

Careers statutory guidance: At a glance checklist and guide for school leaders

This document provides an overview of the roles and responsibilities of schools outlined in the publication [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Statutory guidance for schools and guidance for further education colleges, sixth form colleges and independent training providers \(June 2026\)](#).

ELEMENT OF CAREERS LEADERSHIP	✓	REQUIREMENT	SUPPORT SIGNPOSTING
Careers leadership		Our school has a trained Careers Leader.	Careers Leader training
Careers programme		We have a written careers programme that is structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks and underpinned by progressive learning outcomes. Our careers programme is published on the school website. Careers is featured in the staff CPD programme. We are aware that DfE has published a new core enrichment offer framework is being developed to ensure young people have access to a wide range of enriching activities that broaden their horizons, stretch their abilities and develop wider skills. help schools, colleges and specialist providers design and deliver a core enrichment offer, beyond the statutory curriculum, that is of benefit to all young people. The guidance includes benchmarks, resources and case studies to support schools and colleges to build their enrichment offer more strategically and intentionally and improve access to a variety of opportunities for young people. Our Careers Advisers are qualified to an appropriate level.	Benchmark 1 suggested universal career related learning outcomes Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision (Careers Learning Journeys) The Careers & Enterprise Academy Schools and colleges can also use the CEC's Provider Directory to identify local and national organisations that can support the delivery of encounters with employers and employees across the Gatsby Benchmarks. Careers Guidance in Schools and Colleges: A Guide to Best Practice and Commissioning Independent Career Guidance Services
Strategic planning		We have a current strategic careers plan that is aligned to wider school priorities and regularly monitored by the SLT and governing body.	Understanding how to create a strategic careers plan
Governance		Careers is a regular agenda item at governance meetings. We have a careers link governor.	Careers Education: A Guide for secondary school governors Governors: Introduction to careers module via The Careers & Enterprise Academy

Quality assurance	We have undertaken a Careers Impact internal leadership review. The SLT considers results from the Future Skills Questionnaire. The progress and impact of careers provision are regularly reported to the SLT or governing body. We have undertaken a curriculum audit.	Careers Impact internal leadership review Future Skills Questionnaire: The Careers & Enterprise Company Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision Curriculum Audit Tool
Learner records	We keep records at an individual learner level of involvement in the careers programme.	Compass+ Help Centre: The Careers & Enterprise Company
Destinations data	Learner destinations data (including learner aspirations, intended destinations, sustained and longer-term destinations) is regularly analysed by the SLT.	Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision
Supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET in their transition to post 16	We have a process (e.g. OnTrack+) identify and support young people at risk of disengagement and at risk during the transition to post-16 education or training.	OnTrack+ Practice Guide
Addressing the needs of all learners and careers guidance for learners with SEND	Careers is embedded in our work to tackle disadvantage. We identify learners who may require responsive, targeted, or personalised support.	Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your careers provision: Educator Guide Ontrack+ Practice Guide Vocational profiles
Provider access legislation	We have a current provider access policy in place to ensure that ALL learners have an opportunity to learn about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships. The provider access policy statement is published on the website.	Understanding how to embed progressive encounters with further and higher education resource and checklist Provider Directory tool
Work experience	We are reforming our work experience provision so that all learners benefit from high-quality opportunities that support their development, learning and progression.	Modern Work Experience Understanding how to embed progressive work experiences resource and checklist
Parent and carer engagement	Parent and carer engagement is embedded throughout our careers programme. We consult with parents to ensure our careers provision meets their needs.	Resources and support from the CEC, including Parental Engagement in Careers CPD Your Child's Future - a questionnaire for parents and carers Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision (Careers Learning Journeys)

Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Statutory guidance for schools

Careers Leader training and support

Every institution **should** appoint an appropriately trained Careers Leader to develop and direct the careers programme, in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks. The Careers Leader **should** have the skills and commitment and support from their Senior Leadership Team (SLT), including protected time and sufficient budget to carry out the role effectively.

The Department for Education (DfE) strongly recommends that schools engage with the [DfE's funded, flexible training offer](#), which is designed to support the growth of Careers Leaders at all levels. This includes training for new Careers Leaders, top-up training for experienced Careers Leaders, and senior leadership training focused on high-quality careers provision as a vehicle for wider school improvement.

All secondary schools **should** take the opportunity to join their local Careers Hub.

Reflection:

Does your school have a trained Careers Leader?

Does your school actively engage with the regional Careers Hub?

