

Building careers engagement from transition points

Background

Parents, carers and guardians play an important part in career and education choices of young people. The Gatsby Foundation is undertaking a programme of research and piloting in order to find out how to support your setting*, to help parents** have these discussions with their children. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Gatsby and the Careers and Enterprise Company have worked together with Careers Leaders to explore ideas and good practice in working with parents in these challenging times. This guidance is part of a suite of resources developed over this academic year, to share what practitioners say is working in their settings right now. Looking ahead to the upcoming transition period Careers Leaders have reflected on parental engagement approaches that have worked well and how these could be applied to involving parents when their child starts in a new setting.

*The word 'setting' is used to refer to school, special school, college, Alternative Provision (AP), Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

**The word 'parent' is used to refer to parents, carers and guardians

Overview

Transition points are a key time to capture the engagement of parents in your setting's careers provision, but once they are engaged how can this be maintained? Our Careers Leaders considered the value of having a progressive careers plan for parents that builds from the point of transition and first engagement. The plan should incorporate all existing parental engagement opportunities each year, such as parents' evenings and interactions with parent governors/PTA groups, to build an overarching picture of how all activities can work together to develop parent confidence and engagement with careers. To maximise the effectiveness of this, it needs to be embedded across the whole setting and endorsed by senior leadership, to ensure that careers is a common thread in all parental engagement activity.

The following guidance is based on insight from our Careers Leaders as to why taking a strategic approach is so important, irrespective of the setting and age of the young people joining.

Potential benefits of building your careers engagement plan from transition points

Building trust and open communication

When it comes to exploring potential career prospects and pathways, parents can often resist credible options which they don't understand. By planning your setting's careers engagement from the point of transition, you will cultivate an empowered parent community that feels able to have conversations about careers with a people they trust, setting a precedent for ongoing dialogue.

Developing relationships with the parent community over the years from transition has the power to develop a level of trust and credibility in your setting. If young people and families are only engaged just before they are about to make their next steps, support can feel unfamiliar and your setting may not be viewed as their first point of support.

"At primary school, parents are a lot more 'hands on' and have more direct contact, at my (secondary) school many parents only ever come to the school at Parents' evening. If we can grab them early, perhaps we can keep them engaged. I also think some of our challenges with aspirations need to be tackled in Year 7 and improved parental engagement would help with this."

Lucy Kendall, Careers Leader, Idsall School, West Midlands

Broadening horizons

Planning engagement from transition is as much about raising the aspirations and broadening the horizons of parents, as it is for young people. Informing parents from the start of their child's journey in their new setting and sharing options and opportunities, will help overcome any stigmas and misconceptions surrounding careers. This can particularly help:

- Parents with lower knowledge of the labour market or limited personal experience of work to gain insight into a greater range of choices for their children beyond the roles they may be familiar with.
- Parents that have limited views or knowledge of careers and pathways, which can restrict the ambitions of their children. These could, for example, be parents that believe their child should only access a narrow set of professions (e.g. lawyer or doctor), must follow in their footsteps (e.g. join the family business) or believe that university is the only route into a successful career.
- Parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities who can sometimes have limited expectations and hold pre-conceptions when it comes to considering careers and pathways for their children.

Planning team building and fun activities into your setting's careers offering from the point of transition can be a way to nurture open conversations between parents and their children, and encourage them find out more about their child's strengths and interests. These activities should focus on exploring essential skills (such as teamwork, problem solving and leadership) rather than being too narrowly focused on specific career roles. This keeps the dialogue broader and can lead to discussions about the range of roles or environments those skills could be suited to.

"I believe that the importance to educate some parents on careers education should be at the forefront of children's transitions into senior school. Although some parents have high aspirations for their children, they do not realise the broad spectrum of equally valid careers that are also available."

Charlene Steele, Careers Leader, Ark's Academy, East of England

Continuous development

The benefit of having an ongoing engagement plan to implement from transition is that you can build upon the foundation of learning your careers programme facilitates with each activity, each year. Parent misconceptions cannot be changed with one induction presentation; reiterating messages at regular opportunities through a range of channels including events and communications home, helps to gradually shift parents' mindsets.

Having a progressive plan will allow your setting more scope to manage resources based on need, and spot where some families require extra support so additional interventions can be added for them. Creating such engagement from transition sets expectations for what parents can anticipate from the setting and their careers programme, and what settings can expect from their parent community.

This approach means that by the time key decision-making points are reached parents' knowledge and confidence to support their child will have grown and they will be in a position to help their child make more informed choices.

Templates to help visualise your setting's plan for a strategic careers programme are available on the [CEC Journey/roadmap page](#) and they can be adapted to show the parent journey.

Further resources

You can find other resources about engaging parents in careers guidance on the [CEC Resource Directory](#).