

The Quality in Careers Standard >>>

THE GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL STANDARD FOR FE COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT TRAINING PROVIDERS (ITPs)

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

**To be used in all [Quality in Careers](#) assessments for external national accreditation
from September 2025**

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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 FE colleges and independent training providers ('providers')¹ all matters relating to:

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

1.2. The [Quality in Careers Standard](#) is owned by the Quality in Careers Consortium². It is the **single national quality award that recognises excellence in careers guidance and careers programmes** for learners up to the age of 19 (and up to the age of 25 for learners with EHCPs). It provides independent, external and expert assessment and accreditation of the careers guidance offered by providers. The Standard has been designed to ensure that providers not only fulfil their statutory obligations but also are inspired to continuously improve their **careers guidance**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 Bodies⁴ across the country to undertake [Quality in Careers](#) assessments. Their assessors will make professional judgments on the impact of the provider's careers guidance on career-related outcomes for learners. They will 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 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).

[Quality in Careers](#) assessment reports comment on the strengths of careers guidance together with recommendations for further improvement.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, 'providers' refers to mainstream and specialist FE colleges and independent training providers (ITPs)

² For more information about the Quality in Careers Consortium see [Introducing the Consortium and the Standard - Quality in Careers](#)

³ The term "careers guidance" refers to the overall careers programme provided by a school (i.e. careers education, careers information, careers advice and personal careers guidance)

⁴ For a current list of Licensed Awarding Bodies see [Licensed Awarding Bodies - Quality in Careers](#)

- 1.4. A key aspect of the assessment process is hearing from learners to verify that the provider listens to learners and involves them in the design, delivery and evaluation of careers guidance. The Standard will ensure that 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 providers can also see what assessors will expect to find in order to award the Standard: [The Assessment Guide - Quality in Careers](#)
- 1.5. The national Standard incorporates the guidance for further education providers and sixth form providers on careers guidance and access for education and training providers published by the Department for Education (DfE, May 2025)⁵. **The DfE continues to strongly recommend that all providers 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, providers and sixth form providers already hold or are actively working towards the Standard. Award Holders are listed publicly on our website [National Register of Award Holders - Quality in Careers](#).
- 1.6. The May 2025 edition of the DfE guidance states:

“We strongly recommend that all schools and colleges work towards the [national Quality in Careers Standard](#) to support the development of their careers programme. This external assessment allows independent judgement of the quality of careers provision, including its impact 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) and Careers England.

The Standard is fully aligned with the updated Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Standard is externally assessed by one of the [Licensed Awarding Bodies](#), 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.”

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools>

1.7. The assessment criteria for the [Quality in Careers Standard](#) were fully revised in May 2025 to incorporate the updated Gatsby Benchmarks⁶. The DfE expects all providers and providers to use the updated Gatsby Benchmarks to enable them 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 plan⁷. 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*⁸ self-assessment tool from The Careers & Enterprise Company is currently required evidence to be submitted by providers as part of the [Quality in Careers](#) assessment process. The data from *Compass* reports, combined with other data, enable The Careers & Enterprise Company to produce its annual report on careers education⁹ which helps to drive improvement in the career development sector.

1.9 The Careers & Enterprise Company also offers a wide range of local support to schools including [Careers Hubs](#), the [Enterprise Adviser network](#), and [Teacher Encounters](#); alongside nationally available digital products and training to help drive continuous improvement in provision. This national offer

⁶ Further information about ‘Good career guidance: The next ten years’ can be found on the Gatsby Benchmarks website <https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/>

⁷ The DfE’s expectations concerning the Benchmarks are set out in the DfE Statutory Guidance issued May 2025 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools>

⁸ <https://compass.careersandenterprise.co.uk/info>

⁹ *The Careers Education 2022/23: Now and next: An analysis of careers education in secondary providers and providers in England* The Careers & Enterprise Company (2024) <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/14cdft1b/cec-now-next-report.pdf>

includes [Careers Leader training programmes](#), [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#) for careers leadership development and the [Resource Directory](#), plus tools such as the [Careers Impact internal leadership review](#), part of the 'Careers Impact System' (see the endnote about the System in paragraph 5.3 on page 33 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 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 to strengthen the impact of their careers programmes. The Framework and accompanying resources can be downloaded from the CDI website¹⁰. The CDI also offers a wide range of support to providers including conferences, regional support, CPD activities and professional resources (such as Careers Leader training under contract to The Careers & Enterprise Company¹¹), 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 apprenticeships¹² ("provider access" under the so-called 'Baker Clause'). The Ofsted college inspection handbook¹³ was updated in September 2024 to reinforce the requirements of this legislation. Careers guidance is one of the key areas that informs inspectors' overall judgements on Personal Development (see the box below). Inspectors will also state if a college is not meeting its requirements in respect of careers provision when carrying out ungraded inspections.

¹⁰ <https://www.thecdi.net/resources/cdi-framework>

¹¹ 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/>

¹² See page 41 of the guidance issued January 2023 [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) for further information about the legal requirements and expectations of the DfE, including a model policy statement. See also [Provider Access Legislation | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)

¹³ [Further education and skills inspection handbook - GOV.UK](#) September 2024 – since we expect the Handbook to be updated again this year we will update this Guide to reflect any changes Ofsted may make.

