approach to work experience. To support this strategic planning, aligning progress towards the work experience guarantee to the school's priorities, school leaders and careers leaders should refer to theme 5 of the [internal leadership review \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-impact-internal-leadership-review).

DfE will set out more details of the work experience guarantee in due course, including:

- who is responsible and accountable for delivery
- support available nationally and locally
- delivery plans
- implementation timelines

Guidance for all institutions

Schools, colleges and ITPs have the flexibility to plan progressive and well-sequenced experiences of workplaces in a way that suits their context and the needs of their learners. This means each workplace experience should build on the last one and look to the next one, building a coherent set of experiences into a

progressive careers programme. Experiences of workplaces should be designed to meet the needs of learners and the local context, while bearing in mind the demands of delivering the full curriculum.

Workplace experiences for learners with SEND

For learners with SEND, workplace experiences can support raising aspirations and encourage learners to understand the options available to them around future career and progression pathways. A progressive approach to experiences through the programme of study will support the learner to gain confidence and develop skills and knowledge needed.

It might be useful to consider using vocational profiling to help learners to understand what they're interested in and why. Schools and colleges should carefully match the opportunities to the abilities, needs and aspirations of the learner.

Schools and colleges may need to work with the employer to put in place additional support in the work placement for some learners with SEND. [Additional support \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources-send-specialists\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources-send-specialists) might be needed to help ensure the learner is fully prepared for the workplace so that the experience is valuable.

Resources

The CEC has made available a range of resources that help schools, colleges and employers to plan and implement meaningful experiences of the workplace aligned to school and college priorities. These include guidance on [understanding how to embed progressive employer encounters and work experiences \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/understanding-how-embed-progressive-employer-encounters-and-work-experiences\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/understanding-how-embed-progressive-employer-encounters-and-work-experiences). There are also [resources to support employers working with young people with SEND \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/resource-1-careers-landscape\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/resource-1-careers-landscape) and a guide for employers to support the development of meaningful experiences, which is available to employers on completion of the [Employer Standards self-assessment tool \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/employer-standards/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/employer-standards/).

Schools and colleges must decide whether adults working with pre-16 work experience learners need to obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate by consulting the regulated activity section in part three of the statutory guidance, [Keeping children safe in education \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2).

DfE encourages schools and colleges to reduce barriers so employers can offer a wide range of experiences of workplaces and placements by following the [Work Experience Guidance \(https://www.hse.gov.uk/young-workers/employer/work-experience.htm\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/young-workers/employer/work-experience.htm). This includes advice on whether risk assessments are necessary and makes clear that the placement provider (employer) has primary responsibility for the health and safety of the learner and should be managing any significant risks. Schools and colleges, or others organising placements, need to check the employer has risk management arrangements in place, along with appropriate policies and procedures to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Industry placements

Industry placements are a mandatory and critical part of every T Level and consist of a substantial period of time in the workplace of at least 45 days. This helps young people to put their technical and employability skills into practice and learn what a real career option is like. It also allows employers to get early sight of new talent in their industry. DfE has provided a package of support for industry placements, which includes:

- [industry placements delivery guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-industry-placements-delivery-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-industry-placements-delivery-guidance)
- [student guide \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-guide-preparing-for-industry-placements\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-guide-preparing-for-industry-placements)
- [employer support package \(https://employerindustryplacements.co.uk/\)](https://employerindustryplacements.co.uk/)

All placements must:

- replicate real working conditions
- develop skills to support future progression
- provide a structured and supportive learning environment

Benchmark 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, ITPs, universities and in the workplace.

- By the age of 16, every learner 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 learners who are considering applying to higher education should have had at least 2 visits to higher education providers to meet staff and learners.
- 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 stage of their career. This should include, as appropriate, FE colleges, universities and ITPs. This should include the opportunity to meet both staff and learners.

Institutions have a responsibility to set learners on the path that will secure the best outcome which will enable them to progress in education and work. Under [raising the participation age \(RPA\) requirements](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-of-young-people-education-employment-and-training) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-of-young-people-education-employment-and-training>), all young people in England are required to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. Schools must make sure that pupils are clear about this requirement and what it means for them.

