The Quality in Careers Standard

THE GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL STANDARD FOR SCHOOLS, SPECIAL SCHOOLS, ALTERNATIVE PROVISION AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGES

Fully incorporating the updated Gatsby Benchmarks for 'Good Career Guidance'

To be used in all Quality in Careers assessments for external national accreditation

from October 2026

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The Guide to the Quality in Careers Standard 'National Assessment and Accreditation Criteria'

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1. Background information

1.1. This Guide sets out in detail for secondary schools, special schools, alternative provision and sixth form colleges all matters relating to:

- the key principles of the Quality in Careers Standard (Section 2)
- the Quality in Careers Standard national assessment criteria incorporating the updated Gatsby Benchmarks (Section 3 and Appendix)
- the assessment and accreditation process (Section 4), and
- information and advice for schools[1] (Section 5).

1.2. The Quality in Careers Standard is owned by the Quality in Careers Consortium. It is the single national quality award that recognises excellence in careers guidance for learners[2]. It provides independent, external and expert assessment of the careers guidance provided by learning providers. The Standard has been designed to ensure that learning providers not only fulfil their statutory obligations but are inspired to continuously improve their careers provision[3] based on the best evidence from research and professional practice.

1.3. The Quality in Careers Consortium Board has licensed a number of Awarding Bodies across the country to undertake Quality in Careers assessments. Their assessors make professional judgements on the impact of the learning provider's careers guidance on career-related outcomes for learners. They also review and report on the evidence of the organisational factors contributing to the quality of careers guidance including:

- vision and leadership
- staff development
- curriculum design and development
- careers information
- careers learning and teaching
- personal careers guidance and support
- monitoring, review and evaluation
- engagement with users and beneficiaries of careers guidance, e.g. learners, parents/carers, employers and other education/training providers.

Assessor reports give detailed comments on the strengths of the learning provider's careers guidance as well as recommendations for further improvement.

[1] Unless otherwise stated, schools refers to secondary schools, special schools, alternative provision and sixth form colleges.
[2] Learners refers both to pupils (up to age 16) and students (16-18) unless otherwise stated.
[3] The term "careers provision" refers to all the elements of careers guidance including careers education, careers information, careers advice and personal careers guidance.

1.4. A key aspect of the assessment process is listening to learners – hearing from learners to verify that the learning provider actively involves them in the design, delivery and evaluation of the careers programme. The Standard will ensure that learning providers present sufficient evidence that their careers guidance has had a positive impact on career-related learning outcomes for learners enabling them to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage their next steps and prepare for their future pathways in learning, leisure and work. The *Assessment Guide* for Awarding Bodies and their assessors has been published on the Quality in Careers website so that learning providers can also see what assessors will expect to find in order to award the Standard.

1.5. The National Standard incorporates the Statutory Guidance for schools and the guidance for further education colleges and sixth form colleges on careers guidance and access for education and training providers published by the Department for Education (DfE, June 2026). The DfE continues to ***strongly recommend*** **that all secondary schools and all colleges work towards the single national Quality in Careers Standard** to support the development of their careers programmes. Currently, just over one-third of state secondary schools and sixth form colleges already hold or are actively working towards the Standard. Award Holders are listed publicly on the National Register on our website.

1.6. The June 2026 edition of the DfE guidance states:

> *"We strongly recommend that all schools and colleges work towards the national **Quality in Careers Standard** 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** which involves the major professional associations of school and college leaders alongside the Career Development Institute (CDI). The Standard is fully aligned with the updated Gatsby Benchmarks.*
> *The Standard is externally assessed by one of the **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 showing that schools and colleges achieving the Standard have higher Gatsby Benchmark performance**."*

1.7. The assessment criteria for the Quality in Careers Standard were fully revised in May 2025 to incorporate the updated Gatsby Benchmarks[7]. The DfE expects all learning providers to use the updated Gatsby Benchmarks to improve their careers programmes in line with their legal requirements to provide independent careers guidance to all 11-to-18-year-olds and students aged up to 25 with an education, health and care plan. The national criteria for the Quality in Careers Standard are grouped under the same eight Benchmark headings.

Good Career Guidance: The Next Ten Years (p.43) outlines the role of the Quality in Careers Standard in promoting good practice:

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

The Quality in Careers Consortium endorses the following recommendation in the *Informational Interviews Report* (Appendix 3) compiled by Gatsby's academic partner, the International Centre for Guidance Studies:

"*Ensure the benchmarks are connected to the wider national careers ecosystem to establish a more effective and comprehensive career guidance and support structure in England. The Gatsby Benchmarks, the Career Development Institute's (CDI) Career Development Framework, and the Quality in Careers Standard are all important components of a comprehensive career development system. Each of these frameworks has a unique focus and purpose, but they can be effectively linked to create a robust and holistic approach to career guidance and development.*"

1.8. Completion of the *Compass+* self-assessment tool from The Careers & Enterprise Company is currently required evidence to be submitted by schools as part of the Quality in Careers assessment process (n.b. *Compass+* is currently only available to schools, special schools, sixth forms and PRUs in the state sector). The Quality in Careers Consortium strongly encourages learning providers to upgrade to *Compass+* (the Careers Leader dashboard) and use its new features to manage, track and report on their careers guidance. OnTrack+ is the newest feature and helps educators identify emerging support needs for learners. These tools protect the data of learners and schools while the anonymized and aggregated data, combined with other data, enable The Careers & Enterprise Company to produce its annual report on careers education[8] which helps to drive improvement in the career development sector.

[7] Further information about 'Good career guidance: The next ten years' can be found on the Gatsby Benchmarks website https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/

[8] *Careers Education in England 2024/25 Annual Report published March 2026 The* Careers & Enterprise Company https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/evidence-and- reports/careers-education-in-england-202425

1.9. The Careers & Enterprise Company also offers a wide range of local support to learning providers including Careers Hubs, which are partnerships between the Careers & Enterprise Company and Combined and Local Authorities, the Enterprise Adviser network, and Teacher Encounters alongside nationally available digital products and training to help drive continuous improvement in provision. This national offer includes Careers Leader training programmes, The Careers & Enterprise Academy for careers leadership development and the Resource Directory, plus tools such as the Future Skills (career readiness) Questionnaire and the Careers Impact internal leadership review, part of the '*Careers Impact System*' (see the endnote about the System in paragraph 5.3 of this Guide and The Careers Impact System and the Quality in Careers Standard - Quality in Careers. The Careers & Enterprise Company's approach to modern work experience outlines how a variety of experiences starting early, which connect education and young people with industry, can unlock the skills and opportunities of the future workforce. To drive improvement across the system, support is also provided to employers through Cornerstone Employer groups and the Employer Standards framework.

1.10. **The Quality in Careers Consortium also strongly encourages learning providers to use the '*Career Development Framework*' from the Career Development Institute (CDI**) to assist them in identifying age and developmentally appropriate career learning outcomes which will strengthen the impact of their careers guidance. The Framework and accompanying resources can be downloaded from the CDI website. The CDI also offers a wide range of support for learning providers including conferences, regional support, CPD activities and professional resources (such as Careers Leader training under contract to The Careers & Enterprise Company[9]), the Career Assured Quality Award for digital resources, the Community of Practice for Careers Leaders and the professional register for career development practitioners.