257 (edited extract): *Personal Development*

257. The judgement focuses on the most significant dimensions of the personal development of learners that our education system has agreed, either by consensus or statute, are the most significant:

- *providing an effective careers programme that offers advice, experience and contact with employers to encourage learners to aspire, make good choices and understand what they need to do in order to reach and succeed in their chosen career*
- *supporting readiness for the next phase of education, training or employment so that learners can make the transition to the next stage successfully*

Sources of evidence specific to personal development

259. To inform this judgement, inspectors will use evidence gathered during the inspection and evidence of trends in learners' personal development over time. Inspectors will use first-hand evidence from visits to learning sessions and training workshops, including visits to learners at work or on work placements. Inspectors will gather evidence from interviews with learners, staff, employers and other partners. Evidence will also include information provided through learner, employer and parent questionnaires. Inspectors will use a range of evidence to evaluate personal development, including:

- *the range, quality and take-up of extra-curricular activities offered*
- *how well leaders promote British values*
- *how well leaders develop learners' character through the quality of education that they provide*
- *where appropriate, the quality of debate and discussions that learners have*
- *learners' understanding of the protected characteristics and how they can promote equality and diversity, and how they celebrate the things we have in common*
- *the quality of careers information, education, advice and guidance, and how well these benefit learners in choosing and deciding on their next steps*
- *learners' understanding of what constitutes healthy relationships*

1.12 Private further education colleges and language schools working towards the [Quality in Careers Standard](#) are advised that the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is appointed by the Home Office to inspect their provision. ISI also includes careers provision in its inspections (see box below): <https://www.isi.net/inspection-explained/inspection-framework/> (November 2024)

4. Students' Welfare, including Health and Safety

Inspectors will evaluate quality and standards in relation to the following criteria:

Pastoral support for students

- Staff members provide effective support and guidance in accordance with the needs of the students and the college or language school's aims.
- The college fosters positive relationships between staff and students and among the students themselves.
- The college or language school promotes integration and tolerance and has effective procedures to help prevent bullying and harassment.
- The college or language school provides appropriate further study/careers guidance for students when appropriate.
- Effective arrangements are made to protect learners from the risk associated with radicalisation and extremism.

1.12 Each year, the Consortium Board provides The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) with data on the schools and providers successfully accredited and holding the [Quality in Careers Standard](#)¹⁴.

1.13 The CEC undertakes a review of the *Compass* results for all schools and providers 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 providers holding the Standard achieve the highest Compass scores alongside those which are members of Careers hubs.

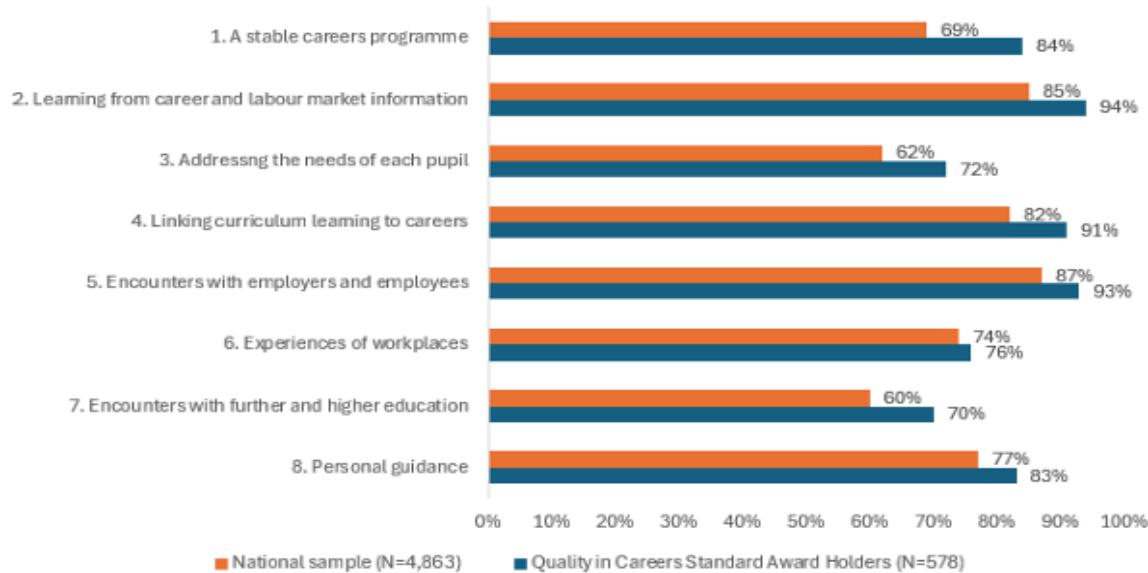
1.14 The analysis undertaken by the CEC in November 2025 confirmed that **education institutions accredited under the Quality in Careers Standard achieved an average of 6.6 Gatsby Benchmarks in 2024/25**. This is 0.1 benchmarks higher than the previous year. The average number of benchmarks achieved by all state-funded schools and providers in England is 6.0 benchmarks¹⁵.

¹⁴[National Register of Award Holders - Quality in Careers](#)

¹⁵[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, providers and Awarding Bodies:

2.1 Learners

- Careers guidance provision 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 guidance. Learners in control of their own lives are more enterprising, hopeful, optimistic, adaptable and resilient. High quality careers guidance enables providers to address the needs of all learners more effectively.
- Careers guidance that upholds the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁶ empowers learners to express their views, feelings and wishes about careers guidance and to have their views considered and taken seriously.
- Careers guidance that is underpinned by the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals¹⁷ 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 Providers

- Careers guidance that is strategically managed and led enables providers to continuously develop their careers guidance as well as being able to harness the potential of careers guidance to contribute to their overall improvement priorities.
- Careers guidance that is focused on internally-led continuous improvement enhances quality more effectively than careers guidance that is just focused on meeting external demands for compliance and regulation. Awarding Bodies offer different approaches to gaining the Standard which enables 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 provider enables learners' needs to be met more effectively while at the same time 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 each provider 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 or Careers Hubs).