Institutions must explain technical and academic pathways without any bias or favouritism towards a particular route. Schools with sixth forms should take care that their own sixth form is not promoted disproportionately compared to alternative academic and technical study options. The focus should be on the individual learner and what is best for them.

It is important that learners realise that all of their educational choices have implications for their longer-term career. Schools and colleges should encourage learners to consider the career options that different educational choices could open up or close down.

Skills training options

Technical pathways offer qualifications designed in partnership with employers which will provide pupils with skills the economy and society need. You can explore high-quality skills training options available to learners on the [Skills for Careers](https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/pages/skills-for-life) (<https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/pages/skills-for-life>) website, including:

- [T Levels](https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/) (<https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/>), which are endorsed by business and provide high-quality, level 3 classroom-based technical courses that equip learners with the knowledge, attitude and practical skills to thrive in the workplace. Equivalent to a 3 A level programme, T Levels help students to progress directly into entry-level employment, an apprenticeship or higher education. There are 20 T Level subjects to choose from, each covering broad content issues related to the chosen sector, options to specialise, and an industry placement of at least 45 days. Schools can find their nearest T Level provider on the [T level website](https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/students/find) (<https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/students/find>).
- Reformed technical occupational entry qualifications – new qualifications delivering competence against an occupational standard. At level 3, they are available for 16 to 19 year olds in occupations not covered by a T Level. At level 2, reformed qualifications are available in all of these routes, except digital. These qualifications aim to support a learner to enter, or to progress within, a role. Additional specialist qualifications are specialist level 2 and level 3 technical qualifications for post-16 learners and adults, which go beyond the contents of an occupational standard. They allow a learner to develop additional knowledge and specialise within a sector. These qualifications build on knowledge covered by a technical occupational entry qualification at level 2 or a T Level or other occupational entry qualification at level 3. The first reformed qualifications will be available for teaching from September 2025 in:
 - construction
 - digital
 - education and early years
 - engineering and manufacturing
 - health and science
- [HTQs](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-technical-qualification-overview/higher-technical-qualification-an-introduction#available-subjects) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-technical-qualification-overview/higher-technical-qualification-an-introduction#available-subjects>) – level 4 and 5 qualifications that have been independently approved against occupational standards decided by employers. They are available across England in universities, FE colleges, Institutes of Technology and ITPs. HTQs prepare learners with the skills needed for a wide range of specialist occupations. Schools can find their nearest HTQ provider by checking the [list of HTQ providers](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-higher-technical-qualifications>). HTQs are a relatively new offer – quality approval for Level 4 and 5 technical qualifications to ensure they meet the skills needs of employers – and there is a dedicated [HTQ toolkit](https://www.htqtoolkit.co.uk/) (<https://www.htqtoolkit.co.uk/>) available with resources to promote this option.

- [Apprenticeships](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/) (<https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/>), which offer a real job that enables individuals to earn while they learn, gaining valuable knowledge, skills and behaviours tailored to a specific job role. There are over 700 apprenticeship standards currently approved for delivery, from Level 2 to degree level. Schools can find an appropriate apprenticeship provider through [the register of apprenticeship training providers](https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar) (<https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar>).
- Supported internships – unpaid work-based study programmes for young people aged 16 to 24 with an EHCP. Supported internships focus on teaching general skills needed for work, however some study programmes may include the chance to study for a qualification.
- Skills Bootcamps, which are available to anyone aged 19 or over and help to develop new skills employers are looking for. There are hundreds of Skills Bootcamps available across a wide range of sectors. Skills Bootcamps can be found through the [National Careers Service website](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course/) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course/>).

What a meaningful encounter should look like

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

The CEC has published guidance on [understanding how to embed progressive encounters with further and higher education](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/understanding-how-embed-progressive-encounters-further-and-higher-education) (<https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/understanding-how-embed-progressive-encounters-further-and-higher-education>), which includes practical support, ideas and advice on how to make sure all encounters, including virtual experiences, are meaningful.

Helping learners understand the pathways available

Learners with an EHCP should have formal opportunities to discuss education, training and career opportunities as part of their annual review, from year 9 onwards – this should include all relevant pathways available to them including supported options.

