

Experiences of workplaces:

Practical ideas from schools and
colleges for achieving Gatsby
Benchmark 6

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how to provide meaningful workplace experiences
for students.

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About this paper

This report provides practical insights from Careers Leaders about how to deliver meaningful workplace experiences for young people in secondary schools, colleges and special schools. It is targeted at schools and colleges seeking ideas for how to improve their provision.

Schools and colleges have made significant progress over recent years and approximately half of schools and colleges now ensure that the majority of their students have at least one experience of the workplace by the age of 16 and another during sixth form or college. This means that an additional 400K experiences of the workplace are needed each year to ensure that all young people have these opportunities. The Careers & Enterprise Company supports schools, colleges, providers and employers to achieve this aim.

We carried out qualitative interviews with Careers Leaders from 28 schools, colleges and special schools that are achieving well on Gatsby Benchmark 6. The interviews explored the models of workplace experiences offered, how they are integrated within career programmes and strategies for overcoming the challenges to ensure that the experiences are meaningful and available to all students.

Top tips for achieving Benchmark 6

Careers Leaders from 28 schools and colleges that are achieving well on Gatsby Benchmark 6 took part in this research to share practical ideas on how to set up meaningful workplace experiences for their students. The research identified three pillars of success: designing effective programmes; achieving the volumes needed to provide opportunities for all students; and making experiences meaningful.

Top tips for an effective programme of workplace experiences

Experiences of workplaces are sequenced and part of a wider programme, rather than one-off activities.

- 1** | Build a progressive programme of employer encounters and workplace experiences, which are based on appropriate learning outcomes and support student skills development.
- 2** | Provide age-related opportunities for learners, for example:
 - At Key Stage 3, focus on breadth and include whole year employer visits or job shadowing.
 - At Key Stage 4, allow more student choice and target students' interests.
 - During post-16 learning, support individuals to choose a range of experiences, training and other activities congruent with their vocational aspirations.
- 3** | Ensure workplace experiences are appropriate to the individual needs of the learner, considering supported placements and internal placements for students who need the most support.
- 4** | Provide as wide a range as possible of additional experiences capitalising on workplace experiences and other schemes run by external organisations and employers.

Top tips for securing workplace experiences for every student

Employer contact strategies are designed to achieve sufficient opportunities for all students to take part.

1 | Build a wide network of employers who can provide workplace experiences through:

- Involving parents and staff in sourcing employers.
- Engaging in business networks.
- Capitalising on student-sourced contacts.
- Providing a clear point of contact for employers.
- Develop partnerships or agreements with key employers.

2 | Maintain relationships through regular communication with employers to keep them engaged and maximise the opportunities through:

- Sending thank-you letters to employers after workplace experiences.
- Inviting employers to business breakfasts or other events.
- Communicating benefits of workplace experiences and good news stories.
- Providing incentives where possible - such as discounts on training provided by FE colleges or offering school/college space for business meetings.

3 | Make offering experiences of workplaces as easy as possible for employers by:

- Providing opportunities for employers to get to know the school or college, building confidence and exposure to young people.
- Providing simplified paperwork and offering support to complete it.

- Offering guidance on effective design of activities or structure of work placements.
- Providing guidance on safeguarding and health and safety.

4 | Meet the resource requirements of workplace experiences by:

- Identifying and articulating staff roles in delivering workplace experiences.
- Ensuring adequate support or allocation of time for the necessary administration.
- Considering the most efficient approach to health and safety checks which may include brokerage services, externally commissioned staff, or training internal staff.
- Seeking additional financial resources where possible which may include project funding for specific activities.
- Securing buy-in from senior leadership teams, through:
 - Establishing regular reporting mechanisms.
 - Engaging senior leaders in workplace experience so they can see benefits first-hand.
 - Making use of digital tracking systems (such as Compass+).
- Building capacity in the school or college including:
 - Investing in Careers Leader development and training.
 - Building networks or steering groups among school staff.

Top tips for making experiences of workplaces meaningful

Workplace experiences are integrated with other career learning opportunities, are tailored to student needs and interests are authentic.