1.11. Under their statutory obligations, secondary schools must provide opportunities for a range of education and training providers to access all learners in years 8 to 13 to inform them about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships ("**provider access**"[10] under the so-called 'Baker Clause'). These pathways include apprenticeships (including foundation apprenticeships), technical routes (including T Levels, Occupational Certificates and Higher Technical Qualifications), vocational and applied routes (including V Levels, Foundation Certificates and other approved qualifications) and academic routes (including A Levels). The Ofsted education inspection framework and the Independent Schools Inspectorate framework (see 1.13 below) have both been updated to reinforce the requirements of this legislation. Careers guidance provision is one of the key areas that informs inspectors' overall judgements on Personal Development (see the box on page 7 below for the section from Ofsted's school inspection toolkit). Inspectors will also state if a school is not meeting its requirements in respect of careers provision when carrying out ungraded inspections.

[9] The full list of providers of careers leader training is available on The Careers & Enterprise Company website https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/careers-leader-training/

[10] See the DfE guidance issued June 2026 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers#what-the-governing-body-is-expected-to-do to fulfil the legal requirements and expectations of the DfE, including a model policy statement. See also Provider Access Legislation | The Careers and Enterprise Company

Personal Development and wellbeing: Careers education[11]

In gathering evidence about careers education, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- *leaders ensure that all secondary-age pupils are well prepared and supported to progress in education, employment or training, including continuing in education or training until at least their 18th birthday*
- *where relevant, there is an appropriate careers programme that meets the Gatsby Benchmarks and includes impartial advice and guidance from a qualified careers adviser, opportunities for workplace experiences, and engagement with employers, colleges, training providers and universities*
- *secondary-age pupils have an appropriate understanding of relevant trends in local and national employment and the implications of the choices they make in relation to these*
- *pupils with SEND develop independence, contribute to their community, make positive friendships and are supported to be as healthy as possible.*

1.12 The Careers and Enterprise Company offers an Education Inspection Framework for Careers Leaders and Education Leaders which highlights the key changes in Ofsted's approach to inspecting careers education. It aims to clarify recent changes, reassure leaders what is expected, and emphasizes the importance of meaningful implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

[11] Ofsted State-funded school inspection toolkit (to be used from 7th September 2026)

1.13 **Independent Schools** working towards the Quality in Careers Standard are advised that the Independent Schools Inspectorate also inspect elements of careers guidance.

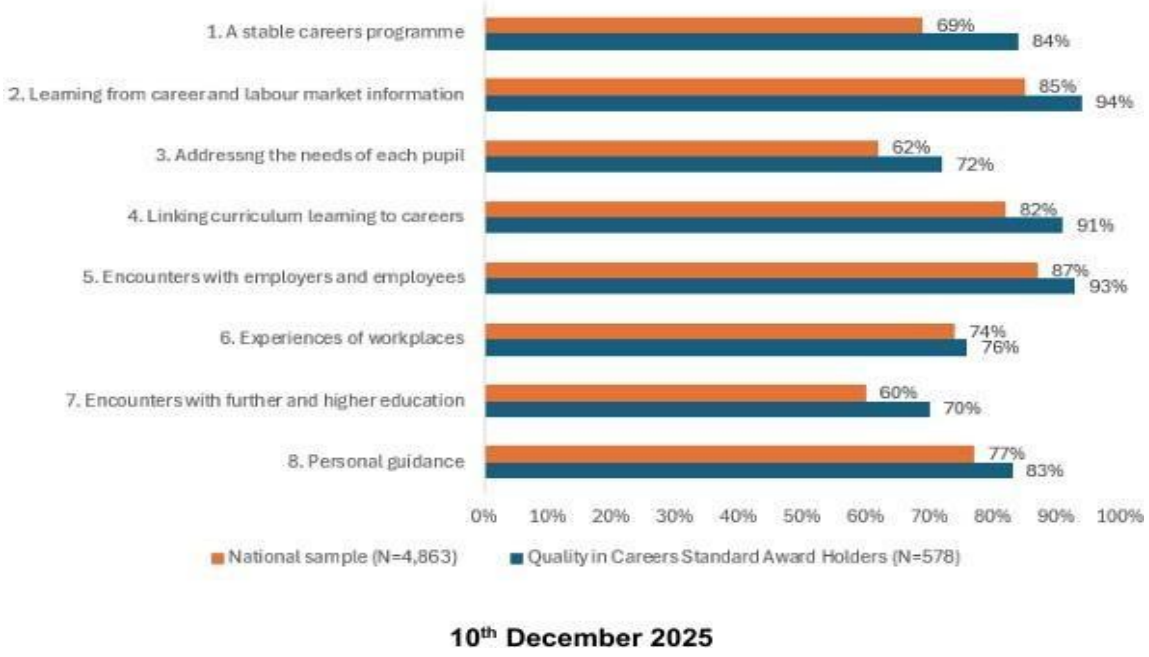
> Section 4: Pupils' social and economic wellbeing, and contribution to society of the ISI's inspection framework includes the following on page 17, section 78:
>
> "Leadership must ensure that the school's curriculum policy is implemented effectively through appropriate plans and schemes of work so that pupils experience human, social and economic education which:
> • reflects the school's aims and ethos
> • encourages respect for other people, particularly those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation)
> • actively promotes fundamental British values
> • develops pupils' social and cultural knowledge and understanding
> • gives pupils of secondary age (11+) access to accurate, up-to-date, impartial careers guidance so that they are able to make informed choices about a broad range of careers options, and which helps them to fulfil their potential".

1.14 Each year, the Consortium Board provides The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) with data from the National Register of learning providers successfully accredited and holding the Quality in Careers Standard. The CEC undertakes a review of the *Compass+* results for all schools and colleges nationally, and the results of holders of the Quality in Careers Standard are compared with the national average. Consistently, the analysis confirms that schools and colleges holding the Standard achieve the highest Compass+ scores alongside those which are members of Careers Hubs. The analysis undertaken by the CEC in November 2025 confirmed that **education institutions accredited under the Quality in Careers Standard achieved an average of 6.6 Gatsby Benchmarks in 2024/25.** This is benchmarks higher than the previous year. The average number of benchmarks achieved by all state-funded schools and colleges in England is 6.0 benchmarks[12] (See box page 9 below).

[12] Quality in Careers AWARD HOLDERS achieve highest Gatsby Benchmark scores (December 2025 analysis) - Quality in Careers

The 2025 CEC report includes this detailed breakdown of the comparative benchmark scores for Quality in Careers Standard "Award Holders" compared with the national average for each of the eight benchmarks:

Table 3: Proportion of schools and colleges achieving each Gatsby Benchmark in 2024/25



10th December 2025

2. Key principles

The Quality in Careers Standard is based on these key principles for learners, learning providers and Awarding Bodies:

2.1 Learners

- Careers guidance that is age and developmentally appropriate enables all learners to make the progress they are capable of in determining and managing their learning, leisure and working lives. By developing personal agency, learners can become autonomous, self-guiding individuals who are discerning users of careers information, advice and guidance. Learners in control of their own lives are more enterprising, hopeful, optimistic, adaptable and resilient. High-quality careers guidance enables learning providers to address the needs of every learner more effectively.
- Careers guidance that upholds the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child empowers learners to express their views, feelings and wishes about the careers guidance needs and to have their views considered and taken seriously.
- Careers guidance that is underpinned by the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals enables learners to aspire to rewarding careers based on personal wellbeing, access to lifelong learning, access to decent work, gender equality, social justice and sustainable living and working.

2.2 Learning Providers

- Careers guidance that is strategically managed and led enables learning providers to continuously develop their overall careers programmes while harnessing the potential of careers guidance to contribute to organisational improvement.
- Careers guidance that is focused on internally led continuous improvement enhances quality more effectively than careers guidance that is focused on meeting external demands for compliance and regulation. Awarding Bodies offer different approaches to gaining the Standard which enables learning providers to choose an Awarding Body which best suits their way of working.
- Careers guidance that is the shared endeavour of all staff – and is embedded in the core values of the learning provider – enables learners' needs to be met more effectively while enriching the professional learning and experience of staff.
- Careers guidance that is co-constructed with users and beneficiaries' fosters improvement and innovation not only in the individual organisation but across the wider career development system. Users and beneficiaries include learners, parents and carers, employers, local and regional authorities, community agencies and linked learning organisations (e.g. in multi-academy trusts, local authorities and Careers Hubs).