¹⁶ Determined as the rights of a person up to the age of 18 <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

¹⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

2.3 Awarding Bodies¹⁸

- A rigorous but straightforward assessment and accreditation process that makes manageable demands on the production of evidence by providers enables Awarding Bodies to motivate and inspire more providers 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 providers to achieve more from gaining the [Quality in Careers Standard](#).
- Expert, external and independent assessment by [Awarding Bodies](#) enables providers to understand quality in careers guidance 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 providers¹⁹, further education and sixth-form providers and independent training providers (ITPs). The Quality in Careers website includes [case studies²⁰](#) for every sector and the Consortium's [virtual event²¹](#) includes video testimonies from every sector too, including an FE College.

3.2 There are extra factors to bear in mind when a **special college** considers seeking accreditation through the Standard. These apply equally when special providers view the *Compass* tool and the Gatsby Benchmarks. In this section, we have included additional notes to assist special providers in working towards the Standard. **There are a number of case studies on the Quality in Careers website featuring 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. More information can be found on the [Quality in Careers website²²](#).

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

¹⁸ [Licensed Awarding Bodies - Quality in Careers](#)

¹⁹ Including Pupil Referral Units, Home and Hospital tuition services also referred to as Alternative Provision

²⁰ [Case Studies of Best Practice Around The Country - Quality in Careers](#)

²¹ [Online Virtual Event - Quality in Careers](#)

²² [Primary Providers - Quality in Careers](#)

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 (2025) guidance²³ on the statutory duties of secondary schools and colleges and the DfE's expectation that all providers will use the Gatsby Benchmarks as a framework for developing their overall careers provision.

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 related to the career development sector.

The [Quality in Careers](#) national assessment criteria are described in detail below:

- They are organised under the same headings as the Gatsby Benchmarks to be more helpful to providers.
- The Gatsby Benchmark and their associated indicators are reproduced in the Appendix for ease of reference.
- To achieve the [Quality in Careers Standard](#) providers must provide evidence of how, in addition to the Benchmarks, careers provision has clear career-related learning outcomes for learners.

1: A stable careers programme

| QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | | |
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| Awarding Bodies will externally assess a provider's arrangements for ²⁴ : | | |
| | Criteria | Commentary |
| 1.1 | Ensuring that those in governance roles provide clear strategic advice and challenge to executive leaders on the development and implementation of high-quality careers guidance that is linked to the provider's development plan | <p>The explicit backing of those in governance and leadership roles for careers guidance enables providers to develop an embedded careers programme for all learners which is high quality, well run and sustainable. Relevant extracts from the minutes of full governors or sub-committee meetings provides appropriate evidence.</p> <p>An up-to-date careers policy which outlines the guiding principles underlying the careers programme is also important evidence.</p> <p>The requirement to show a connection with the provider's development plan is designed to harness the contribution that the careers programme can make to the achievement of the priorities in the plan.</p> |

²³ [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers - GOV.UK](#)

²⁴ The evidence submitted must include an up-to-date *Compass* report

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| 1.2 | <p>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, those in governance roles, employers and other agencies.</p> | <p>This criterion highlights the importance of having a named and appropriately trained careers leader responsible for the careers programme. The careers leader's job profile is important evidence. Effective delivery requires all staff to demonstrate leadership whatever their role is in careers guidance. An organisation chart showing who does what in the careers programme is useful. An overview of the curriculum time allocation alongside a budget analysis of the cost of careers guidance provision can help providers understand the impact of investment levels on quality. Publicising the careers programme on the provider's website and social media channels encourages users and beneficiaries of careers guidance to access the provision and get the most out of it. In FE colleges there is likely to be a separate SEND department/faculty with specialist educational curricula and support. It is important that this department is included at the strategic and policy level and their input is included in the careers programme. Alternatively, a separate careers programme may be developed focussing on SEND students.</p> |
| 1.3 | <p>Ensuring that all staff involved in the careers programme are knowledgeable, skilled and confident in their roles (<i>see also 8.1</i>)</p> | <p>A training needs analysis of staff involved in careers guidance can feed into the provider's staff development programme. The aim should be to meet staff development needs with a reasonable timeframe. Effective staff development combines formal provision (e.g. workshops, courses) with incidental and non-formal activities (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. Section 3 below provides further criteria relating to tailoring the programme to meet the needs of individuals and groups. Careers leaders should work closely with the named person in overall charge of SEND support.</p> |
| 1.4 | <p>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</p> | <p>The Quality in Careers Standard focuses on the relationship between inputs, processes and outcomes in understanding and promoting quality in careers programmes. The selection of learning objectives needs to combine three elements: the universal aims of careers guidance, specific career-related aims relating to learners' chosen courses and the assessment of individual needs (See also sections 3 and 4 below). The purpose is to develop a comprehensive, sequenced and coherent careers curriculum. The CDI Career Development Framework is the most useful resource for focusing on the general aims of careers guidance (See 2.1 below). The six areas in the framework help providers to develop a broad and</p> |