1 | Embed experiences of workplaces in the wider careers programme by:

- Making experiences of the workplace a central part of the careers programme and establishing a clear expectation that all students will engage.
- Identifying mechanisms to enable workplace experiences to integrate with other Gatsby Benchmarks, including:
 - Developing an integrated approach to workplace experiences and employer and employee encounters.
 - When allocating staff to workplace visits, linking staff to employers relevant to their curriculum area to support CPD and potential future curriculum-employer linkages.
 - Including a workplace experience element during visits to FE and HE providers.

2 | Balance student choice and raising aspiration by:

- Providing experiences throughout Key Stage 3 to raise aspirations and challenge stereotypes to enable students to select stretching experiences in Key Stage 4.
- Seeking vocational interests of students prior to workplace experiences to enable matching and monitoring.

- Providing a clear structure and timeline for students who are choosing workplace experiences. Provide additional support through careers guidance or job coaching to those students who do not identify suitable experiences within these timescales.

3 | Provide opportunities for students to maximise their learning by:

- Preparing students for workplace experiences through structured activities such as company research, C.V. and letter writing, networking, interviews and phone calls.
- Providing booklets and resources to help students track and record their workplace experiences.
- Providing reflection and debriefing opportunities after workplace experiences which may include events, 'off-timetable' days or careers guidance sessions.
- Identifying how to make experiences as authentic as possible – including using realistic application processes.

4 | Build flexibility into programmes to allow individuals to take part in multiple workplace experiences at different times in the academic year if this is more suitable to their interests and aspirations.

Support available from The Careers & Enterprise Company

The Careers & Enterprise Company provides support to schools and colleges across England to help them meet the Gatsby Benchmarks. Details and links are provided below.



The **Gatsby Benchmark Toolkits** provide resources on Benchmark 6 that are tailored to schools¹, colleges² and special schools³. These include tips for education providers and employers, the evidence for why workplace experiences matter, links to toolkits and resources developed by other organisations and links to The Careers & Enterprise Company's free online training module.⁴



Schools and colleges in the Enterprise Adviser Network also receive support from a trained **Enterprise Coordinator** who provides information, advice and support to schools and facilitates link to local employers.



Compass +⁶ is a new digital tool to help schools benchmark, manage, track and report on their careers programme. Compass+ is available for all secondary schools, special schools, sixth-forms and PRUs in England. The tool helps Careers Leaders to target careers activities on the students most in need and to reach and build a wider network of employers and career partners.



The Enterprise Adviser Network⁵ supports schools and colleges by linking them to an **Enterprise Adviser**, a senior business volunteer, who can help the school or college to develop its careers and enterprise plan, connect with local and national employers and find out more about the local and national labour market.

1. The Careers & Enterprise Company and Career Development Institute (2019). *The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit: Practical signposting for schools*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

2. The Careers & Enterprise Company (2019). *The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit: Practical signposting for colleges*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

3. The Careers & Enterprise Company, Career Development Institute and Talentino (2019). *The SEND Gatsby Benchmark toolkit: Practical information and guidance for schools and colleges*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

4. careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/careers-leaders

5. Information about the EAN and how to join can be found here: careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/join-our-network

6. Information about Compass + and how to register interest can be found here: careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/compass-plus



Compass⁷ and **Tracker**⁸, which enables schools and colleges to log activities and see the impact on Compass results, can also be used outside of Compass +.



The **Youth Social Action Toolkit**⁹ makes it easier to join up social action with careers education in schools and colleges. It provides free resources, ideas and case studies for enabling young people to take part and for engaging employers.



Find an Activity Provider¹⁰ helps connect schools and colleges with organisations that provide workplace experiences and employer encounters. The search can be filtered by area, type of activity, industry sector and suitability for young people with SEND.



The **meaningful encounters framework**¹¹ and **checklist**¹² are a useful resource for workplace experiences. It highlights considerations to maximise the value of encounters with employers at each stage of planning, implementation, reflection and progression.



The **Careers Leader Training**¹³, available online and face to face, helps Careers Leaders to understand their role and to develop the skills required to strategically and successfully embed a careers programme in their school or college.