2.3 Awarding Bodies

- A rigorous but straightforward assessment and accreditation process that makes manageable demands on the production of evidence by learning providers enables Awarding Bodies to motivate and inspire more organisations to achieve the Quality in Careers Standard.
- Awarding Bodies that strike the right balance between professional support and challenge – both before and after assessment – enable learning providers to achieve more from gaining the Quality in Careers Standard.
- Expert, external and independent assessment by Awarding Bodies helps learning providers to understand quality in careers guidance provision and to make rapid improvement in their overall careers programmes.

3. The Quality in Careers Standard national criteria

3.1 The national Quality in Careers Standard is available to all state and independent secondary schools, special schools[13], further education and sixth-form colleges and independent training providers (ITPs). The Quality in Careers Standard website includes **case studies** for every sector and the Consortium's **virtual event** includes video testimonies from schools and colleges from every sector.

3.2 There are extra factors to bear in mind when a **special school** considers seeking accreditation through the Standard. These apply equally when special schools view the *Compass* tool and the Gatsby Benchmarks. The commentaries in this section include additional notes to assist special schools in working towards the Standard. **A number of case studies on the website feature special schools and a special school is included in the video testimonies on the virtual event.**

3.3 **A note about primary schools**: The Quality in Careers Consortium is also committed to supporting the development of careers guidance in primary schools to enable children to develop their career knowledge, skills and confidence from an early age. The Consortium has developed a scheme to provide "national endorsement" of primary school careers education quality awards. The Careers & Enterprise Company offers a Primary Careers Hub platform.

3.4 To achieve the national Quality in Careers Standard, learning providers will be required to supply sufficient evidence to show how their careers guidance addresses the national assessment and accreditation criteria set out below.

[13] Alternative provision includes Pupil Referral Units, Home and Hospital tuition services.

3.5 **The national criteria have been agreed with the DfE** and are fully aligned with the updated Gatsby Benchmarks. They comply with the DfE's latest (2026) guidance on the statutory duties of secondary schools and colleges and the DfE's expectation that all learning providers will use the updated Gatsby Benchmarks as a framework for developing their overall careers provision from September 2025.

3.6 The national criteria fully incorporate the performance indicators for each Benchmark with additional quality criteria covering career-related learning outcomes for learners that have been identified from research and practice.

3.7 The Quality in Careers national assessment criteria are described in detail below:

- They are organised under the same headings as the Gatsby Benchmarks as this should be helpful to schools.
- The updated Gatsby Benchmark and their associated indicators are reproduced in the Appendix for ease of reference.
- To achieve the Quality in Careers Standard learning providers must provide evidence of how their careers programmes have clear career-related learning outcomes for learners. The evidence submitted must include an up-to-date Compass+ report.

1: A stable careers programme

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA **Awarding Bodies will externally assess a school's arrangements for:**		
	Criteria	Commentary
1.1	Ensuring that the governing body provides clear strategic advice and challenge to enable the senior leadership team to develop and implement a high-quality careers programme that takes full account of current statutory duties and is linked to the whole school development plan.	The DfE expects governing bodies to provide strategic advice on the development of careers guidance to the senior leadership team. Relevant extracts from the **minutes of full governors or committee meetings** would be appropriate evidence. An up-to-date **careers policy** is also important evidence. The requirement to link the development of the careers programme to the whole school development plan seeks to harness the contribution of the careers programme to the achievement of school priorities. An up-to-date **careers development plan** showing current priorities and where the careers programme will contribute to the development of the school is key evidence.

1.2	Securing effective day-to-day leadership, management, and delivery of the careers programme including giving full support to a named individual in the role of Careers Leader and ensuring that the programme is known and understood by all staff, learners, parents and carers, governors, employers and other agencies.	This criterion highlights the importance of the careers leader role, but also the need for all staff involved in the careers programme to show leadership in carrying out their roles. A strategic approach from SLT should be evidenced and the career development plan should be embedded in whole school curriculum planning. An **organisation chart** showing who does what in the careers programme is useful. The careers leader's **job profile** is also important evidence. An overview of the **curriculum time allocation** alongside a **budget analysis** of the cost of careers guidance can help schools understand the impact of investment levels on quality. It is useful for the **careers leader** to explain how they involve other partners such as Enterprise Co-coordinators/Careers Hub Leads in their programme and what the impact has been. For special schools and alternative provision, therapeutic and clinical staff may also be involved with supporting the careers programme. Other agencies may include social services and support workers.
1.3	Ensuring that all staff involved in the careers programme are knowledgeable, skilled and confident in their roles (*see also 8.1)*	A **staff development programme** is an important adjunct to the careers development plan. The aim should be to meet staff development needs with a reasonable timeframe. Effective staff development in schools combines formal activities (e.g. workshops, courses) with non-formal ones (e.g. team teaching, learning from the materials staff use with learners). Appropriate induction training and continuing professional learning and professional development opportunities are essential to build the confidence, commitment and competence of staff in preparing all learners for choices, decisions, and transitions. It is also useful for succession planning. Section 3 provides further criteria relating to tailoring the programme to meet the needs of individuals and groups, especially in the context of SEND and alternative provision.
1.4	Identifying sequenced and progressive career-related learning and development outcomes, appropriate to the needs of learners, which can be used to measure the impact of the careers programme (*see also 4.3)*	The Quality in Careers Standard focuses on the relationship between inputs, processes and outcomes in enhancing quality in careers guidance. **Entitlement statements** can be used to show intended learning outcomes from careers activities at each key stage. The CDI Career Development Framework is the most useful resource in this regard but can be supplemented by other relevant frameworks such as the Skills Builder framework of work skills. At the granular level, intended learning outcomes should be written for **schemes of work** and **lesson plans** so that the impact of learning sessions can be evaluated**.** Schools also need to consider the range of teaching and learning approaches that will help learners to achieve intended outcomes (See 4.3). For special schools and alternative provision career-related learning outcomes can also include learners' understanding of independent living and community, and the values of friendship as well as preparing for