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| | | <p>balanced careers programme that will benefit learners in the short and long term. This framework can be supplemented by other relevant frameworks to develop employability and enterprise such as the Skills Builder framework of work skills.</p> <p>Providers also need to identify the teaching and learning approaches that will help learners to achieve the intended objectives.</p> <p>The Quality in Careers framework focuses on four compelling pedagogical approaches: dialogic teaching and learning, enquiry-based learning, experiential and experience-based learning and reflective learning (See also sections 4-8 below).</p> <p>The impact of the careers programme can be assessed on the basis of the achievement of both learning outcomes and practical outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even with well-matched careers inputs and processes, career-related learning outcomes are not entirely predictable. Learners may achieve more or less than intended. Career-related learning outcomes can be measured in terms of 'distance travelled' and 'personal capability'. Some courses will have units or modules that incorporate career-related learning objectives and their own assessment measures. • Practical outcomes are also affected by variables such as the behaviour and socio-economic background of individuals and labour market conditions. Examples of practical outcomes include qualification success rates and sustainable destination data. <p>Evidence for the achievement of this criterion can be provided in different ways such as entitlement statements (to show intended learning outcomes), written schemes of work, session or lesson plans, destinations data, evaluation activities and annual reports.</p> <p>For special educational needs provision in colleges and ITPs, 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.</p> <p>Schemes of work may be more individualised for learners and inclusion of Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCP) can support the measurement of impact.</p> |
| 1.5 | <p>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</p> | <p>This criterion underlines the importance of effective communications with the intended users and beneficiaries of the provider's careers programme. Good communications is the first step towards meeting the needs of users and beneficiaries and engaging them in co-constructing the careers programme.</p> <p>The careers pages on the provider's website, careers posts on the provider's social media channels and other digital and print communications (e.g. e-newsletters) are useful sources of evidence.</p> <p>Posting contact details for the careers leader and a statement of access for providers are statutory requirements.</p> |

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| | | <p>Providers must make sure that learners with SEND and their parents and carers know where to go for support including what individual support workers and/or welfare services at a college or ITP can offer. There should be strong evidence of close working relationships with external agencies (e.g. social services) and with parents and carers because they are likely to be supporting their children with aspects of their college life. This can be used as evidence for this criterion.</p> |
| 1.6 | Regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the careers programme | <p>Quality in Careers encourages providers to undertake manageable and focused monitoring, review and evaluation (MRE) activities that have a good return on investment. Feedback from a range of stakeholders and partners including learners, parents/carers, alumni, Enterprise Advisers, linked learning providers, employers and careers guidance services is particularly useful.</p> <p>Record keeping (e.g. attendance registers and other records of participation) enables careers leaders to identify and deal with specific issues that may arise.</p> <p>Surveys (e.g. questionnaires, interviews and focus groups) should form part of a regular MRE strategy and have a clear purpose in mind, e.g. to inform decision-making about the development of the careers programme.</p> <p>The evidence submitted must include an up-to-date Compass report.</p> <p>The Careers & Enterprise Company's SEND Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit 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.</p> <p>This is available from their website: https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/</p> |
| 1.7 | Evaluating the effectiveness of learners' participation in the planning, delivery and review of the careers programme | <p>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 involving representatives of learners in planning meetings, peer-to-peer teaching and assessment, and feedback from focus groups and surveys.</p> |
| 1.8 | Evaluating arrangements for personal careers guidance to ensure that provision remains effective | <p>The performance of internally appointed careers advisers can be managed through the provider's performance review system. Contracts and 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 provider's staff.</p> <p>It is important to demonstrate that the provision of careers guidance is embedded in the provider's overall careers programme.</p> |

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| 1.9 | Evaluating the impact on the quality of the careers programme on the provider's participation in collaborative networks | <p>Collaborative engagement with key professional organisations and networks improves quality through the sharing of good practice and involvement in innovative projects.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff membership of professional bodies, e.g. the Career Development Institute, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) • Participation in MAT/consortium/Careers Hub training events. <p>The Careers & Enterprise Company has a community of practice for Careers Hub Leads and Enterprise Co-ordinators working to support special schools and SEND in mainstream schools, colleges and ITPs. Some Careers Hubs have specific network meetings for SEND/AP careers leaders.</p> |
| 1.10 | Enabling parents and carers to be co-partners with the provider in supporting the career development of their children | <p>Providers have a key role to play in informing parents and carers about career 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.</p> <p>Presentations and reports from open day events and the results of surveys of parents/carers provide useful evidence. 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.</p> |
| 1.11 | Actively demonstrating a commitment to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion in careers guidance | <p>Providers have a key role in meeting the needs of their communities and contributing to social mobility by giving everyone the chance to achieve rewarding career goals, regardless of background, ability or previous education experience.</p> <p>Equality, diversity and inclusion principles apply across all eight sections of the Quality in Careers and Gatsby Benchmark frameworks.</p> <p>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, the Equality Duty and special needs legislation are key; so are efforts by the provider to mitigate the effects of poverty and deprivation in the area(s) they serve.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Under the Equality Act 2010, providers must also do everything they reasonably can to remove the barriers to learning for disabled students.</p> |

2: Learning from career and labour market information

| QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | | |
|---|---|--|
| Awarding Bodies will assess a provider's arrangements for: | | |
| | Criteria | Commentary |
| 2.1 | Ensuring that all learners have access to impartial, up to date and user-friendly career and labour market information about career pathways covering the full range of opportunities in education, training and employment relevant to their needs, and that they are supported in its use | <p>All learners should have access to a wide range of careers information including occupational, labour market and lifestyle information to support their career development. A recognised framework such as the CDI framework identifies six areas of learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grow throughout life, e.g. learners need to know about career patterns and structures and how to aspire to lifelong learning and career development• Explore possibilities, e.g. learners need to know about options and progression pathways in education, training and employment. They also need to know about changing opportunities and prospects in education, training and employment relating to their needs and interests• Manage career, e.g. learners need to know about making informed career plans and decisions, handling applications and interviews, making transitions and personal financial capability• Create opportunities, e.g. learners need to know about self-marketing, sources of support and ways of demonstrating self-advocacy, initiative and enterprise• Balance life and work, e.g. learners need to know about good and decent work, occupational health and job satisfaction• See the big picture, e.g. learners need to know about the changing nature of learning, careers and work. <p>Signposting to national and local sources of careers information on the careers pages of the provider's website or VLE is important. In addition, the provider may have access to programs that match learners' interests and skills to courses and occupations and generate relevant career and labour market information.</p> <p>Lesson and session plans provide useful evidence, e.g. on how to research careers information, how to spot misrepresentation and bias, how to verify AI-generated careers information.</p> |