7. compass.careersandenterprise.co.uk/info

8. tracker.careersandenterprise.co.uk/info

9. youth-social-action.careersandenterprise.co.uk/

10. find-activity-provider.careersandenterprise.co.uk/search

11. careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/careers-leaders

12. careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/1207_-_meaningful_encounters_checklist_0.pdf

13. careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/training-careers-leaders

Foreword

As the Executive Principal of an all-through academy in East Sussex, the importance of good careers education is something that is very close to my heart. Inspiring young people is one of the most important roles for educators, as this alone can motivate and help to guide students through their school lives.

Good careers education, advice and information can provide this inspiration. It can help to frame a young person's aspirations and indeed, the expectations they have of themselves for both now and in the future.

I therefore welcome this report and the practical support it can offer to colleagues, to ensure all young people have access to workplace related experiences.

At Hailsham Community College Academy Trust, we have a wide ranging CEIAG programme that provides bespoke input for students across all year groups. A lot of this work relies heavily on the relationships we have built with business and organisations at both a local and national level, and the role that these workplaces play in supporting our young people cannot be underestimated.

We frequently welcome guest speakers from a huge range of industries and provide our students with regular opportunities to visit and gain experiences of different workplaces so that they can build a real insight into the exciting career opportunities available to them.

We have long standing links with local colleges, universities and apprenticeship providers, acknowledging that our young people need to be informed of what routes are available in order to make choices that are right for them and their future goals. Even our reception classes have workplace learning opportunities with guest speakers breaking down the stereotyping of certain industries.

Phil Matthews

Executive Principal

The Careers and Enterprise Company has provided us with invaluable support to ensure we are always working to achieve the best outcomes for our learners whilst meeting the requirements of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Without a doubt, the Gatsby Benchmarks have been a supportive addition to our work around careers. They provide a framework for managing and monitoring our careers programme and enable us to provide personalised careers education for students. This report will help to guide Careers Leaders and other colleagues in understanding how workplace experiences can be used as evidence towards meeting Benchmark 6 and will also provide schools with innovative ways of providing these types of opportunities to their students.

Our Careers Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping and delivering the new approach to careers education, ensuring that it is embedded in the curriculum and that an ongoing, sustainable programme provides tangible and meaningful support for young people.

The evidence in this report offers valuable, insightful and practical ideas based on the learning and expertise of Careers Leaders who are engaged in the day-to-day work of careers education in schools and colleges. I would urge anyone involved in working with young people to read the report and use it as a tool to evaluate and best of all, improve and enhance your existing CEIAG provision.

1 | Introduction

Experiences of workplaces in the Gatsby Benchmarks

The value of workplace experiences for young people's career readiness and employability skills has been well-established by research¹⁴ and is reflected in current Government policy and non-statutory guidance.^{15, 16} Work experience placements, job shadowing and workplace visits can help young people learn about the world of work, raise aspirations and awareness of what is possible, confirm or reject career pathways, build networks and develop employability skills.¹⁷ These outcomes are closely aligned with school and college priorities for students, making workplace experiences a valuable opportunity for students to prepare for their working lives.

Experiences of the workplace are a core component of the Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance¹⁸, which are based on international evidence about what constitutes good careers provision in schools and colleges. Gatsby codified this as eight benchmarks, and the sixth benchmark states that:

Every student/learner should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.

The Gatsby Benchmarks require that in secondary schools, students should have an experience of the workplace by the end of Year 11 and another during Years 12 and 13. In colleges, learners should have an experience of the workplace (aside from part-time jobs) by the time they finish their programme of study.

To support schools and colleges to improve their careers provision and help them to engage with the Gatsby Benchmarks, The Careers & Enterprise Company worked with the Gatsby Charitable Foundation to develop Compass – a self-assessment tool which allows schools and colleges to compare their provision to both the Gatsby Benchmarks and to other providers. Over 3,800 state-funded schools and colleges in England have completed Compass at least once and the results are reported in State of the Nation.¹⁹

By the end of the 2018/19 academic year, 47% of schools and colleges completing Compass had fully achieved Benchmark 6, indicating that all (or the overwhelming majority) of their students have at least one experience of a workplace by the end of Year 11 and another during Years 12 and 13. Most of the remaining schools and colleges had partially completed the Benchmark, meaning that at least some of their students have a workplace experience.

