



Providing an effective careers programme

A guide for secondary school governing boards

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Introduction

Supporting young people to make informed choices about their future is an important responsibility for schools and their governing boards.

This guide explains how governing boards in all types of secondary school meet their statutory duties relating to careers guidance, by supporting and challenging their schools and trusts to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks – the recognised blueprint for high-quality careers guidance. It has been produced in collaboration with [The Careers and Enterprise Company \(CEC\)](#), which exists to facilitate a world-class careers education and help every young person find their best next step.

Why careers guidance matters

The governance duty is, above all, to drive relentless ambition for the young people served by our school system. This means ensuring that they not only achieve good academic outcomes, but that they are equipped for life beyond school and enter the workplace with the skills they need to thrive.

Aside from being a statutory responsibility, providing good careers guidance is a fundamental aspect of the board's service to its community(ies). It helps strengthen our economy and improve society by driving down youth unemployment and driving up social mobility.

This is why governing boards should collaborate with executive leaders, Careers Leaders and with the wider network of Hubs and Enterprise Advisers, to embed careers within the curriculum and ensure every young person is supported to move on to positive destinations.

Terminology

- We use '**student**' throughout this guidance to refer to pupils, learners, and young people in education.
- The term '**careers guidance**' describes the full range of interventions that support young people to make choices and develop their careers.
- The term '**parent**' is used to refer to parents, carers and guardians and other influencers you may wish to involve.

Advice for academy committees

If you serve on an academy committee (local governing body) within a multi academy trust (MAT), refer to the [scheme of delegation](#) for your trust or seek advice from your governance professional (clerk to the board) to understand the expectations for careers guidance in your context. Your responsibilities are likely to vary from that of a maintained school governing body or trust board.

1. Statutory responsibilities

Department for Education (DfE) [statutory guidance](#) sets out the following requirements that apply to all secondary schools.

Requirement	Schools must:
Encounters with education and training providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide at least six encounters with approved apprenticeships and technical education providers for all students. Comply with parameters around the duration, frequency and content of these encounters (as set out in guidance).
Policy statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish a policy statement on the school website setting out arrangements for provider access. Make sure that the policy is followed. <p>The CEC has created an example careers education, information and guidance policy, which includes an example careers programme, provider access policy, and key stakeholder responsibilities.</p>
Careers programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a careers programme which meets Gatsby Benchmarks – the benchmarks are non-statutory but provide a framework to help meet requirements. Appoint a named person to the role of Careers Leader to lead their careers programme. Publish details of their careers programme on the school website (available for students, parents and carers).

What Ofsted look for

When evaluating the impact of the education provided by a school, Ofsted inspectors consider whether students are ready for the next stage of education, training or employment by the time they leave school. This includes the effectiveness of careers guidance in enabling students to make progress. Sources of evidence used by inspectors include nationally published information about students’ destinations when they leave the school.

In 2023, Ofsted carried out an [independent review of careers guidance](#) in schools and further education and skills providers. The review findings encourage leaders to “think strategically about careers and to support employer engagement that is authentic, contextualised and personalised”, also highlighting that “parents can be an important partner in supporting informed decision-making but are under-used.”

The CEC has developed [parental engagement CPD modules](#) to support Careers Leaders and an [Ofsted guide](#) for governors and trustees with key questions to support strategic careers planning.

The role of careers leader

Careers Leaders are responsible for:

- the delivery of their school's careers programme
- having a clear overview of the programme
- ensuring that the school meets the Gatsby benchmarks
- reporting regularly to the governing board (often fulfilled by working closely with the careers governor/trustee)

Schools can structure the Careers Leader role in different ways. For example, one individual might be the Careers Leader for all the schools in a MAT. Ideally the Careers Leader should be a senior leader. If not, there should be a clear reporting line to the senior leadership team.

Access [CEC's guide](#) to learn more about the role of the Careers Leader.

2. The role of governing boards

The role of governing boards is explained on page 13 of the statutory guidance. Specifically, they are required to ensure that:

- There is a plan which sets out the delivery of the careers programme in the school/trust and how impact will be measured.
- The plan is developed in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks and informed by statutory guidance.
- Careers guidance offered to students includes information on the range of education or training options, including apprenticeships and technical education routes with equity.
- The careers guidance offered is impartial – it shows no bias or favouritism towards a particular institution, education or work option.
- Those giving careers guidance promote the best interests of the students to whom it is given.

To fulfil their role and meet the expectations, boards will need to:

- Review the plan for providing careers guidance as a regular agenda item and use the opportunity to discuss delivery and impact with the senior executive and Careers Leader.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the plan using reports and information gained from a number of sources. This is explained further in [section 4](#) of this guide.