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| | | <p>Providers are also encouraged to maintain an active alumni network to support the provision of careers information.</p> <p>For SEND provision, 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.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| 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) | <p>Active engagement of parents and carers goes beyond just providing them with information. The aim is to develop parental capability to be an effective partner with the provider in enhancing the child's career development. Events for parents/carers and feedback surveys are useful sources of evidence. The provider should have a strategy for engaging with hard-to-reach parents/carers and report on progress (e.g. in the careers leader's annual report).</p> <p>For parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities, the provider will need to have a detailed, long term information support strategy covering access to education, training and employment opportunities as well as financial information and benefit packages.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| 2.3 | Preparing young people to become critically aware consumers of careers information in all its forms, including AI-generated information | <p>As AI-powered careers information tools proliferate, providers need to prepare learners to exploit the benefits of AI-generated career and labour market information and to become discerning users able to spot misinformation, bias and out-of-date information.</p> <p>Best practice for SEND 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.</p> <p>Lesson/session plans and examples of teaching resources are a valuable way of showing how the provider is equipping learners with information handling skills.</p> |

3: Addressing the needs of each young person

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Awarding Bodies will assess a provider's arrangements for:

| | Criteria | Commentary |
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| 3.1 | Actively challenging the obstacles to career development that individuals may face and building the capabilities of learners themselves and those who support them to tackle such barriers | <p>Barriers to career development include psychological factors relating to individuals themselves (e.g. low aspirations, stereotyped thinking, misconceptions, disengagement, absenteeism) and external environmental factors (e.g. stereotyping, discrimination, bullying and harassment).</p> <p>Providers can explain to assessors what they do to challenge barriers, e.g. NEET prevention strategies, support for ex-young offenders.</p> <p>The careers policy and other relevant policies and guidelines for staff (e.g. relating to equality, diversity and inclusion) are useful evidence of what the provider does to support a culture of career development for all.</p> <p>For learners with SEND, providers should include details of the support they provide. Sense.org.uk cites the following examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accessible information, such as symbol-based materials• mentoring• assistive technology, specialist tuition or note-takers• one-to-one and small group learning support• access to therapies• housing and independent living training. |
| 3.2 | Shared record-keeping by the learner and the provider that has a positive impact on both learners' career development and on the effectiveness of the provider's careers programme | <p>Careers records can include examples of a learner's experiences and achievements (e.g. work experience reports, examples of completed work), results of careers assessments, careers action plans and notes of meetings with a personal tutor and/or careers adviser.</p> <p>Learners should have access to their careers records so that they can add to them, keep them up to date and benefit from them at planning, decision and transition points.</p> <p>They can also use their records as tools for self-advocacy and reflection, with the support of staff as appropriate, to think about what is going well and what they need to do next.</p> |

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| | | <p>Best practice in SEND provision includes the creation of vocational profiles which capture 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.</p> <p>Providers can keep attendance records to track the participation of individuals in the careers programme and help to identify when remedial action, such as catch-up sessions, are needed. Aggregated data from learners' records such as information about destinations can inform the development of the careers programme (See 3.3 below).</p> |
| 3.3 | Analysing post-18 destinations data and using the results of the analysis to make improvements to the careers programme | <p>Analysis of destinations data can assist the provider in motivating learners, developing the curriculum, lowering non-completion rates and evaluating the careers programme.</p> <p>It is useful to track both short-term and long-term destination trends.</p> <p>An analysis of the destinations of leavers over the short and long term is useful for identifying trends in participation in education and labour market conditions.</p> <p>Tracking student destinations enables providers to keep in touch with alumni. For SEND learners it is especially encouraging to talk to their peers about what is possible.</p> <p>The DfE's commentary and expectations in relation to destinations data are set out in the May 2025 edition of Careers guidance and access for education and training providers - GOV.UK</p> |
| 3.4 | Ensuring that advice given is effective in meeting the needs of all learners | <p>This criterion aims to focus attention on addressing the diverse needs of individuals and groups, e.g. supporting 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.</p> <p>Anonymised examples of case conferences and EHC plans can illustrate the effectiveness of advice and support. Examples of the impact of enrichment programmes (including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities) for specific groups of learners are also particularly useful. Oral evidence can also be provided by staff talking to Quality in Careers assessors.</p> |
| 3.5 | Securing effective partnerships with relevant services and agencies that provide additional support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners | <p>Notes of meetings (with data protection in place) can provide evidence of how individual needs are being addressed.</p> <p>Providers should refer to specialist services for further advice and support, for example, from education psychologists.</p> <p>The duties of local authorities concerning young people's participation and the DfE's expectations on the co-operation between providers and local authorities in respect of vulnerable and disadvantaged young</p> |