By tracking the Benchmark results, it is clear that schools and colleges are making progress. Of the 2,880 schools and colleges that have completed Compass more than once between 2016 and 2019, the proportion achieving Benchmark 6 has increased from 37% to 49%²⁰. With approximately 400K students of students missing out, further support is needed to enable schools and colleges to overcome the challenges and to facilitate employer engagement.

14. Buzzeo, J. & Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

15. Department for Education (2017). *Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents.* London: DfE.

16. Department for Education (2018). *Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, school leaders and school staff.* London: DfE.

17. Education and Employers (2019). *What is a meaningful encounter with the world of work?* London: Education and Employers.

18. Gatsby Charitable Foundation. (2014). *Good Career Guidance.* London: Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

19. The Careers & Enterprise Company (2019). *State of the Nation 2019: Careers and enterprise provision in England's secondary schools and colleges.* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

20. Percy, C. and Tanner, E. (2020). *Closing the Gap: Employer engagement in England's schools and colleges in 2019.* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

Evidence on successful strategies

Drawing on research evidence and case study examples, a number of recent documents set out good practice guidelines for workplace experiences. The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit for schools²¹ provides the following steer:

- Workplace experiences are part of a structured programme of work-related encounters.
- Students are active participants in choosing workplace experiences that fulfil their needs and interests.
- Students are well-prepared and well-supported during placements.
- Students engage in structured reflection after workplace experiences.
- Employers provide feedback and evaluate their experience of taking part.
- Flexible and alternative forms of workplace experience are considered to ensure that experiences have maximum impact.

The toolkit for colleges places more emphasis on alignment of experiences with career aspirations, co-designing placements with employers and skill development²². The equivalent toolkit for SEND schools²³ sets out the importance of good communication with employers, to understand the needs of young people, providing appropriate training and support during placements and recognising their contribution.

The training and resources provided by The Careers & Enterprise Company encourage Careers Leaders to use the 'meaningful encounters framework' to ensure that they plan for impact and establish learning outcomes for experiences of workplaces. The framework is structured around the cycle of planning, implementation, reflection and progression with a checklist of considerations.¹²

Previous research published by The Careers & Enterprise Company (and carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies) explored the evidence base for the three common forms of work-related learning: work experience placements, job shadowing and workplace visits²⁴.

This report outlined the following lessons for practice:

1. Ensure high-quality placement opportunities that challenge stereotypes.
2. Offer flexibility in timing and length of work experience to gain the support of employers.
3. Match student interests to placements, but challenge purely student-led approaches to ensure that workplace experiences broaden aspirations.
4. Adequately prepare students for work experience so that they know what to expect and how to behave.
5. Structure placements and include meaningful activities that students can learn from.
6. Ensure effective feedback from employers and debriefing processes for students.

21. The Careers & Enterprise Company and Career Development Institute (2019). *The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit: Practical signposting for schools*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

22. The Careers & Enterprise Company (2019). *The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit: Practical signposting for colleges*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

23. The Careers & Enterprise Company, Career Development Institute and Talentino (2019). *The SEND Gatsby Benchmark toolkit: Practical information and guidance for schools and colleges*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

24. Buzzeo, J. & Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

A recent report from the Centre for Education and Youth (previously LKMCo) offered further insight into how to make work experience 'fit for purpose', drawing on literature reviews, roundtable discussions with professionals, interviews with experts and nine case studies of schools and colleges.²⁵ The report acknowledged inequalities in access to work experience with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people more likely to miss out. It also highlighted the variable quality of experiences and the uneven distribution of good experiences across groups of young people. Recommendations were targeted at three groups: schools and colleges; employers; and government, funders and third sector organisations. The recommendations for schools and colleges were similar to those cited above, including matching pupils with appropriately stretching opportunities, offering flexibility across the academic year, preparation and debrief, supporting employers and businesses, and evaluating the quality. The report also recommended addressing inequalities in access and highlighting the benefits.

There is strong consensus about the importance of workplace experiences and what education providers and employers need to do to maximise the benefits for young people. Even so, with half of schools and colleges not yet providing workplace experiences to the majority of their students, there is clearly a need for further support.