In consultation with a careers adviser, schools and colleges may recommend good quality websites and apps, whether national or local in scope, provided they present the full range of opportunities in an objective way. The National Careers Service website provides information and advice on a wide range of education, training and career options, including [Find a Course](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course) (<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/find-a-course>) which allows users to search for education and training opportunities across England.

Schools and colleges can work together, including through careers hubs and other networks, to help put pathways in context and deliver activities across multiple benchmarks. To ensure learners understand the

breadth of pathways available, schools and colleges can consider inviting a range of employers and providers to talk to learners about their careers and the routes into them.

Learners value highly the opportunity to attend open days at further and higher education institutions to help narrow down choices and reaffirm commitment to applying to attend further or higher education. Schools and colleges should help and advise learners attending such open days.

Meeting the provider access legislation

Schools must comply with the provider access legislation and ensure that every pupil, whatever their ambitions, has at least 6 opportunities to meet providers of technical education or apprenticeships during years 8 to 13. This gives pupils the opportunity to consider how studying or training in different ways, and in different environments, might suit their skills, interests and aptitudes.

Schools have flexibility to decide which providers to invite, but should particularly consider those within reasonable travelling distance of the school, including, where available:

- [general FE colleges \(https://www.aoc.co.uk/about/list-of-colleges-in-the-uk\)](https://www.aoc.co.uk/about/list-of-colleges-in-the-uk)
- ITPs
- [Institutes of Technology \(https://www.institutesoftechnology.org.uk/study\)](https://www.institutesoftechnology.org.uk/study)
- [university technical colleges \(https://bakerdearing.org/supporting-utcs/find-a-utc/\)](https://bakerdearing.org/supporting-utcs/find-a-utc/)
- [studio schools \(https://www.studioschooltrust.org/\)](https://www.studioschooltrust.org/)
- other schools that are offering technical education, such as T Levels or other vocational qualifications
- apprenticeship providers, which can be found on [the register of apprenticeship training providers \(https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar\)](https://download.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/apar)

Schools can contact their [local careers hub \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/contact-your-local-careers-hub/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/contact-your-local-careers-hub/) to get help identifying suitable providers in the area and support with building partnerships.

Schools should design and tailor the programme of provider encounters so that, as pupils progress through school years 8 to 13, they can build up a clear picture of technical education and apprenticeship opportunities available to them at different stages. This means taking account of the key stage 4, [post-16 \(https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/career-choices-at-16\)](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/career-choices-at-16) and [post-18 options \(https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/career-choices-at-18\)](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/career-choices-at-18) that each provider offers when deciding which year group(s) would benefit most from meeting a provider.

The legislation includes flexibility for schools to arrange encounters with the same provider across more than one 'key phase'. For example, a school may invite an FE college to talk to pupils in the first key phase (year 8 to 9) about key stage 4 options and to talk to pupils in the second key phase (year 10 to 11) about post-16 options. However, within the same key phase, schools must always provide meaningful encounters with 2 different providers to meet the legal requirement. Schools should also ensure appropriateness of the encounters for learners with SEND.

The school should not do anything which might limit the ability of pupils to attend. It would not be acceptable for schools to restrict invitations to selected groups of pupils or hold events outside of normal school hours.

Visiting providers

Persons acting on behalf of a provider may represent the provider, or accompany the provider, if they are particularly well placed to engage and inform pupils about the options available. For example, a University Technical College or an apprenticeship provider may ask to bring a key employer with them on a provider visit.

The school should consider such requests and consent cannot be withheld unreasonably. Schools and colleges should not require a DBS check for a visitor who is in the school for a one-off visit. However, headteachers and principals should decide on the appropriate level of supervision for the duration of the visit.

Ladder of support and intervention

DfE has developed a ladder of support and intervention to ensure that there is a transparent and consistent approach to helping all schools to meet the provider access legislation and to taking action to respond to cases of non-compliance.

The CEC provides support to schools and providers at a national level through the dedicated [provider access legislation page \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/) and locally through [careers hubs \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/contact-your-local-careers-hub/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/contact-your-local-careers-hub/). Careers hubs will work in partnership with schools to identify relevant providers in their area and support schools to identify

opportunities to tailor support based on local context and need. Schools that are not yet in a careers hub will have access to additional central support from provideraccess@careersandenterprise.co.uk.