		and finding employment and further education and learning. Schemes of work may be more individualised for learners and inclusion of Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCP) can support measurement of impact. The CDI Career Development Framework of learning outcomes is written in broad terms in order that they can be interpreted to suit the context of the careers programme. Appendix 7 gives examples of learning aims for KS3 & 4 and post 16, which can also be accessed by SEND schools and alternative provision.
1.5	Developing a communications strategy, including information about the careers programme and contact details, to build relations with parents and carers, employers and other opportunity providers and agencies	This criterion underlines the importance of effective communications with the users and beneficiaries of the school's careers programme. Good communications is the first step in proactively engaging stakeholders and partners in enhancing quality and contributing to the development of the careers programme. The **careers pages** on the school's website, **careers posts** on the school's social media and other **digital and print communications** (e.g. e-newsletters) are useful sources of evidence. Posting contact details for the Careers Leader and a statement of access for providers are statutory requirements. Special schools and alternative provision should have strong evidence of close working relationships with parents and carers because they are likely to be supporting their children with aspects of the careers programme. This can be used as evidence for this criterion.
1.6	Regularly monitoring, reviewing and evaluation of the careers programme focusing on its impact on learners' career-related outcomes – including seeking feedback from a wider range of stakeholders and partners such as parents/carers, alumni, the Enterprise Adviser Network, link schools, further and higher education, independent training providers, employers, careers guidance services and children's services	**Record keeping** (e.g. attendance and participation registers) enables careers leaders to identify issues (e.g. need for catch-up sessions for absentees), adjust the programme and monitor the impact. Impact can be analysed and presented in an **annual report to governors** to inform future plans. The use of **surveys** (e.g. involving methods such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups) should form part of a regular evaluation strategy. This involves prioritising what is to be evaluated in order to keep evaluations manageable and to secure a good return on investment (e.g. so that **evaluation reports** inform decision-making about the development of the careers programme). The evidence submitted must include an up-to-date **Compass+** report. The Careers & Enterprise Company's SEND Careers Health Checklist has a section which interprets the Benchmarks for a careers programme to support young people with highly complex needs and PMLD and can be used for review and evaluation. The **On Track+ Practice Guide** provides early insight into learners who may benefit from extra help. This digital tool is available for Compass+ users.
1.7	Evaluating the effectiveness of learners' participation in the planning, delivery and review of the	This is about encouraging the active involvement of learners in the design, delivery and evaluation of the careers programme. Harnessing the learner voice can be achieved in a variety of ways, e.g. by submitting items relating to the careers programme for discussion by the **School Council,** appointing **student careers**

	careers programme	**ambassadors** and carrying out **surveys**. Learner **presentations** and **peer assessment** contribute to the effectiveness of careers teaching and learning. For special schools this may also include feedback, perhaps in the form of surveys, from parents and carers.
1.8	Evaluating agreements and contracts for the provision of personal careers guidance to ensure that those services remain effective and are embedded in the school's overall careers programme	The performance of internally appointed career development practitioners can be managed through the school's **performance review system.** **Service or partnership agreement plans and reviews** are a useful mechanism for managing the work of external careers guidance providers and integrating their work with that of the school.
1.9	Evaluating the impact of the school's participation in collaborative networks on the quality of the careers programme	Collaborative engagement with key professional organisations and networks improves quality through the sharing of good practice and participation in innovative projects. Examples include: • School **membership of professional bodies**, e.g. the Career Development Institute, the PSHE Association • Participation in **MAT/consortium/ Careers Hub training events.** The impact of this engagement can be reported in the **annual report to governors**. The Careers & Enterprise Company has a community of practice for Careers Hub Leads and Enterprise Coordinators working to support special schools and SEND in mainstream schools. Some Careers Hubs have specific network meetings for SEND/AP careers leaders.
1.10	Enabling parents and carers to be co-partners with the school in supporting the career development of their children	School has a key role to play in informing parents and carers about careers and labour market information but also in building parental self-efficacy, i.e. enabling them to acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to support the career development of their children. Parents and carers are among the most significant influences on young people's career decisions and should be actively involved in planning, communication and evaluation of the careers programme. Presentations and reports from **parents' evenings** and the results of **surveys of parents** provide useful evidence. The Careers and Enterprise Company offers **Your Child's Future** which covers topics to strengthen parental and carer engagement with the school's careers programme - available to Compass+ users. The careers leader can explain to Quality in Careers assessors how the school engages hard-to-reach parents. **EHCP review meetings** demonstrate the role of parents and carers in supporting their child's transition and is evidence of best practice for this criterion.

1.11	Actively demonstrating a commitment to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion in careers guidance	Equality, diversity and inclusion principles apply across all eight sections of the Quality in Careers and Gatsby framework. Upholding relevant requirements and expectations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Sustainable Development goals related to children and young people, Equality, Duty and special needs legislation are key; so are efforts by the school to mitigate the effects of poverty and deprivation in their catchment area. Challenging subtle as well as overt forms of bullying, harassment and discrimination is particularly important for the damage they do to the confidence and career chances of the individuals affected. Professional reflective logs, impact assessments and evaluation reports are possible sources of evidence

2: Learning from career and labour market information

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:		
	Criteria	Commentary
2.1	Ensuring that all learners have access to impartial, up to date and user-friendly careers and labour market information about career pathways covering the full range of opportunities in education, training and employment relevant to their needs, and supporting them in its use	Signposting to national and local sources of careers information on the **careers pages** of the school's website or VLE is important. In addition, the school may have access to programmes that match learners' interests to occupations and generates relevant career and labour market information. **Lesson plans** provide useful evidence, e.g. of sessions on how to research careers information, how to spot misrepresentation and bias, and how to verify AI-generated careers information. Anonymized examples of reports of **careers meetings/discussions** should show how learners have used the careers information they researched in developing their career plans. **Digital careers badges** and **personal careers (e)portfolios,** where the school has introduced these, are powerful sources of evidence. Schools are also encouraged to maintain an active alumni network to support careers guidance. Alumni provide valuable insights into learning and work, locally and further afield. They may be able to provide access to opportunities (see Sections 5, 6 & 7). They can also provide inspiration by showing what previous learners have gone on to achieve. For special schools, career pathways may include a wider range of options including information on supported internships and placements, volunteering, employment preparation programmes as well as transitions to supported adult care options.

		Career and labour market information may be offered in accessible formats such as Braille or symbol language. Many SEND learners benefit from information presented through visual and audio channels and experiential activities. **Records of participation** in appropriate formats (e.g. personal portfolios) enable learners to recall what they have learnt and achieved; and can be used for self-advocacy, e.g. to tell interested parties what they like doing.
2.2	Engaging with parents and carers about how to access, understand and use career and labour market information to benefit their child's career development (see also 1.10)	Active engagement of parents and carers goes beyond just informing them. The aim is to develop parental capacity to be an effective partner with the school in enhancing the child's career development. The **annual careers programme** will show the dates of meetings and events for parents/carers, but the school should have a strategy for engaging with hard-to-reach parents/carers and report on progress (e.g. in the **annual report to governors**). The help for children may not only come from parents (or carers) but also come from other family members such as siblings and grandparents and others in their personal support network. For special schools, giving access to information for parents/carers will start early as involving them in discussions about labour market opportunities and pathways is key to a successful transition. Financial information, including benefit packages, support mechanisms and assistive technology support for different pathways should also be discussed with parents/carers as these may have an influence on the option chosen. This should be included in the school careers strategy, and the careers programme will show how it is delivered.
2.3	Preparing young people to become critically aware consumers of careers information in all its forms, including AI-generated information	**Lesson plans** and examples of **teaching resources** are a valuable way of showing how the school is teaching information handling skills through the careers programme and preparing learners to be discerning users of information, including AI generated, and able to spot misinformation, bias and out-of-date information. Best practice for special schools and alternative provision will be to introduce career and labour market information early in the careers programme as young people with SEND may develop socially, emotionally cognitively or physically at different times and support from appropriate staff including the careers adviser needs to be in place to help them to process this information.