Signpost:

Access [fully funded flexible Careers Leader Training](#).

Find out more about Careers Hubs [here](#).

Careers programme (Careers Learning Journeys)

Every school **should** have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance, structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, that is known and understood by learners, parents and carers, staff, those in governance roles, employers and other agencies.

- Every school **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.

DfE expects headteachers, principals and governing boards to support their careers team, especially their Careers Leader, and to invest in personal guidance provided by a qualified Careers Adviser. This will allow the continued delivery of high-quality, progressive careers programmes that support all learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve and thrive.

Personal guidance is a critical element of a 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. Schools **should** make sure that Careers Advisers (internal and external) providing personal guidance to learners are trained to the appropriate level.

Reflection:

Do you have a written-down careers programme that is structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks and underpinned by progressive learning outcomes?

Is the personal guidance offer delivered by Careers Advisers 'trained to the appropriate level'?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#).

Access the resource [Benchmark 1 Suggested Universal Career Related Learning Outcomes](#).

Signpost all staff to the free training offer (including modules for Careers Leaders at all levels, special educational needs coordinators and teaching staff) via [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#).

COMING SOON: A parent and carer questionnaire to support the evaluation of your careers programme.

Access the [UK Register of Career Development Professionals](#), held by the Career Development Institute, to search for an appropriately trained Careers Adviser who can deliver a particular service or activity, such as personal guidance.

Sharing your careers programme

Schools **must** publish online the following information about their careers programme:

- The name and contact details of the Careers Leader.
- A summary of the careers programme, including details of how learners, parents, teaching staff and employers can access information about it.
- 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 current statutory guidance, in particular demonstrating how they are working towards meeting all eight Gatsby Benchmarks. Schools **should** also incorporate the policy statement on provider access that they **must** publish under section 42B of the Education Act 1997.

Reflection:

Is your careers programme published on the school website?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#).

Strategic careers plan

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

An effective Careers Leader **should** work with senior leaders to ensure the careers programme is informed by a strategic careers plan aligned to school priorities.

Aligning to whole institution priorities.

The careers programme should be aligned with the institution's vision and priorities. 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

Careers plans should be linked to the whole-school or college development plan, as this will help career guidance have the greatest impact on student outcomes. This might include alignment with parental engagement plans, progression policies and the enrichment offer.

DfE has published a new enrichment offer to help schools, colleges and specialist providers design and deliver a core enrichment offer, beyond the statutory curriculum, that is of benefit to all young people. The guidance includes benchmarks, resources and case studies to support schools and colleges to build their enrichment offer more strategically and intentionally and improve access to a variety of opportunities for young people.

Schools and colleges will be expected to provide:

- opportunities for civic engagement
- arts and culture
- activities in nature
- outdoors and adventure activities

- sport and physical activity
- the development of wider life skills and future skills

Reflection:

Is there a current strategic careers plan that is aligned to wider school priorities and regularly monitored by the SLT and governing body?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to create a strategic careers plan](#).

Governance

Every school **should** have a member of it's governing body who takes a strategic interest in careers education and guidance and encourages employer engagement.

The governing body **should** provide clear advice and guidance on which the school leader can base a strategic careers plan which meets the legal or contractual requirements of the school. The plan **should** be developed in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks and informed by the requirements and expectations set out in statutory guidance. This plan **should** show how the careers programme will be implemented and how its impact will be measured.

The governing body **must** make sure that independent careers guidance is provided to all learners throughout their secondary education

(11 to 18-year-olds), and learners aged up to 25 with an education, health and care plan, and that it:

- is represented in an impartial manner, showing no bias or favouritism towards a particular institution, education or work option.
- includes information on the range of education or training options, including apprenticeships and technical education routes.
- is guidance that the person giving it, considers will promote the best interests of the learners to whom it is given.

The governing body **must** also make sure that arrangements are in place to provide six encounters with a provider of technical education or apprenticeships for years 8 to 13 learners.

Reflection:

Is careers a regular agenda item at governance meetings?

Is there a careers link governor?

Signpost:

Share the resource [Careers Education: A Guide for secondary school governors](#).

Signpost all governors to the free online module Governors: Introduction to careers via [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#).

Quality assurance, continuous improvement and impact evaluation

From September 2025, DfE expects all institutions to use the [updated Gatsby Benchmarks](#).

DfE strongly recommends that schools use the [Future Skills Questionnaire \(FSQ\)](#) as an evaluation tool for their careers programmes.