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| | | people are fully explained in the May 2025 edition of the DfE's statutory guidance Careers guidance and access for education and training providers - GOV.UK |
| 3.6 | Sharing learner information with appropriate authorities and agencies including monitoring the extent to which such data sharing agreements and processes benefit the learners concerned | Providers may work with a range of organisations to support 'at risk' learners and learners with additional needs. 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 on the careers programme. The DfE's commentary and expectations in relation to information sharing with local authorities are set out in the May 2025 edition of the DfE's statutory guidance Careers guidance and access for education and training providers - GOV.UK |

4: Linking curriculum learning to careers

| QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | | |
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| Awarding Bodies will assess a provider'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 subjects and courses they are studying <i>(See also 1.4 above)</i> | Learners can find out about the skills they will be developing in subject and course information published by the provider. Lesson and session plans can also show how staff facilitate the development of these skills. Staff have a key part to play in informing learners about progression pathways in the subject or course they are taking and about careers using the subject or course knowledge and skills. Many staff also have extensive networks from their previous employments which they can draw on to support their learners. Access to suitable continuing professional development should be provided (See also 1.3 above). Evidence can also be provided by Quality in Careers assessors talking to staff . |
| 4.2 | Embedding career-related learning in the programmes of study for all learners | Career-related learning that is an integral part of the learner's programme of study is more likely to be perceived by them as relevant, motivating and interesting. The design of careers inputs will vary from course to course but can be documented in schemes of work developed in consultation with staff. |

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| | | Providers of post-16 courses for SEND learners often include an element of independent living and employability skills. This should be embedded as part of the overall career programme. |
| 4.3 | Implementing effective ways of teaching, learning and assessing career-related learning | <p>The pedagogical approaches that are associated with motivating learners and facilitating effective learning in careers education include dialogic teaching and learning, enquiry-based learning, experiential and experience-based learning and reflective learning.</p> <p>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 session plans, evaluation reports and examples of learners' work.</p> |

5: Encounters with employers and employees

| QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Awarding Bodies will assess a provider's arrangements for: | | |
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| | Criteria | Commentary |
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| 5.1 | Securing meaningful encounters for every learner with people who work | <p>Meaningful encounters should enable every learner to discover more about the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of working life. (See the definition of 'meaningful' in the 2024 Gatsby update).</p> <p>This includes understanding why people work and how the obligations they have towards others depend on their status and role (e.g. employer, self-employed, employee, volunteer).</p> <p>Contact with individuals contributes to learners' understanding of occupational roles, job skills, work ethos, local employment prospects and career pathways.</p> <p>Examples of activities where people from the world of work facilitate meaningful encounters include careers talks, careers fairs/festivals, practical demonstrations, interview sessions, games and simulations (e.g. where visitors are participants or advisers or judges), mock interviews, mentoring schemes and supervision of learners in the workplace (see also 6.1 below).</p> |

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| | | <p>Every year, learners should have at least two meaningful encounters with people from the world of work. At least one should be delivered through their curriculum area. Learners own part-time jobs could provide meaningful encounters.</p> <p>The range of employers and employees should include the private and public sector, third sector organisation and community organisations. Maintaining a database of providers and their participation will enable the provider to monitor the range of industries and activities represented in the careers programme and whether or not they address learners' needs.</p> <p>Registers of participation and examples of learners' work will assist the provider in evaluating effectiveness.</p> |
| 5.2 | Ensuring that encounters with people who work are an integral part of a planned and progressive careers programme with effective preparation and follow-up | <p>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.</p> <p>Short evaluation notes appended to lesson plans and/or schemes of work after they have been delivered to groups can comment on what went well and what the provider could do differently or better next time.</p> <p>These encounters should be fully inclusive of SEND students and all providers.</p> <p>The term 'people who work' 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.</p> |
| 5.3 | Enabling employers and employees to contribute effectively to the careers programme as active partners | <p>The provider can facilitate the contribution of employers and employees through schemes such as working closely with a link governor for careers, Enterprise Advisers from the CEC, local employers and employer liaison groups, as appropriate.</p> <p>Notes of meetings and summaries in the annual report can furnish evidence over time of a more strategic partnership.</p> <p>Many post 16 providers of SEND provision take the initiative and invite local employers and community organisations into their providers to demonstrate their learners' skills and abilities and discuss collaboration with their careers programme.</p> |

6: Experiences of workplaces

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Awarding Bodies will assess a provider's arrangements for:

| | Criteria | Commentary |
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| 6.1 | Securing meaningful experiences of workplaces for every learner | <p>Examples of experiences of workplaces includes learners undertaking volunteering, work-based projects, work experience and work shadowing. Experiences may take place physically in workplaces and/or be facilitated online.</p> <p>Useful evidence includes registers of participation and examples of work completed by learners as well as learners' evaluations of the value of their placements.</p> <p>Learners should have at least one meaningful experience of a workplace in addition to any part-time jobs they may have.</p> <p>For some SEND young people it may be appropriate to provide internal placements which will be more sheltered and can be closely supervised.</p> <p>Learners with SEMH (social, emotional, mental health) issues may benefit from tailored encounters and experiences.</p> |
| 6.2 | Ensuring that experiences of workplaces are an integral part of a planned and progressive careers programme with effective preparation and follow-up | <p>Schemes of work and lesson plans should show that experiences have planned learning objectives and that learners have also had a chance to identify their own learning objectives.</p> <p>It is important that the provider arranges structured reflection activities to follow up and review their experiences including helping learners to make positive use of 'incidental' and 'unintended' outcomes that result from experiences.</p> <p>Planned preparation and de-briefing is key to successful work placements for SEND learners.</p> <p>This can be integrated into the careers programme. 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.</p> |