3: Addressing the needs of each young person

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:		
	Criteria	Commentary
3.1	Actively challenging the barriers to personal career development and engagement in learning from causes such as low aspirations, absenteeism, misconceptions, stereotyping, and harassment; and building the capabilities of learners and those who support them to overcome them	Stereotyping and low aspirations are examples of the barriers to career development for individuals and groups. Other issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion with a potentially negative impact include the harmful effects of bullying, harassment and discrimination. Learners in special schools and alternative provision will face additional barriers, particularly misconceptions about their ability to work and learn in the adult world. The **careers policy,** relevant **guidelines for staff** (e.g. relating to equality, diversity and inclusion), other **relevant school policies** and **school rules** for learners should support a culture of career development for all. Evidence should show how the school upholds the public sector Equality Duty (2010) and other relevant requirements and expectations.
3.2	Ensuring that learners and their parents/carers consent to and have access to careers records that are created as part of the careers programme, including records of advice given to learners by teachers, tutors and careers advisers to support their career planning	A good **record keeping system** will assist learners with their career planning, but it is important to recognise that young people's career thinking can change quickly so 'labelling' individuals or constraining advice and support for individuals on the basis of old records and reports must be avoided. Records also enable careers leaders to keep track of the participation and engagement of individuals in the careers programme and when alternative provision is needed. Learners in special schools and alternative provision often have prolonged periods of time away from school. Keeping individual career records will flag up what career learning has been missed. This can be addressed through a tailored programme for the learner to catch up with missed careers activities and experiences.
3.3	Enabling learners to maintain records of their experiences and achievements and use these for a range of purposes including	**Lesson plans** and anonymized examples of **learners' work** (e.g. work experience reports, CVs, video presentations, portfolios of work) can provide useful evidence of the effectiveness of the careers programme. Best practice seen in special schools and alternative provision includes the creation of vocational profiles

	career planning and reflection and presenting themselves well to opportunity providers	which captures information about learner's aspirations, skills, interests and ability to work. This information can feed into EHCP reviews and create meaningful discussion about a learner's future career plans.
3.4	Analysing post-16 and post-18 student destinations data and using the results of the analysis to make improvements to the careers programme.	It is useful to track both short-term and long-term destination trends. A **report on the destinations of last year's leavers** is useful for evaluating the effectiveness of the careers programme and inspiring learners. An **analysis of long-term destination trends** can provide valuable insights into educational, training and employment markets and possible implications for the future development of the school's curriculum offer. Destinations data is useful for closing gaps in achievement. Schools should collect and use data on learners' aspirations, intended destinations, immediate destinations and longer-term destinations to inform personalised support and evaluation of the careers programme. Tracking student destinations enables schools to stay connected with alumni. For SEND learners it is especially encouraging to talk to their peers who are now in employment or further training/education. The DfE's commentary and expectations in relation to destinations data are set out in the DfE's latest (June 2026) Statutory Guidance. In respect of state schools, this should include the impact of Pupil Premium spending to support disadvantaged learners, where appropriate.
3.5	Ensuring that advice given is effective in meeting the needs of all learners	This criterion aims to focus attention on addressing the single and multiple needs of individuals and groups, e.g. potential under-achievers and high achievers, poor attenders, disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), young carers and looked after children. Anonymized examples of **case conferences** and **EHC plans** can illustrate the effectiveness of advice. Examples of the impact of **enrichment programmes** (including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities) for specific groups of learners are also particularly useful. Evidence can also be provided by Quality in Careers assessors **talking to staff.** The **On Track+ Practice Guide** provides early insight into learners who may benefit from extra help. This digital tool is available for Compass+ users.
3.6	Securing effective partnerships with relevant services and agencies that provide additional support for vulnerable and	**Notes of meetings** (with data protection in place) can provide evidence of how individual needs are being addressed. The duties of local authorities concerning young people's participation and the DfE's expectations on the co-

	disadvantaged learners	operation between schools and local authorities in respect of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people are fully explained in the June 2026 edition of the DfE's Statutory Guidance.
3.7	Sharing school data with the appropriate authorities and agencies, including monitoring the extent to which such data sharing agreements and processes benefit the learners concerned	A joined-up approach to addressing individual needs is the key to improving outcomes for individuals. This may be reported on in the **annual report to governors.** Evidence can also be provided by Quality in Careers assessors **talking to staff.** The DfE's commentary and expectations in relation to information sharing with local authorities are set out in the June 2026 Statutory Guidance.

4: Linking curriculum learning to careers

QUALITY IN CAREERS **NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA** **Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:**		
	Criteria	Commentary
4.1	Raising learners' awareness of the career management, employability and enterprise skills they are developing and the wide range of careers that can be accessed through the core and optional subjects and courses they are studying *(See also 1.4)*	Understanding of the careers skills learners are developing in and through subjects and courses can be evidenced in **options booklets, displays** in departments and around the school and **lesson plans.** Subject staff have a key part to play in informing learners about further learning in the subject and careers using the subject. They also need to be knowledgeable about the usefulness of subject combinations. Evidence can also be provided by Quality in Careers assessors **talking to staff.** **The Department for Education (DfE)** has produced non-statutory guidance **The Enrichment Framework for Schools and Colleges** to support the development of a high-quality enrichment offer that can complement the careers programme. Special schools often take an holistic approach to the teaching of all subjects including careers. Careers skills learnt should be evidenced through **whole school curriculum plans** as well as the careers programme so that their profile is not lost.

4.2	Embedding career-related learning in the curriculum for all learners including through discrete provision, cross-curricular provision in subjects and courses, and co-curricular activities	Curriculum management of careers programmes involves blending three types of provision (discrete, cross-curricular and co-curricular) in order to achieve a comprehensive, balanced, well-sequenced and progressive learning programme. The design of the programme will vary from school to school and needs to be documented in **schemes of work** developed in consultation with staff. For learners with special educational needs, the careers programme may also include a broader curriculum of independent living, travel training and social skills, often delivered by employers and volunteer mentors.
4.3	Implementing effective ways of teaching, learning and assessing career-related learning	The pedagogical approaches that are associated with motivating learners and facilitating effective learning in careers education include dialogic teaching, enquiry-based activities, experiential and experience-based learning and the use of reflective learning techniques (e.g. portfolio learning). Assessment for learning methods are particularly effective although assessment of learning leading to a qualification has a place as well for some learners. Useful evidence includes **lesson plans, evaluation reports** and **examples of learners' work.**

5: Encounters with employers and employees

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:		
	Criteria	Commentary
5.1	Securing meaningful encounters with employers and employees for every learner	Learning from visits and visitors, especially when these activities are underpinned by the approaches listed in 4.3 above, contributes to making encounters meaningful in the ways defined in the DfE's Statutory Guidance (June 2026). The Statutory Guidance states that every year from the age of 11 pupils should participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer. Evidence for this could come from the Careers Programme, student records and portfolios or projects carried out as part of curricular learning. The range of employers and employees should include the private and public sectors, third sector organisation and community organisations. Maintaining a **database of providers** and their participation will enable the school to monitor the range of industries and activities represented in the careers programme and whether or not they address learners' needs. **Registers of participation** and **examples of learners' work** will assist the school in evaluating effectiveness.

5.2	Ensuring that encounters with employers and employees are an integral part of a planned and progressive careers programme with effective preparation and follow-up	This criterion is about demonstrating that encounters are embedded in the careers programme, and the learning impact is maximised by ensuring sound preparation and follow-up. Short evaluation notes appended to **lesson plans** and/or **schemes of work** after they have been delivered to groups can record what went well and what the school could do differently or better next time. These encounters should be fully inclusive of SEND learners. The terms 'employer' and 'employee' should encompass all providers of meaningful and appropriate post-16 activities including supported internships, social enterprises (and other providers often funded by Local Authority Social Services) and children's resource centres and respite care facilities.
5.3	Enabling employers and employees to contribute effectively to the careers programme as active partners and stakeholders	The school can facilitate their contribution by working closely with their link governor for careers and Enterprise Adviser from the CEC as well as with individual local employers and employer liaison groups. **Notes of meetings** and summaries in the **annual report to governors** can furnish evidence of what has been achieved. Many special schools and alternative provision providers take the initiative and invite local employers and community organisations into their schools to demonstrate their learners' skills and abilities and discuss collaboration with their careers programme.