[Your Child's Future](#) is an exciting new feature designed to help education settings understand parents' and carers' knowledge, confidence and awareness of careers

Institutions **should** ensure the quality assurance and continuous improvement of their careers programmes. DfE strongly recommends the use of the [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 improvement. Schools can undertake a free Careers Impact internal leadership review via Compass+.

DfE also strongly recommends that all schools work towards the national [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 on learners' career-related learning. Schools can gain formal accreditation of their careers programme through the Quality in Careers Standard, which is the national quality award for all aspects of careers education and guidance.

In schools, Ofsted inspects careers guidance primarily when evaluating and grading the personal development and wellbeing of pupils.

The inspection considers:

- how well the school provides impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance that supports pupils' readiness to transition successfully to the next phase of education, training or employment.
- how far the school is making progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks.
- for post-16 provision, how well careers provision is embedded across 16 to 19 study programmes and supports pupils to make informed decisions about their next steps.

Ofsted considers the extent to which schools:

- ensure pupils receive impartial advice and guidance from a qualified careers adviser.
- provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to engage with employers, colleges, training providers, universities and to experience workplaces.
- support pupils to develop the knowledge of relevant trends in local and national employment needed to inform choices about next steps.

Ofsted's school inspection [toolkit](#) and further education and skills inspection toolkit provide further detail on how inspectors gather and evaluate evidence, the CEC's [Education inspection framework](#) Guide for Careers Leaders and Education Leaders highlights key changes in Ofsted's approach, reassures leaders on what is expected and emphasises the importance of meaningful implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks for both schools and colleges.

Reflection:

Have you undertaken a Careers Impact internal leadership review?

Do you make effective use of FSQ insights and data within quality assurance, continuous improvement and impact evaluation?

Have the progress and impact of your careers provision been recently reported to the SLT or governing body?

Are you ready to confidently articulate the intent, delivery, and impact of your careers provision? [The Ofsted Education Inspection Guide](#) provides a structured framework and series of questions for consideration.

Signpost:

Get started with your [Careers Impact internal leadership review](#) via Compass+.

Access the resource [Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision](#).

Systematic record-keeping

Schools **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 learners who change schools during the secondary phase, information about participation and the advice given previously **should** be integrated into a learner'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.

Reflection:

Are you keeping records at an individual learner level of involvement in the careers programme?

Signpost:

[Compass+](#) users can keep systematic records of learners' participation in career activities, and advice given.

Destinations data

Schools should support all pupils to find a suitable post-16 destination before they leave. Schools and post-16 providers should work together to aid the transition from compulsory schooling to further education, including by sharing careers education records and giving pupils an opportunity to meet college staff prior to enrolment. Digital tools, including the Education Record app, can support learners to access their exam results and further information to help them enrol in and transition to their chosen post-16 destination. Sustained and longer-term destinations data continues to be valuable and **should** inform the evaluation of careers programmes and help schools to build and maintain alumni networks.

Schools **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 **should** use sustained and longer-term destinations data as part of their evaluation process, and use alumni to support their careers programme.

DfE recommends that schools support local authorities with Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) work to drive improvements to prevent students from becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) and support effective post-16 transitions. This can support better join-up to share destinations data for reporting on the Gatsby Benchmarks, via Compass+, and RONI processes.

Reflection:

Has learner destinations data (including learner aspirations, intended destinations, sustained and longer-term destinations) been recently analysed by the SLT?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision](#).

Access aggregated sustained and longer-term destinations data at the following web pages: [Longer term destinations](#) and [16-18 destination measures](#).

Compass+ users can access [this Help Centre article](#) for support with making effective use of the 'Interests and Destinations' section of Compass+.

Meeting the needs of all learners and careers guidance for learners with SEND

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 special educational needs and disabilities, and those who are absent.

Institutions **should** provide any additional support that may be needed to help young people navigate these barriers to career progress.

Careers guidance for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) should be delivered through a person-centred and graduated approach in line with the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

Chapter 8 of the SEND Code of Practice sets out that careers guidance is a core part of preparing children and young people with SEND for adulthood.

For young people with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans, local authorities must ensure that the EHC plan review at Year 9, and every review thereafter, includes a focus on preparing for adulthood. For those without EHC plans, transition support is provided through SEN support and impartial careers guidance. In all cases, appropriate advice is sought and information shared to ensure continuity of support and smooth transition into post-16 pathways and employment.