7: Encounters with Further and Higher Education

| QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA | | |
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| Awarding Bodies will assess a provider'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. | <p>By the end of their programme of study, every learner should have had a meaningful encounter with a range of further and higher education providers including the opportunity to meet both staff and learners.</p> <p>Schemes of work and lesson plans should show that experiences have planned learning objectives related to enhancing learners' understanding of the full range of opportunities in further and higher education including apprenticeships and facilitating their next steps.</p> |
| 7.2 | Ensuring that encounters with further and higher education are an integral part of a planned and progressive careers programme with effective preparation and follow-up | <p>This criterion is intended to ensure that learners are well-prepared for their encounters with further and higher education and have a structured debrief and review of their encounters.</p> <p>Evidence can be drawn from the published programme of careers events, schemes of work and anonymised notes of career discussions/meetings with individuals.</p> <p>Whereas encounters with universities will be appropriate for some SEND students, they may not be appropriate for all. So that these encounters are fully inclusive of all SEND students, these will include providers of meaningful and appropriate post-16 activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• supported internships,• social enterprises (and other providers often funded by Local Authority Social Services),• adult community care, and• respite care facilities. |

8: Personal Guidance

QUALITY IN CAREERS NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Awarding Bodies will assess a provider's arrangements for:

| Criteria | Commentary |
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| 8.1 Ensuring that all learners have access to personal careers guidance from professionals and staff who have been trained and prepared for their roles (see also 1.3) | <p>Colleges in receipt of funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency must hold the <i>matrix</i> Standard. Where externally provided careers guidance is secured from professionally qualified careers advisers, providers should ensure that the organisation providing such services meets the agreed sector standard (i.e. the <i>matrix</i> Standard) and that account is taken of the professional standards and qualifications determined by the Career Development Institute (CDI).</p> <p>The CDI recognises different levels and types of qualification for professionals in the sector depending on their role. As a minimum, a level 4 (SCQF level 7-9) qualification is appropriate for those supporting learners in accessing and using careers information. Level 6 or level 7 (SCQF level 11) qualification are for practitioners who provide career guidance to learners.</p> <p>The provider should ensure that all those involved in personal careers guidance, whether internal or external to the provider's organisation, are competent in their roles and can act with impartiality in the best interests of learners.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The Consortium Board endorses the CDI's recommendation and commends it to assessors, providers and providers. See also the CEC briefing note https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/media/xuzdf12s/what-works-personal-guidance.pdf.</p> <p>The Consortium Board also expects Awarding Bodies to stress to providers that all staff need to act with impartiality. Where the school appoints a 'Careers Adviser' (career development practitioner) to its staff, Awarding Bodies must satisfy themselves that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the adviser is qualified at a minimum of L6, • is on the UK Register of Career Development Professionals http://www.thecdi.net/Professional-Register- |

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| | | <p>Providers and careers guidance companies are expected to hold (or be working towards achieving) the <i>matrix</i> Standard (www.matrixstandard.com).</p> <p>There are growing numbers of sole traders/small partnerships which are becoming <i>matrix</i> Standard accredited, therefore, the Consortium Board advises Awarding Bodies to recommend that providers securing services from sole traders/small partnerships should encourage these to consider <i>matrix</i> accreditation and to contact the Awarding Body for the <i>matrix</i> Standard: The matrix Standard Business Accreditation Standard.</p> <p>The Consortium Board <u>requires</u> Awarding Bodies to ensure that sole trading careers advisers contracted to deliver careers services to providers fully meet the professional requirements set out above.</p> <p>If the provider employs careers advisers from a careers guidance company, the Service Level/Partnership Agreement should include a provision for the assessment of the careers advisers' performance.</p> <p>Evidence can be provided by Quality in Careers assessors talking to staff.</p> |
| 8.2 | <p>Ensuring that all learners have equity of access to independent, impartial, and timely personal careers guidance</p> | <p>Learners and their parents and carers need to know how to access and get the most out of personal careers guidance. The evidence from tutorial programmes and other schemes of work can show that support and guidance is timely and appropriate. The provider should also show how the problem of 'delivery gaps' is addressed, e.g. the provider's strategies for reaching out to learners, especially from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who engage less consistently in career development.</p> <p>Records of attendance will help the provider to monitor the take up of personal careers guidance activities.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Often prompts and additional resources are useful (e.g. a whiteboard, careers websites on a laptop, or an action planning proforma).</p> <p>For SEND learners, and particularly those with SEMH and autism, making sure that the careers adviser is a familiar face in their college/ITP community is key to successful support. Best practice would be for the careers adviser to be involved with some careers activities and to be available for informal careers</p> |

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| | <p>meetings throughout the learner's course. Careers advisers should also be invited to and have an input into EHCP reviews. Careers adviser engagement with parents and carers is also recommended so they can support a successful transition for the learner. 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.</p> <p>Every learner should have at least one personal guidance meeting. Careers guidance staff should work closely with other key staff (e.g. SENDCo) to ensure personal guidance is effective.</p> |
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4. The assessment and accreditation process

- 4.1. The purpose of a [Quality in Careers](#) assessment is to recognise what the provider is doing well in its careers guidance provision and to support continuous quality improvement. It is focused 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 provider and the assessor will use the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with the provider’s staff. The assessor will also adapt the approach to suit the circumstances and context of the provider.
- 4.3. Assessment enables 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. Our 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

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 provider's website to establish 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 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**'²⁵) 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 provided 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 provider is yet making good progress towards fully meeting the Standard.