6: Experiences of workplaces

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:		
	Criteria	Commentary
6.1	Securing meaningful experiences of workplaces for every learner by the age of 16 and at least one further meaningful experience by the age of 18	Experiences of workplaces include work-based projects, work experience and work shadowing. Experiences may take place physically in workplaces and/or be facilitated online. The DfE Statutory Guidance (June 2026) sets out the government's expectation that every young person should benefit from two weeks' worth of work experience by the end of Key Stage 4. Schools should be able to demonstrate how they are developing and expanding their work experience offer in line with this ambition, including through a combination of placements, workplace experiences and employer engagement activities where appropriate. Registers of participation and examples of work completed by learners are particularly useful. Evaluation reports can show whether experiences were meaningful and what help was given to absentees who missed experiences that were arranged for them. Part-time jobs can count as a meaningful experience if the learner can show that they regard it as a learning experience and not just a way of earning money. The 2 weeks' worth of work experience should be additional to any volunteering or paid part-time work. School itself is a workplace. For some SEND learners it may be appropriate to provide internal placements which will be more sheltered and can be closely supervised. Learners with SEMH (social, emotional, mental health) issues may benefit from tailored individual employer engagement activities or a planned programme of graduated employer contact to build their confidence and employability skills.
6.2	Ensuring that experiences of workplaces are an integral part of a planned and progressive careers programme with effective preparation and follow-up	Schemes of work and lesson plans should show that experiences have planned learning outcomes and that learners were helped to internalise them. Learners should also have a chance to identify their own learning objectives and to learn from 'unintended' outcomes that result from experiences. It is important that stakeholders are well-informed as some will be providers of experience and others will be helping learners to reflect on and follow up their experiences. Planned preparation and de-briefing is key to successful work placements for all learners including SEND learners. This can be integrated into the careers programme.

		For SEND learners it is important to involve parents and carers in the preparation for experience of workplaces so that they can feel confident that their child will have a positive experience. The CEC has produced a variety of resources on Modern Work Experience including the equalex Framework.

7: Encounters with Further and Higher Education

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:		
	Criteria	Commentary
7.1	Ensuring that learners understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them, including academic, technical and vocational routes.	**Schemes of work** and **lesson plans** should show that experiences have planned learning outcomes related to learners' understanding of the full range of opportunities in further and higher education. It is important that stakeholders are well-informed as some will be providers of encounters and others will be helping learners to reflect on and follow up their encounters.
7.2	Securing meaningful encounters with providers of the full range of learning opportunities for learners by the age of 16, and at least two visits to higher education providers to meet staff and learners by the age of 18 for those who are considering this choice	This criterion is intended to ensure that learners are aware of the full range of options and pathways, especially at key decision points (e.g. in Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13). Evidence can be drawn from the published **programme of careers events, schemes of work** and anonymized **notes of guidance meetings** with individuals. Whereas encounters with universities will be appropriate for some SEND learners, they may not be appropriate for all. So that these encounters are fully inclusive of all SEND learners, these will include providers of meaningful and appropriate post-16 activities including: • supported internships, • social enterprises (and other providers often funded by Local Authority Social Services), • children's resource centres, and • respite care facilities.

8: Personal Guidance

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a school's arrangements for:		
	Criteria	Commentary
8.1	Ensuring that all learners have access to personal careers guidance from teachers, tutors and other relevant staff who have been trained and prepared for their roles (*see also 1.3)*	Confident, competent and committed staff who understand their roles can make a real difference to the effectiveness of the careers programme. The **staff development programme** and examples of **resources used in training** are particularly useful sources of evidence. **Tutorial programmes and other schemes of work** can show that advice and support is timely and appropriate. Evidence can also be provided by Quality in Careers assessors **talking to staff.**
8.2	Ensuring that all learners have equity of access to independent, impartial, and timely careers advice and guidance sources. For schools, this means ensuring that all learners have at least one appropriate meeting by the age of 16 and the opportunity of a further meeting by the age of 18	**Records of attendance** will help the school to monitor the take up of the school's personal careers guidance activities. The published **careers programme** should make clear the main periods when one-to-one and small group careers meetings are held as well as the availability of drop-in sessions (as appropriate). The Consortium Board expects Awarding Bodies to emphasize to schools that a meeting is a conversation with a purpose. The ground rules for guidance meetings (e.g. confidentiality, impartiality) should be explained to the learner beforehand and their consent obtained. The purpose should be negotiated, and learners should be given time to prepare. Careful attention to the setting and beginning of the meeting is important so that learners feel at ease. The structure of the meeting needs to be related to the time available and made clear to the learner. Typically, it will include clarification of the purpose of the meeting, discussion and exploration, decisions and plans related to what the learner needs to do next. Often prompts and additional resources are useful (e.g. a whiteboard, careers websites on a laptop, or an action planning proforma). For SEND learners, and particularly those with SEMH and autism, making sure that the careers adviser is a familiar face in their school community is key to successful support. Best practice would be for the careers adviser to be involved with careers activities and to be available for careers meetings throughout the Key

		Stages. Careers advisers should also be invited to and have an input into EHCP reviews. Careers adviser engagement with parents and carers is also vital so they can support a successful transition for the young person. **The CDI's recommended length of time for a meaningful guidance meeting that is in keeping with the requirement of Gatsby Benchmark 8 is at least 45 minutes.** **The Consortium Board endorses the CDI's recommendation and commends it to assessors, schools and colleges**. See also the CEC Paper on personal guidance.
8.3	Ensuring that all internally appointed careers staff - including internally appointed professionally qualified careers advisers - are trained to appropriate levels and can act with impartiality in the best interests of learners. Staff must subscribe to relevant codes of professional practice, and quality assurance mechanisms must be in place to ensure their professional practice is appropriately assessed by someone occupationally competent to do so	The Career Development Institute is the main professional body for career development practitioners in the UK. Careers leaders and other careers staff can join the CDI and access training, resources, updates and practitioner networks. Careers Hubs and MATS that employ strategic careers leads can also facilitate staff development. The expectation of the Quality in Careers Consortium is that the main careers adviser in a school should be fully qualified to at least Level 6 and be on the UK Register of Career Development Professionals. Registered professionals must adhere to the code of ethics and undertake 25 hours of CPD annually. The Consortium Board expects Awarding Bodies to stress to schools that all staff need to act with impartiality. Where the school appoints a careers adviser to its staff, Awarding Bodies must satisfy themselves that: • The adviser is qualified at a minimum of Level 6 • is on the UK Register of Career Development Professionals • complies with the Career Development Institute's code of ethics • and complies with the Career Development Institute's CPD requirements (i.e. at least 25 hours of recorded CPD p.a.)

8.4	Where externally provided careers advice and guidance is secured from professionally qualified careers advisers, ensuring that the organisation providing such services meets the agreed sector standard (i.e. the *matrix* Standard) and that account is taken of the professional standards and qualifications determined by the Career Development Institute.	The Career Development Institute is the main professional body for career development practitioners in the UK. The expectation of the Quality in Careers Consortium is that the main career adviser in a school should be fully qualified to at least Level 6 and be on the UK Register of Career Development Professionals. If the school buys in careers advisers from a careers guidance company, the **Service Level/Partnership Agreement** should include a provision for the assessment of the careers advisers' performance. Colleges and careers guidance companies are expected to hold (or be working towards achieving) the *matrix* Standard. There are growing numbers of sole traders/small partnerships which are becoming *matrix* Standard accredited; therefore, the Consortium Board advises Awarding Bodies to recommend that schools securing services from sole traders/small partnerships should encourage these to consider *matrix* accreditation and to contact the Awarding Body for the *matrix* Standard: The Consortium Board requires Awarding Bodies to ensure that sole trading careers advisers contracted to deliver careers services to schools fully meet the professional requirements set out in 8.3 above.

