

Careers guidance and access for education and training providers

Updated May 2025

This summary is from the perspective of John Ambrose, Strategic Director of Complete-Careers LLP, as well as what he considers to be the main paragraphs for Careers Leaders to focus on as priorities. Please read in conjunction with the audit table highlighting the 'musts' 'expectations' and 'strongly recommends'. The table and the rest of this document is designed to help you locate the most significant features in the 50 pages of statutory guidance. We recommend you read the document in full when you are able to here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools> to gain a full understanding of what you 'should' be doing in your careers provision.

Statutory guidance on careers for schools and colleges in England was updated on 8th May 2025. The guidance is robust and well written, presented more of a narrative of practice referenced with evidence as well as support to guide the focus of education leaders and careers leaders.

Kery changes in May 25 updated guidance:

- The guidance is now for Independent Training Providers (ITPs), as well as schools and colleges
- There are no changes to the careers legislative framework (musts) since the last guidance. The update instead reflects the government's policy priorities
- There is a new '**vision**' for careers guidance to improve careers advice in schools and colleges and to guarantee 2 weeks worth of work experience for every young person. Both set out ambitious targets for schools, colleges and ITPs, see Gatsby Benchmark Changes section and benchmark changes 6 and 8 for more detail.
- Adopting changes from the Gatsby foundation 2024 report (see summary here: <https://complete-careers.com/good-career-guidance-the-next-10-years/>) to include the 5 themes and modification to the detail in the 8 benchmarks.

All 'institutions' (schools, colleges and ITPs) are strongly encouraged to begin planning as soon as possible ... before implementing from September 2025. (Page 8). The ambitious plans for the work experience guarantee though are presented more as an ambition and as preparation, ready for further details being set in 'due course'. Does this mean further updated statutory guidance next year perhaps? (see Gatsby Benchmark Changes section under benchmark 6 for full details).

Significance changes, yet not new to May 2025 statutory guidance:

- 'Careers Guidance' continues to be the term to define all 8 Gatsby benchmarks (page 4)
- The guidance has a dedicated section for the governing bodies placing responsibility with them as well as leaders (pages 14-17)

- The Baker Clause (access to education and training providers) sets out expectations for what schools, colleges and ITPs must do and the information they must provide on their website.
- The guidance features a 'Ladder of support and intervention' which acts as a four-stage procedure for schools deemed not to be complying with the legislation (page 47).

The statutory guidance uses the terms "must" and "should" throughout. They use the term "must" when the person in question is 'legally required to do something' and "should" when the 'advice set out should be followed unless there is good reason not to.' (Page 4).

Vision, System and Support

The statutory guidance describes the vision for careers guidance *'to improve careers advice in schools and colleges and to guarantee 2 weeks' worth of work experience for every young person.'* (Page 5).

The Gatsby benchmarks continue to be central to the statutory guidance with references to the average benchmark score for schools and colleges (5.8). It states that schools and colleges are part of a career's hub, have a qualified Careers Leader and engage in the digital resources their score average is 6.3 benchmarks. The highest correlation recorded is where schools and colleges have achieved the Quality in Careers Standard (6.5 benchmarks). The language surrounding the benchmarks is however quite confusing and perhaps contradictory in places. You may remember back in 2018 when all schools and colleges were expected to **meet** the benchmarks by 2020? 2020 then came and went, but the national average was below 3 of the 8 benchmarks. The DfE then shifted the language around the benchmarks with the expectation moving from 'meet' to '**use**'. This has been much more helpful and has allowed schools and colleges to provide more accurate recordings. On page 7 of the new guidance it states ***'DfE expected all institutions to use the updates benchmarks'*** (similar to previous guidance). On page 10 however it describes how *'with the right level of support, the benchmarks represent a demanding but achievable standard that the DfE expects all schools and colleges to meet.'*

Role of Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) and National Careers Service (NCS)

After outlining their 'vision' DfE introduce CEC and NCS as funded support to:

CEC – *'support schools and colleges to develop careers programmes in line with their careers requirements and the Gatsby Benchmarks'*

NCS – *'to provide free, impartial career information, advice, and guidance to support students, parents, and teachers through a website, web chat service and telephone helpline'.* (Page 5)