Reflection:

Do you have a clear understanding of which learners may require extra support to prevent them from becoming NEET?

Is careers embedded in your work to tackle disadvantage?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your careers provision: Educator Guide](#).

[Access the OnTrack+ Practice Guide](#)

Supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET in their transition to post 16

DfE recommends that schools and specialist settings use OnTrack+, a new data feature developed by CEC in Compass+, to support their role in identifying and supporting young people at risk during the transition to post-16 education or training. Following a successful pilot, initial evidence and feedback show how earlier identification, from year 7, is already enabling schools to act before disengagement becomes permanent. To get started with OnTrack+, schools are encouraged to undertake a Careers Impact internal leadership review to support a whole-school approach and to read the [OnTrack+ guidance](#).

DfE recommend that schools work with local authorities on Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) to improve NEET prevention and support effective post-16 transition. Use of OnTrack+ equips a school to understand and respond to emerging risk from year 7 onwards, enabling better collaboration and handover as local authority RONI activity increases in later years. Sharing destinations data can help with reporting on the Gatsby Benchmarks, via Compass+, and RONI processes.

Provider access legislation

Institutions **must** explain technical and academic pathways without any bias 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. All young people **must** be able to explore all future pathways equitably. The focus is now on using information to inform decision-making.

Schools **must** comply with the provider access legislation and ensure that every learner, whatever their ambitions, has at least six opportunities to meet providers of technical education or apprenticeships during Years 8 to 13.

Every school **must** publish a policy statement setting out their arrangements for provider access and ensure that it is followed.

- Two encounters for learners during the 'first key phase' (Year 8 or 9) that are mandatory for all learners to attend, to take place any time during Year 8 or between 1 September and 28 February during Year 9.
- Two encounters for learners during the 'second key phase' (Year 10 or 11) that are mandatory for all learners to attend, to take place any time during Year 10 or between 1 September and 28 February during Year 11.
- Two encounters for learners during the 'third key phase' (Year 12 or 13) that are mandatory for the school to put on but optional for learners to attend, to take place any time during Year 12 or between 1 September and 28 February during Year 13.

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

Reflection:

Is there a current provider access policy in place to ensure that ALL learners have an opportunity to learn about approved technical qualifications or apprenticeships?

Do all encounters with further and higher education providers meet the updated Gatsby definition of 'meaningful' for Benchmark 7?

Signpost:

Do we know if the information and support we provide is meeting parent need?

Access the resource and checklist [Understanding how to embed progressive encounters with further and higher education](#).

Access the [Provider Directory](#) tool to find organisations in your area that can deliver encounters with further and higher education.

Read more about the [Provider Access Legislation here](#).

[Your Child's Future](#) is an exciting new feature designed to help education settings understand parents' and carers' knowledge, confidence and awareness of careers.

Work experience

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. All institutions should have adopted the strengthened updated benchmark and ensure that every pupil has multiple experiences of workplaces by the age of 16 and at least one further such experience by age 18.

From September 2026, schools should be reforming their work experience programmes so that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities, development and learning that work experience provides.

Further support is available via local careers hubs to help schools build meaningful experiences of workplaces into the curriculum, delivered under Benchmark 6.

This **should** include consideration of how to build the meaningful experiences of workplaces, delivered under Benchmark 6, into a structured work experience programme.

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

- By the age of 16, every learner **should** have had meaningful experiences of workplaces.
- By the age of 18, every learner **should** have had at least one further meaningful experience.

Reflection:

How are you reforming your work experience provision so that all learners benefit from high-quality opportunities that support their development, learning and progression?

Are work experiences underpinned by relevant learning outcomes that build on prior learning and experiences?

Signpost:

Read the [Modern Work Experience](#) section of the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) website to find out more about modern work experience.

Access the resource and checklist [Understanding how to embed progressive employer encounters and work experiences](#).

Undertake a [Careers Impact internal leadership review](#) with a particular focus on Theme 5.

Parent and carer engagement

Every institution **should** have a clear approach to engaging parents and carers embedded throughout the careers programme. There **should** be a focus not only on sharing information, but on supporting parents and carers to make the best use of it and to get involved in any opportunities offered.

Reflection:

Is parent and carer engagement embedded throughout your careers programme?

Do we know if the information and support we provide is meeting parent need?

Signpost:

Access [resources](#) and support from the CEC, including [Parental Engagement in Careers CPD \[continuing professional development\]](#).

Access the resource [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#).

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