Support from The Careers and Enterprise Company

- The CEC has a free [online learning module](#) to help governors and trustees learn about high quality careers education.
- There is also an area of [The CEC's resource directory](#) dedicated to governors and trustees which includes further guidance and support.
- [Register for The CEC Governors Newsletter](#) to stay up to date.

Appointing a careers governor or trustee

The statutory guidance states that there should be a member of the governing board who takes a strategic interest in careers, encourages employer engagement and who may work closely with the [Careers Leader](#). This role does not remove the board's collective responsibility; the appointed person should ensure the board is kept up to date on progress being made.

Use our [role description for careers link governors and trustees](#) to learn about how this important role contributes to the work of the board.

Using the Gatsby benchmarks

The Gatsby Benchmarks describe all the elements of good careers guidance in schools. Testing in pilots showed that with good leadership and a clear sense of purpose, the Benchmarks are achievable by each and every school.

The eight benchmarks are:

1. a stable careers programme
2. learning from career and labour market information
3. addressing the needs of each pupil
4. linking curriculum learning to careers
5. encounters with employers and employees
6. experiences of workplaces
7. encounters with further and higher education
8. personal guidance

[Refer to section 4 of this guide](#) to see how the benchmarks can support and prompt your discussions with school leaders and Careers Leaders.

Although there are eight individual benchmarks, these should also be considered as a whole, reflecting the school/trust vision for careers education and personal development. There is cross-over between benchmarks; blending them leads to an embedded, whole school approach. The [Gatsby good career guidance handbook](#) provides further advice on creating a careers guidance programme that is framed by the Benchmarks.

3. Building an effective careers programme

The following elements should feature within your strategy for building an effective careers programme. Use these to support discussions with your school leaders and Careers Leader:

Allocating resources

Schools do not receive additional funding for their careers programme; it must be paid for out of their own budget. However, there are ways of providing cost effective and sustainable careers guidance. Ask your Careers Leader about:

- How the school or trust makes use of the range of the high quality careers [tools and resources](#) and [training programmes](#) that are freely available through The CEC.
- Opportunities to collaborate with other schools and colleges to spread the cost of careers activities while maintaining quality.

Working with Enterprise Advisers

Enterprise Advisers (EA) play a crucial role in enhancing careers provision within schools and colleges across England. Recruited through the Careers and Enterprise Company's (CEC) network of [Careers Hubs](#), these dedicated business volunteers leverage their expertise, networks, and business acumen to provide robust support to Careers Leaders and Education Leaders to:

- raise the quality of careers guidance
- expand employer connections and increase high quality experiences for young people
- enhance labour market understanding in education
- amplify apprenticeships, technical pathways, and vocational routes
- focus on interventions for economically disadvantaged young people
- help align careers provision to local economic needs

The CEC provide a range of resources that explore [how Enterprise Advisers can add value](#).

Collaborating with other schools

[Careers Hubs](#), each with a dedicated Hub Lead, bring together a group of secondary schools and colleges with partners in the business, public, education and voluntary sectors. The number of schools in Careers Hubs is growing and evidence shows that they are making the fastest progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks.

4. Monitoring the careers programme

Routine monitoring allows the governing board to evaluate the progress that is being made towards achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks. Refer to the indicators and information sources outlined in the following table during your discussions with school/trust leaders and your Careers Leader.

Benchmark 1: A stable careers programme (which meets the requirements of the 7 other benchmarks)

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>A programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by stakeholders (students, parents, employers and training providers)</p> <p>Access benchmark 1 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers education and guidance is featured within the school/trust development plan • The school (or schools in the trust) have achieved or are working towards the national quality in careers standard • Strategy and delivery are informed by stakeholder feedback • The Careers Leader works collaboratively with others (the SENCO for example) to embed a whole school approach • Effective CPD and support has been provided to the Careers Leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of the careers programme published on the school/trust website • Reports and presentations from the Careers Leader • Key points arising from stakeholder feedback

Benchmark 2: Learning from career and labour market information (LMI), such as role, pay and vacancy trends

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>Students and their parents are provided with good quality, accessible information about future study options and labour market opportunities, as well as support from an informed adviser to make best use of available information</p> <p>Access benchmark 2 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources like the National Careers Service are being used to support students and parents to make informed choices • LMI is being used to help students identify careers with good prospects • Organisations like Local Enterprise Partnerships have been engaged to help interpret local LMI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting and case studies that show the range of information used to inform students and parents of different courses, job roles and progression pathways • Examples (case studies) of careers advisers providing information, advice and guidance to students on a one-to-one basis and in groups

Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each pupil

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>Tailoring advice and support to the needs of each student and embedding equality and diversity throughout the careers programme</p> <p>Access benchmark 3 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination data is used to shape the careers programme and advice given • Activities are tailored to meet the needs of students, resulting in positive destinations • Skills audit books are used to inform student self-evaluation and the choices they make • The SENCO, pastoral leader and Careers Leader work together to address each students' needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on the education, training and employment destinations of students over the last three years • Examples (case studies) of careers activities tailored to meet the needs of particular students (such as those with SEND and or in receipt of the Pupil Premium) • Skills audit books completed by students • Feedback from students and parents