The CEC's role is outlined further on page 9. The guidance states how the CEC will oversee the national careers system in England delivering improvements in careers provision, in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks. The report references the role of Careers Hubs, Enterprise Coordinators, CEC funded Career Leader training, cornerstone employers and enterprise advisers, as well as the following resources:

- Compass: *'measuring careers provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks'* (page 10)
- Compass Plus: *'learner level data that can personalise career interventions'* (page 10)

- Future Skills Questionnaire: *'learner self-completion questionnaire'* page 10. *'DfE strongly recommends that schools and colleges use FSQ as an evaluation tool for their careers programmes'* (page 10).
- Career Impact Internal Leadership Review: *'provides shared language of how careers can be positioned as a driver for school, special school and college improvement'* (page 10). *'We strongly recommend the use of the Career Impact System'* (page 13).

The role of NCS is similar to how it was described in the previous statutory guidance. This is outlined as an interim arrangement as *'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.'* (page 11). The role of the NCS is described as *'supplements support available to learners through their school or college, particularly outside of term time'* (page 11).

Ofsted

The guidance refers to the new inspection system from Autumn 2025 with a renewed Education Inspection Framework, changes to inspection methodology and a new Ofsted report card. It then refers more to the current Education Inspection Framework for reference *'in the meantime'* (page 12).

Quality Assurance and Quality Standards

As above (in CEC section) the DfE **'strongly recommends'** the use of the **Career Impact System**. Page 13 shares how the reviews involve *'sharing practice and progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks, identify what works well and areas for improvement and explores how careers can enable wider improvement'*.

'DfE strongly recommends that all schools and colleges work towards the national **Quality in Careers Standard** to support the development of their careers programme' (page 14). It describes the role of the Quality in Careers Standard as *'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'*. (Page 14)

*'We **require colleges** to hold the **Matrix Standard** if they are in receipt of funding from the DfE adult skills budget'*. (page 14).

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'. (Page 15)

The role of the Governing Body

'The governing body is expected/should (open to interpretation given the heading in the section!) 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 statutory guidance, show how the careers programme will be implemented and measured'. (page 14)

'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.' (Page 15)

The main career legislation falls under the governing body section, please see below word for word:

'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'. (page 15)*

Careers Leaders

*'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, commitment and support from their senior leadership team. **They should be given protected time and sufficient budget to carry out the role effectively.**' (page 18). 'DfE strongly recommends that schools, colleges, and ITPs engage with DfE's funded, flexible career training offer'... (page 19)*

Career Learning and Learning Outcomes

The guidance states how *'Career learning can also be provided as a subject in its own right, alongside embedding careers into subject disciplines.'* (page 33). The role of the CDI framework is described on page 34 to *'set out the learning outcomes to gain career management skills that help you manage your career throughout life'.*

Targeted Support

Pages 27-30 of the guidance provides further instructions of targeted support, care and monitoring for learners with SEND or who are vulnerable or disadvantaged. This includes advice targeted at SEND schools, as well as free schools and alternative education providers.

'Where learners have an EHCP their annual reviews must include a focus on preparation for adulthood' (page 30).

School and colleges website requirements

*'Maintained schools **must** and academies and colleges should publish information about their careers programme online including:*

- *The name and contact details of the Careers Leader*
- *A summary of the careers programme*
- *Details on how students, parents, teachers and employers may access information about the careers programme*
- *How the institution measures and assesses the careers programme's impact on learners.*
- *The date by which the institution will review information.'* (page 21)

Data to the local authority

New in this statutory guidance, **the DfE have 'removed the expectation** the destinations of young people **left up to 3 years** before to allow resources to be focused on helping current learners secure and sustain a destination.'

 (Page 27). This is welcomed as it has caused issues for many schools.

DfE also **'recommends** that schools work with **local authorities on Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI)** to improve NEET prevention and support effective post-16 transition.'

 (page 27).

*'Schools and colleges have a have **a statutory duty** to provide information to local authority services so that they can carry out relevant duties and track and maintain contact with these young people'* (page 31).