Additional targeted support and guidance will be offered if there are concerns about a school's adherence to the provider access legislation as a result of:

- DfE's own monitoring of compliance
- information in a published Ofsted inspection report
- a complaint from a provider

There is a dedicated page on the CEC website to [register a concern \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/register-a-concern/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/register-a-concern/).

The CEC will support schools and respond to concerns from providers.

Steps on the ladder of support and intervention:

1. Support – The school will be reminded of the requirements of the duty. They will receive targeted support and guidance about what the school needs to do to comply with the provider access duty.
2. Responding to concerns – The careers hub will review the specific concern with the provider and the school and will deploy additional support if required and suitable. This additional support will depend on the nature of the concern raised but could involve the school being encouraged to undertake an expert review or independent quality assurance of their careers provision focused on the provider access legislation and/or being supported to develop an improvement plan which could include careers leader training. DfE will respond to [complaints \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/complaints-procedure\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/complaints-procedure) and intervene where a school continues to be non-compliant.
3. Responding to complaints – If the school is found to be non-compliant following a complaint, and the support and concern phases have been exhausted, an official or a minister from DfE will write to the school reminding them of the requirements of the duty and will state a date that the school will need to comply by to avoid moving to formal intervention. The letter will state that the senior leadership team and/ or the governors should undertake careers leader training (depending on the circumstance, the school may have to fund the training).
4. Intervention – The use of the Secretary of State's intervention powers, under Section 496 and 497 of the Education Act 1996, to require appropriate remedial action to be taken.

Schools that reach step 3 on the ladder of support and intervention will be subject to further monitoring in the current and following academic year to ensure they have the right support going forward.

Improving compliance

Although compliance has improved since we introduced the strengthened provider access legislation, there is still further to go. Ofsted's new study of careers guidance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reports that collaboration between schools and colleges needs to improve further so that all pupils can hear about the post-16 courses on offer and be supported to make effective transitions. [The National Audit Office report on T Levels \(https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/investigation-into-introducing-t-levels/?nab=0\)](https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/investigation-into-introducing-t-levels/?nab=0) concludes that awareness of the qualification remains too low.

During the academic year 2025 to 2026, we will ask the CEC to publish annual national level data on compliance with the provider access legislation to shine a light on progress and identify where there is more to do to meet the requirements.

Further support

The CEC's [dedicated webpage \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/) contains further information and support on the provider access legislation. Schools and providers requiring further support should contact their careers hub or email provideraccess@careersandenterprise.co.uk.

Benchmark 8: Personal guidance

Every learner should have opportunities for guidance meetings with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of school or college 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 their individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, SEND coordinator and other key staff to ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme.

- Every learner 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 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 school or college website.

Personal guidance delivered by professional careers advisers breaks down barriers to opportunity for young people. A [2020 study \(https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/personal-guidance-in-english-secondary-education-an-initial-return-on-investment-estimate/\)](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and-reports/personal-guidance-in-english-secondary-education-an-initial-return-on-investment-estimate/) found that for every £1 invested in personal guidance, the government can expect to recoup at least £3. Personal guidance has a positive impact on lifelong earnings and helps to decrease the number of those NEET.

Personal guidance meetings are purposeful and supportive conversations between a careers adviser and a young person. They allow the young person to make sense of the encounters, experiences and support they have received through their careers programme. They can discuss the young person's skills, interests and achievements and reflect on what this means for their career plans, enabling them to reach an informed career decision and empowering them to move forward. Young people can gain self-development and career management skills, develop plans for the future and set goals to achieve them.

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

- supported by senior leadership, including being appropriately resourced (CDI guidance recommends that at least 45 minutes are allowed for every personal guidance meeting)
- young person-centred and tailored to their individual needs
- conducted by qualified careers advisers 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, fosters proactivity and encourages young people to proactively manage their own future and career

Trained careers advisers

The implementation of benchmark 8 is dependent on having professional careers advisers who are skilled in guidance techniques and have up-to-date knowledge of the full range of pathways and labour market opportunities. This equips them to help young people to identify ambitious education, training and career options and progression routes.