For the avoidance of doubt, if a 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 "*Making 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 provider is awarded with the Standard being assessed as "*Making good progress*" providing that:

- i. The provider has demonstrated a robust and coherent approach to managing the quality of its careers guidance provision that is consistent with the

²⁵ [Brand Guidelines - Quality in Careers](#)

[Quality in Careers Standard](#) key principles; and

- ii. The 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 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.

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**²⁶.

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’**²⁷).

[Quality in Careers assessors](#) may, at the first annual review of a 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 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 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 provider needs to address ready for its reaccreditation. Complete Careers’ assessors will address this in the first annual review.

²⁶ [National Register of Award Holders - Quality in Careers](#)

²⁷ [Brand Guidelines - Quality in Careers](#)

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 school is awarded the Standard being assessed as “Fully meeting,” providing that:

- I. The school 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 school has fully met all of the [Quality in Careers Standard](#) national criteria incorporating the eight Gatsby Benchmarks.

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**²⁸.

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 guidelines²⁹’) 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 school 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.

²⁸ [National Register of Award Holders - Quality in Careers](#)

²⁹ [Brand Guidelines - Quality in Careers](#)

4.7. An added note about an Awarding Body offering additional recognition to schools & colleges:

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 providers

5.1. All Awarding Bodies will advise providers directly on their particular evidence requirements. Below we offer advice on what 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 provider's previous [Quality in Careers Standard](#) assessment report (if applicable)
- The most recent inspection report from Ofsted or ISI (Independent Providers Inspectorate)
- The provider's destinations data
- Information about the provider's careers guidance policy as approved by the Governing Body (or equivalent), its careers programme on the provider's website and social media platforms
- Where applicable, a "provider access" policy statement - compliant with the legal duty³⁰ set out in the May 2025 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')
- Outcomes from self-assessment using the *Compass* tool - which the 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

³⁰ [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) See also [Provider Access Legislation | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)

learning outcomes.

- Any experience of, or outcomes from, participating in the '*Careers Impact System*' (see [The Careers Impact System and the Quality in Careers Standard - Quality in Careers](#)).

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

- contextual information about the 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 the overall careers guidance provision including the Careers Leader's job description
- evidence offered by local external partner organisations, e.g. careers guidance service provider, 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 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: 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' <https://www.thecdi.net/resources/cdi-framework>

The Careers & Enterprise Company (<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>)

- Provider Access: <https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/promoting-all-pathways> and <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/fe-skills/provider-access-legislation/>

The Careers & Enterprise Company Gatsby Benchmarks toolkits:

- Providers: https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/1041_gatsby_toolkit_for_providers_final.pdf

- Young people with SEND: https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/1051_send_gatsby_toolkit_refresh_digital.pdf
- <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/the-careers-enterprise-academy/>

The Gatsby Benchmarks website <https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/>

Hanson, J., Moore, N., Clark, L. and Neary, S. (2021) *An evaluation of the North-East of England pilot of the Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance* [An evaluation of the North East of England pilot of the Gatsby Benchmarks of good career guidance : University of Derby Repository](#)

Ofsted (September 2024) [Further education and skills inspection handbook - GOV.UK](#)

Quality in Careers “Case Studies” of providers and providers: [Case Studies of Best Practice Around The Country \(qualityincareers.org.uk\)](#)

The *matrix Standard* <https://matrixstandard.com/>

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 - Quality in Careers](#)

The ‘*Careers Impact System*’ is designed to support secondary providers, special providers and providers on a journey towards a progressive and differentiated careers provision, underpinned by relevant learning outcomes, which is embedded within whole school, special school or college improvement. The System is built around a maturity model that defines effective and strategic careers leadership and establishes a shared and standardised language of quality improvement for careers aligned to school, special school and college improvement.

There are six themes within the maturity model and the Gatsby Benchmarks are central to these themes:

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

The System has several elements including self-evaluation, peer-to-peer and expert reviews. Careers Impact peer-to-peer reviews are being rolled out across Careers Hubs and Trusts. The purpose of the peer-to-peer reviews is to embed a standardised process of continuous improvement across national networks.

Since in the May 2025 edition of its statutory guidance the DfE 'strongly recommends all providers and providers' to work towards achieving the [Quality in Careers Standard](#)³¹, the Department hopes that engagement in any element of the Careers Impact System will encourage more providers, special providers and providers 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 providers, special providers and providers 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.

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-providers>

Appendix: The updated Gatsby Benchmarks for providers

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 provider 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 provider should have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of those in governance roles, 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 provider'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, subject staff and other staff who support learners, careers advisers and employers

Benchmark 2: Learning from career and labour market information

All learners, parents and carers, subject staff and other 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 special educational needs and disabilities (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 their 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 and supported to access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their support for 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.

- A provider's careers programme should actively seek to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical thinking, showcase a diverse range of role models and raise aspirations.
- Providers 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.
- The 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 key transition points to support their next steps and career development.
- Providers 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.
- Providers 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 providers programme of careers education, all subject staff should link curriculum learning with careers, even on courses which are not specifically occupation led. Subject staff should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of future career paths.

- 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 provider's ongoing staff development programme for 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 activities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include learners' own part-time employment where it exists.

- Every year, alongside their programme of study, learners should participate in at least two meaningful encounters with an employer. At least one encounter 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.

- 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, providers, independent training providers (ITPs), universities and in the workplace.

- 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 stages of their career. This should include, as appropriate, further education providers, 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 provider 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 individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, SEND coordinator (SENDCO) 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. 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 provider website.

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