Benchmark Developments

From the November 2024 Gatsby report we have the stability in retaining the wording of the 8 benchmarks. The report presents revisions to the sub-criteria and introduces 5 key themes which have been adopted into the statutory guidance. The five themes are:

- **Careers at the heart of education and leadership** (whole school approach, connectivity with strategic vision/plans and distinct responsibilities for leadership, careers leaders, advisers and governors).
- **Inclusion and impact for each and every young person** (tailoring programmes to needs, considering vulnerability, disadvantage and SEND).
- **Meaningful and varied encounters** (expanded definition of 'meaningful' in GBs 5, 6 & 7, providing greater variety and the opportunities to review and reflect from encounters).
- Focus on the use of **information and data** (data collection has been refocused to include aspirations and intended destinations).
- Engagement of **parents and carers** (embed parent and carer engagement into planning and provide them with information to support their children).

The section below sets out the key criteria changes amongst the Gatsby Benchmarks and how they have been adopted into the statutory guidance:

Gatsby Benchmark 1:

Explicit backing of SLT is expanded to include governors and headteacher, and career leader should be identified and appropriately trained (pages 17 and 18).

New measure: *'The careers programme should be tailored to the needs of pupils, sequenced appropriately, **underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to the whole-school development plan**. It should also **set out how parents and carers will be engaged throughout**'* (page 17).

careers advisers referenced as a source to evaluate the effectiveness of the career programme (alongside learners, parents, teachers and employers – as previous). Page 18.

Gatsby benchmark 2

'During each key stage all pupils should access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their own decisions on study options or next steps' (p.29) This was previously only by the age of 14 and didn't include 'next steps'.

DfE also reference the role of the new 'Skills for Careers website:

www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk

Gatsby benchmark 3

Systematic records – this was previously for individual advice given to each pupil, but now covers 'the participation of pupils in all aspects of their career programme' (p.24)

New measure – following on from the above there is a criterion for the information to be shared when pupils change school during the secondary phase (p.24). Further guidance is provided for colleges and ITPs to integrate records with those given at previous stages of the learner's education (including their secondary school) (page 24).

The guidance on tracking for three years after leaving has gone and is replaced with recording aspirations, intended and immediate destinations. In addition, schools are expected to *'use sustained and longer-term data as part of their evaluation process and use alumni to support their careers programme.'*

Gatsby benchmark 4

Now expected in every year and in every subject while also highlighting the knowledge and skills pupils develop and not just career routes. (Page 31)

New measure: *'Careers should form part of the school's ongoing staff development programme for teachers and all staff who support pupils'*. (p.31)

Gatsby benchmark 6

Benchmark 6 has a much stronger emphasis, but suggests this is developmental from September 2025 until further guidance is provided in due course.

See table (appendix 1) of ‘meaningful’ definitions.

Under the ‘Implementing 2 weeks’ worth of work experience’ heading the guidance states the following:

‘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 year 10 and 11’ (page 39)*

Under the ‘Work experience placement(s) in years 10 and 11’ heading the guidance states how it ‘**expects** 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.’ (page 40)

Remember however this seems to be aspirational with promise of further details on the work experience guarantee expected in ‘due course’.

Gatsby benchmark 8

As before but language changed from ‘interviews’ to ‘meetings’ and now states ‘*meetings should be scheduled in the careers programme to meet the needs of pupils*’ (page 48).

New measure: ‘*Information about personal guidance support and how to access it should be communicated to pupils and parents and carers, including through the school website.*’ (P.48)

Amended measure: ‘*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.*’ (page 48)

The DfE clarify the role of the CDI’s UK register of Career Development Professionals to support institutions to find suitable advisers. It also makes explicitly clear that ‘**The careers leader qualifications do not qualify an individual to offer personal guidance unless they also hold a separate careers guidance qualification.**’ (page 49).

Definitions of meaningful (appendix 1)

Benchmark 5	Benchmark 6	Benchmark 7
-have a clear purpose, which is shared with the employer and the young person -be underpinned by learning outcomes that are appropriate to the needs of the young person -have opportunities for two-way interactions between the young person and the employer - be followed by time for the young person to reflect on the insights, knowledge or skills gained through the encounter Page 36	- 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	-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 the 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