4. The assessment and accreditation process

4.1. The purpose of a Quality in Careers assessment is to recognise what the learning provider is doing well in its careers guidance provision and to support continuous quality improvement. It focuses on the impact of careers guidance on the career-related learning outcomes for learners and the effectiveness of the processes that contribute to that impact. This is why listening to learners – '*Learner Voice'* - is a critical part of the assessment.

4.2. The Quality in Careers assessment is also designed to be a positive learning experience for the learning provider, and the assessor will use the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with the learning provider's staff. The assessor will also adapt the approach to suit the circumstances and context of the learning provider.

4.3. Assessment enables learning providers to show learners, parents and carers, employers and other key partners that the careers programme has been independently assessed against quality criteria that exemplify the best practice in overall careers guidance provision.

4.4. Awarding Bodies are able to award the Standard for up to three years *(all Awarding Bodies do so, except the Complete Careers Awarding Body which awards the Standard for a two-year period)*. The main stages in the Quality in Careers assessment and accreditation process are:

4.4.1. Public commitment to work towards the Standard

Learning providers which make a public commitment to begin to work towards achieving the Quality in Careers Standard will receive a **"certificate of commitment"** from the Awarding Body, providing that:

i. The Governing Body (or equivalent) has made a public commitment on the learning provider's website to establish a robust and coherent approach to managing the quality of its careers guidance that is consistent with the Quality in Careers Standard key principles; and

ii. The learning provider has completed the *Compass+* self-assessment tool and has begun working towards meeting the Quality in Careers Standard national criteria incorporating the eight Gatsby Benchmarks.

They will also be authorised to use the words *"Committed to work towards meeting the Quality in Careers Standard incorporating the Gatsby Benchmarks"* on their materials (in accordance with the Consortium's ***Brand Guidelines***) until their external assessment takes place.

4.4.2 External assessment which leads to one of these outcomes:

Outcome 1: External assessment where the Standard is not awarded as the learning provider is assessed as making insufficient progress towards meeting the Standard

"*Making insufficient progress*" means that the inputs into the careers programme are inadequate and the management and delivery processes are not stable or developed enough for the assessor to conclude that the learning provider is yet making good progress towards fully meeting the Standard.

For the avoidance of doubt, if a learning provider is making insufficient progress on any single section of the eight elements comprising the national criteria, the assessor will conclude that the outcome is "M*aking insufficient progress*" and will identify the areas for development to address the shortcomings.

Outcome 2a: External assessment where the Standard is awarded using this citation in the assessment report–

"Congratulations on achieving the Quality In Careers Standard which fully incorporates the Gatsby Benchmarks. This is an excellent achievement and recognises the quality and breadth of your careers provision.
As you are "making good progress" towards meeting the Benchmarks and all of the accreditation criteria, as we comment upon below in the detail of your report, we will continue to review your progress with the Benchmarks, and the additional career-related learning outcomes for students which the national Standard requires, through our annual reviews with you."

The learning provider is awarded with the Standard being assessed as "*Making good progress*" providing that:

i. The learning provider has demonstrated a robust and coherent approach to managing the quality of its careers guidance provision that is consistent with the Quality in Careers Standard key principles; and

ii. The learning provider has completed the *Compass+* self-assessment tool, is already ''*Making good progress*'' in meeting the Quality in Careers Standard national criteria incorporating the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, and the Quality in Careers external assessor is confident that a clear plan is in place demonstrating that the learning provider will continue to work towards fully meet the national criteria in the future, maintaining a cycle of continuous improvement.

This will be supported with explicit evidence cited in the 'external assessment report,' including detailed assessments on progress towards meeting all national criteria including performance against each of the eight Benchmarks sections in the national criteria for the Standard, with action points for further development.

Learning providers which are assessed as "*Making good progress*" towards meeting all the national assessment criteria for the Quality in Careers Standard will receive an "accreditation certificate" from the Awarding Body with these words *"Congratulations on achieving the Quality in Careers Standard which fully incorporates the Gatsby Benchmarks."* They will be listed on the Quality in Careers website on the **National Register** of Award Holders.

They will also be authorised to use the Quality in Careers logo and the words *"Nationally assessed as achieving the Quality in Careers Standard, making good progress towards meeting all the accreditation criteria incorporating the Gatsby Benchmarks"* on their materials (in accordance with the Consortium's ***Brand Guidelines***.

Quality in Careers assessors may, at the first annual review of a learning provider assessed as "*Making good progress*", recommend to the Awarding Body that the certification should be reaccredited as "*Fully meeting all the accreditation criteria*" if the learning provider has fully met the outstanding criteria as identified in the original assessment. The Awarding Body may then reissue the Quality in Careers certification, but the full accreditation review timeframe would not be extended (e.g. if the learning provider was due for reassessment 3 years after the initial assessment, that timeframe would be unaltered).

Where an Awarding Body also carries out a second annual review (i.e. all Awarding Bodies except the Complete Careers Awarding Body which awards the Standard for a period of 24 months not 36 months), the Quality in Careers assessor will also concentrate upon what the learning provider needs to address ready for its reaccreditation. Complete Careers' assessors will address this in the first annual review.

Outcome 2b: External assessment where the Standard is awarded using this citation in the assessment report–

"Congratulations on achieving the Quality in Careers Standard which fully incorporates the Gatsby Benchmarks. This is an excellent achievement and recognises the quality and breadth of your careers provision.
As you are "fully meeting" the Benchmarks and all of the accreditation criteria, as we comment upon below in the detail of your report, we will continue to review your progress in maintaining meeting the Benchmarks, and the additional career-related learning outcomes for students which the national Standard requires, through our annual reviews with you."

The learning provider is awarded the Standard being assessed as "*Fully meeting*," providing that:

I. The learning provider has demonstrated a robust and coherent approach to managing the quality of its careers guidance provision that is consistent with the Quality in Careers Standard key principles; and

II. The learning provider has fully met all of the Quality in Careers Standard national criteria incorporating the eight Gatsby Benchmarks.

Learning Providers which are assessed and accredited as "*Fully meeting*" all the national assessment criteria for the Quality in Careers Standard will receive an "**accreditation certificate**" from the Awarding Body with these words *"Congratulations on achieving the Quality in Careers Standard which fully incorporates the Gatsby Benchmarks."* They will be listed on the Quality in Careers website on the **National Register** of Award Holders.

They will also be authorised to use the Quality in Careers logo and the words "*Nationally assessed as achieving the Quality in Careers Standard, fully meeting all the accreditation criteria incorporating the Gatsby Benchmarks"* on their materials (in accordance with the Consortium's **Brand Guidelines**) until their full accreditation is due for reassessment by their Awarding Body.

4.5. The Consortium has agreed with DfE that all Awarding Bodies are required, when a learning provider is assessed as "achieving the Standard", to use either of the citations shown above in Outcomes 2a and 2b, in the Assessment Report they provide to the school.

4.6. Awarding Bodies are also required to undertake an annual quality review with current holders of the Standard, to support continuous improvement and to alert holders to any developments relevant to their preparations for renewal of the Standard.

4.7. ***An added note about an Awarding Body offering additional recognition to learning providers****:*

The Quality in Careers Consortium recognises that some Awarding Bodies may additionally wish to offer exceptional recognition to celebrate schools, colleges or Independent Training Providers, which have repeatedly excelled for periods of time in their careers guidance provision.

Where an Awarding Body wishes to make such an additional 'award' to honour such long-standing outstanding provision it must be made clear that this additional recognition is ***not*** *part of the national arrangements for the Quality in Careers Standard.*

It is determined solely by the particular Awarding Body which must be explicit about what such additional exceptional recognition is for.