The CDI has published a briefing paper which explain [the role of the careers adviser within personal guidance \(https://www.thecdi.net/CDI/media/Write/Documents/CDI_119-Role_of_a_Careers_Adviser-2021-FINAL_v_to_use.pdf?ext=.pdf\)](https://www.thecdi.net/CDI/media/Write/Documents/CDI_119-Role_of_a_Careers_Adviser-2021-FINAL_v_to_use.pdf?ext=.pdf) and a [blueprint of learning outcomes for professional roles in the career development sector \(https://www.thecdi.net/professional-qualified/cdi-blueprint-for-professional-roles\)](https://www.thecdi.net/professional-qualified/cdi-blueprint-for-professional-roles). The [CDI commissioning guide \(https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/careers-guidance-schools-and-colleges\)](https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/resources/careers-guidance-schools-and-colleges) provides practical information and advice to help schools and colleges commission appropriate independent careers guidance for learners.

Schools and colleges should make sure that careers advisers (internal and external) providing personal guidance to learners are trained to the appropriate level. The main level 6 and 7 qualifications for careers advisers are the level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development, the level 6 Higher Apprenticeship: Career Development Professional and the Qualification in Career Development (QCD) at level 7.

DfE recommends that schools and colleges view the [UK Register of Career Development Professionals \(https://www.thecdi.net/professional-register\)](https://www.thecdi.net/professional-register), held by the CDI, to search for an appropriately trained careers adviser who can deliver a particular service or activity, such as personal guidance. Registration shows that a careers adviser is qualified to at least level 6 in a career development subject, abides by the CDI Code of Ethics and undertakes regular professional development. Schools should encourage and facilitate continuous professional development for careers advisers so that they can remain up to date.

Other qualifications may be available from universities that meet the [requirements to be on the UK Register of Career Development Professionals \(https://www.thecdi.net/professional-register/requirements-of-the-professional-register/registered-career-development-professional-qualification-list\)](https://www.thecdi.net/professional-register/requirements-of-the-professional-register/registered-career-development-professional-qualification-list). The careers leader qualifications do not qualify an individual to offer personal guidance unless they also hold a separate careers guidance qualification. The CDI

monitors adherence to these criteria. The CDI also manages the [Careers in Careers jobs board](https://jobs.thecdi.net/) (<https://jobs.thecdi.net/>) for the career development sector.

As an indicator of quality, schools and colleges can commission personal guidance from both self-employed careers advisers and organisations which hold the [matrix Standard](https://matrixstandard.com/) (<https://matrixstandard.com/>), including organisations who deliver the National Careers Service. All holders of the matrix Standard have undergone an independent assessment of their delivery of advice and support services on careers, training and work and undergo annual continuous improvement checks to ensure they continue to meet the matrix Standard.

Personal guidance meetings

Personal guidance meetings work best when the school or college can contextualise them with information about the learners' academic performance and careers education. Schools and colleges should integrate personal guidance within the careers programme and wider pastoral and learner support system so that other staff, such as form tutors or their equivalent, can consider learners' ongoing career planning as part of their overall personal, social and educational development.

To raise awareness of the personal guidance offer, institutions should communicate what support is available, and how to access it, to learners, parents and carers and other staff. Information should be available on the institution's website.

Personal guidance meetings should be scheduled in line with the needs of learners, so that they are available to support decision-making at key transition points. Schools should ensure that all pupils have a personal guidance meeting by age 16. School sixth forms, colleges and ITPs should ensure a further meeting for every young person by age of 18.

The careers leader and senior leaders should work closely with the careers adviser, enabling them to contribute to the overall development and evaluation of the careers programme. Careers leaders should support careers advisers to integrate their work with other individuals, teams and departments, including the SENCO, subject teachers and pastoral teams.

Careers advisers working with learners with SEND should draw on the outcome and aspirations in the EHCP, where they have one, to focus the discussion. Using a person-centred approach like [vocational profiling](https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/vocational-profile) (<https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/vocational-profile>) can contribute to these discussions. Similarly, when working with looked after children or care leavers, their personal education plan or pathway plan should be used to help focus the discussion. It is good practice for these learners to have a named adviser who can build a relationship with them and better understand their individual needs.