Benchmark 4: Linking curriculum learning to careers

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>All teachers linking curriculum learning with careers. STEM subject teachers should highlight the relevance of STEM subjects for a wide range of future career paths</p> <p>Access benchmark 4 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum content for each subject area is linked to the world of work throughout the academic year • Strong working relationships exist between the school and employers • The governing board utilises insight and experiences that governors/trustees bring from the world of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of employer engagement with the curriculum and careers strategy • Feedback from staff on the impact of careers CPD on the curriculum • Presentations from STEM subject teachers on relationships between school and industry • Feedback from employers on the impact of their involvement

Benchmark 5: Encounters with employers and employees

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>Every student having multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace through a range of enrichment activities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students in all year groups and their parents are engaged in careers enrichment activities • Wide ranging enrichment activities that are not restricted to providing generic careers advice • Collaboration with partners such as CEC that boosts employer engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting of student and parent attendance and engagement with enrichment activities, such as careers fairs and visiting speakers • Examples (case studies) of personalised interactions between students, employers and employees

<p>Access benchmark 5 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student voice is used to identify areas of interest and target engagement • Opportunities to learn from employers are linked to the curriculum (not one-off events) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student surveys • Feedback from parents and employers
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Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>Every student having first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities and to expand their networks</p> <p>Access benchmark 6 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of workplace experiences are offered • Workplace experiences have clearly defined outcomes attached to them: what students need to take away from meeting a range of people from workplaces • Feedback from students and employers is captured to measure impact and share success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and reporting of student workplace experiences • Feedback from students on the value of their workplace experiences • Case studies • Evaluation of workplace experiences

Benchmark 7: Encounters with further and higher education

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>All students understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and vocational routes and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace</p> <p>Access benchmark 7 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are introduced to careers concepts and options at an early stage • All students are aware of all options available to them, and parents understand these routes • Parents and carers are involved in careers education so that they can support their children • Strong engagement with providers is underpinned by regular, two-way communication and visits • The needs of all students are clearly being considered, such as through SEND-focused careers events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The calendar of activities offered to students about careers and subjects, such as studying at a university or a college • The learning outcomes for visits from further and higher education providers • Case studies of how students, regardless of their needs, are prepared for meaningful encounters • Destination data: explore trends and patterns which may indicate the range of options understood and taken up by students

Benchmark 8: Personal guidance

Is characterised by	Indicators of success	Governing board information sources
<p>Providing all students with opportunities for guidance interviews with a Careers Adviser, whenever significant study or career choices are being made</p> <p>Access benchmark 8 resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every student has had a one-to-one guidance interview before they leave in year 11 • Quality assurance monitors the guidance given to students and ensures that those giving it are suitably trained • Efforts have been made to ensure the advice students receive is impartial such as through adviser-swapping with other schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports and presentations from the Careers Leader • The method used to quality assure the guidance given to students • Case studies • Feedback from students and parents

Your monitoring routine may also involve:

- a termly summary of progress against priorities included in the senior executive leader report
- a termly update report to the board from the Careers Leader on the implementation of the careers programme
- a termly update report from the careers governor/trustee outlining their activity and work undertaken with the Careers Leader
- focused [monitoring visits to school](#) (reviewing progress on specific Gatsby Benchmarks for example) that may also provide opportunities to talk to teachers, students and parents
- attendance at careers events and opportunities to see the careers programme in action and meet with stakeholders such as employers, providers, Enterprise Advisers, and Hub representatives

Underpinning these activities is the working relationship and routine engagement between the careers governor/trustee and the Careers Leader. We recommend that they meet at least once a term to discuss how the careers programme is being planned to raise its profile and embed it into the curriculum. This may lead to a joint termly update report to the governing board.

Measuring impact

The indicators of success referred to in the monitoring table will help governing boards to evaluate the extent to which careers guidance in the school or trust meets Gatsby Benchmarks and improves outcomes for students.

Boards should use the following to measure impact:

- Data on the education, training and employment destinations of students.
- Insight gained through engagement with the school/trust, students, parents/carers, employers and providers.

You may wish to use The CEC [Impact evaluation toolkit](#) in collaboration with your Careers Leader to support this work.

Self-assessment

[Compass](#) is an online evaluation tool that schools can use to self-assess their careers programme and track improvements. Compass data is confidential to the school or college concerned, but they may choose to share the data with governors/trustees, parents, colleagues, and Ofsted. All eligible schools can now upgrade to Compass+ which offers the facility to collect student-level data.

NGA is the national membership association for governors, trustees and governance professionals in England's state schools and trusts.

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