5. Information and advice for learning providers

5.1. All Awarding Bodies will advise learning providers directly on their particular evidence requirements. Below we offer advice on what learning providers should be ready to provide.

5.1.1 Before the assessment

Quality in Careers assessors will prepare for the assessment by analysing available evidence from a learning provider. This may include:

- The learning provider's previous Quality in Careers Standard assessment report (if applicable)
- The most recent inspection report from Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)
- The learning provider's destinations data
- Information about the learning provider's overall careers guidance policy as approved by the Governing Body (or equivalent), its careers programme on the learning provider's website and social media platforms
- A "provider access" policy statement - compliant with the legal duty set out in the June 2026 edition of the DfE's Statutory Guidance setting out the circumstances in which education and training providers will be given access to students to inform them about the range of technical education qualifications, supported internships and apprenticeships (the so-called 'Baker Clause') – "provider access".
- Outcomes from self-assessment using the *Compass+* tool - which the learning provider will be required to share with the assessor and supplement with qualitative evidence that activities and encounters meet the needs of diverse student populations and contribute to their career-related learning outcomes.
- Any experience of, or outcomes from, participating in the *'Careers Impact System'*.

The learning provider may offer additional evidence. The following list of suggested evidence is to help learning providers to identify what may be most relevant and is not intended to be prescriptive:

- contextual information about the learning provider, e.g. levels of socio-economic deprivation
- systems in place for managing the careers provision at senior leadership and Governing Body/Board level
- names of staff with key roles and responsibilities in careers guidance including the Careers Leader's job description

- evidence offered by local external partner organisations, e.g. careers guidance service providers, Careers Hub, Enterprise Adviser Network, Local Enterprise Partnership, Uni Connect Partnership.

5.1.2 During the assessment

Quality in Careers assessors will collect further evidence from the learning provider's staff and from '*Learner Voice'* relating to evidence of:

- career-related learning outcomes for learners from careers activities
- meaningful engagement of parents and carers
- meaningful engagement of employers and the wider community
- embedding these activities and encounters into the curriculum.

5.2. **Resources:** Learning providers may find the following sources of further information about quality in overall careers guidance provision useful:

- The Career Development Institute (CDI) - new 'Career Development Framework'
- The Careers & Enterprise Company Resource Directory
- Provider Access Legislation
- The Careers & Enterprise Company:
  - Gatsby Benchmarks updated toolkits Schools and Young people with SEND
  - CPD for Careers Leaders, Education leaders and Governors
  - Modern work experience including the equalex framework
- The Gatsby Benchmarks website.

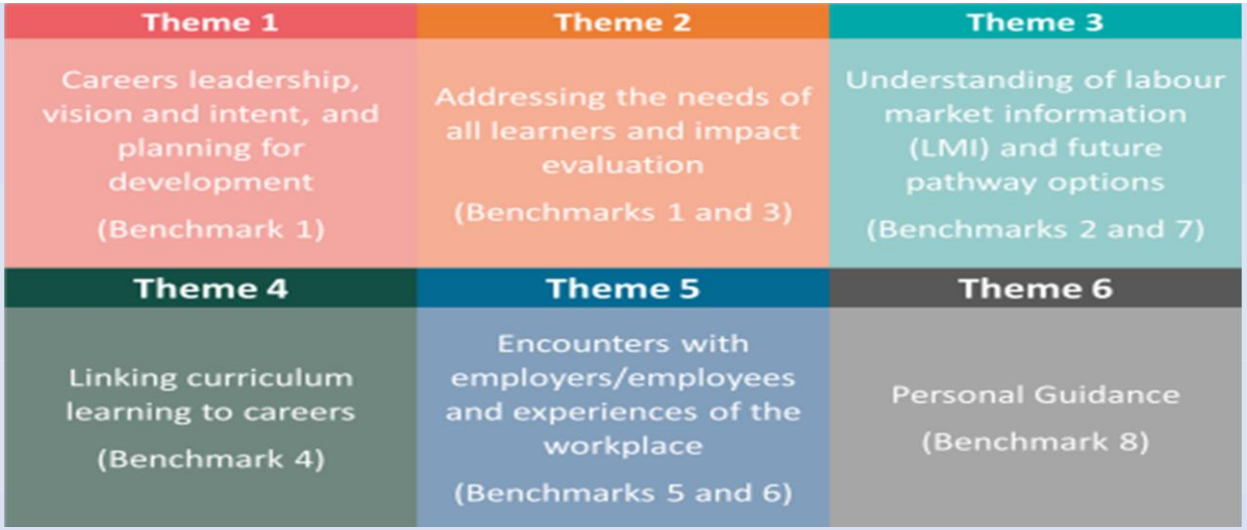
- Ofsted (September 2026) School Inspection handbook
- The Careers and Enterprise Company Ofsted – Education Inspection Framework Guide (June 2026)
- Independent Schools Inspectorate Inspection Framework (2026)
- Quality in Careers *"Case Studies"* of good practice in schools and colleges
- The *matrix* Standard

5.3 An endnote about The Careers & Enterprise Company's 'Careers Impact System' and its relationship with the Quality in Careers Standard.
Please see also "The Careers Impact System and the Quality in Careers Standard"

The '*Careers Impact System'* is designed to support secondary schools, specialist settings and colleges on a journey towards a progressive and differentiated careers provision, underpinned by relevant learning outcomes, which is embedded within whole school, specialist setting or college improvement.
The System is built around maturity models that define effective and strategic careers leadership and establish a shared and standardised language of quality improvement for careers aligned to school, specialist setting and college improvement.
There are six themes within the maturity models, and the Gatsby Benchmarks are central to these themes (see page 38 below).
The Careers Impact System has several elements including internal leadership reviews and peer-to-peer reviews. Careers Impact peer-to-peer reviews are delivered across Careers Hubs and some multi-academy Trusts via the CEC Trust Community of Improvement. A Careers Impact peer-to-peer review is a structured supportive review carried out by trained facilitators. It uses the Careers Impact Maturity Model to enable reflective discussion, share good practice and help settings identify strengths and priorities for development in a non-judgmental way.

Since in its May 2025 Statutory Guidance, and again in the updated Statutory Guidance (June 2026) the DfE 'strongly recommends all schools and colleges' to work towards achieving the Quality in Careers Standard, the Department hopes that engagement in any element of the Careers Impact System will encourage more schools, special schools and colleges to consider working towards the Standard by increasing their confidence to seek external assessment.

The Consortium will consider how data can be used to support this view. There is much commonality and synergy, as would be expected, between the *Careers Impact System* maturity model and the Quality in Careers Standard's assessment criteria.
Secondary schools, special schools and colleges that are working towards or have achieved the Quality in Careers Standard, for example, will be well-placed to make more informed self-evaluation reflections about their practice.
Assessors for the Quality in Careers Standard who carry out assessments in a secondary school, special school or college should take any indicators or learning from the *Careers Impact System* into account and continue to make their independent judgements on the quality of the careers provision.


Theme 1
Careers leadership, vision and intent, and planning for development
(Benchmark 1)
Theme 2
Addressing the needs of all learners and impact evaluation
(Benchmarks 1 and 3)
Theme 3
Understanding of labour market information (LMI) and future pathway options
(Benchmarks 2 and 7)
Theme 4
Linking curriculum learning to careers
(Benchmark 4)
Theme 5
Encounters with employers/employees and experiences of the workplace
(Benchmarks 5 and 6)
Theme 6
Personal Guidance
(Benchmark 8)

Appendix: The updated Gatsby Benchmarks for learning providers (June 2026)

Each section of the Quality in Careers Standard uses the same headings and incorporates the same criteria as 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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