Aims of the research

This research project was commissioned to identify the practical ways in which schools and colleges deliver experiences of workplaces. The intention was to elicit insights from a range of schools, colleges and special schools that have achieved well on Gatsby Benchmark 6 about the types of workplace experiences offered, how they are integrated with other aspects of their career programmes and strategies for overcoming the challenges to ensure that experiences are meaningful and available to all students. The report is intended to amplify the existing Gatsby Benchmark Toolkits with additional examples and ideas for improving provision.

Research methods

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with 28 Careers Leaders from schools and colleges that were achieving well on Benchmark 6 (identified through the Compass tool). Purposive sampling ensured that the Careers Leaders taking part were from a range of provider types of different sizes, and across different geographical locations in England. The sample characteristics were:

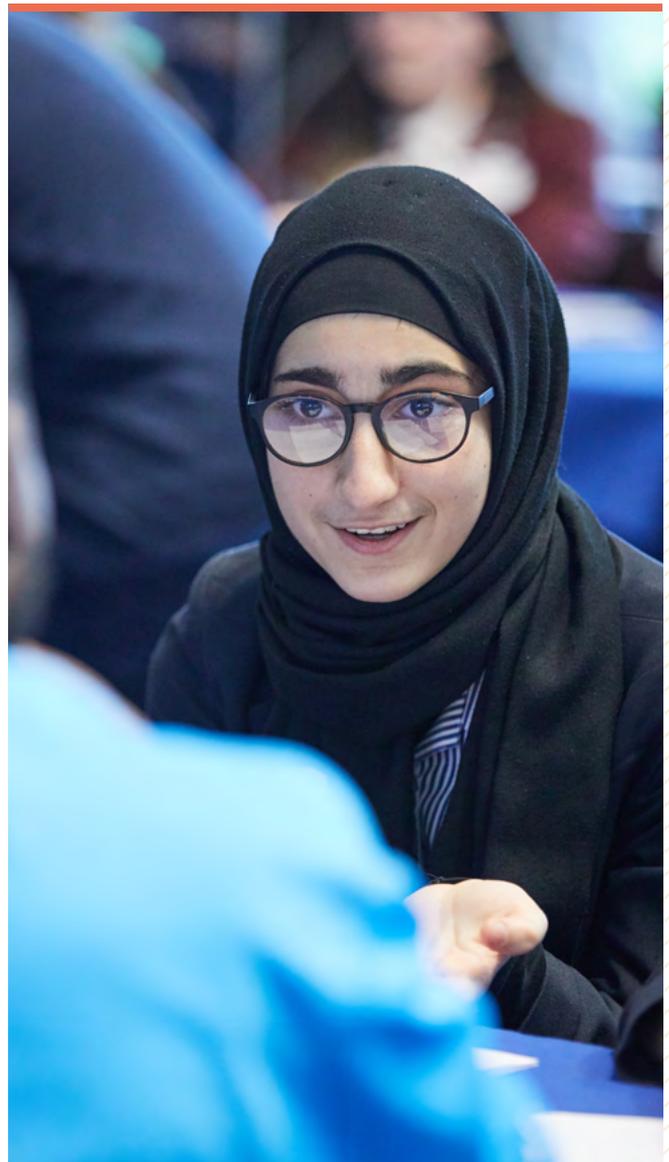
- Type: 18 secondary schools, 6 colleges, 4 special schools.
- Geography: 20 out of 38 Local Enterprise Partnership areas represented.
- Ofsted: 8 Outstanding, 15 Good, 4 Requires Improvement, 1 not known.

25. Millard, W., Shaw, B., Baars, S. & Menzies, L. (2019). *More than a job's worth: Making work experience fit for purpose* London: LKMCo.

The interviews took place during June and July 2019 and lasted approximately one hour. The interviews explored the approaches taken by schools and colleges, how they had overcome typical barriers, and innovative practices. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically to identify key themes in terms of effective practice. In addition, short vignettes were written for some of the schools and colleges summarising their approach to the Benchmark.

Report outline

The report is structured around three sections: (1) effective models of delivery and how types of workplace experiences are combined and integrated with the wider careers programme; (2) how schools and colleges achieve the volumes of experiences needed to meet Gatsby Benchmark 6; and (3) approaches for ensuring that experiences are meaningful for students.



2 | Models of workplace experiences

An important feature of the Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance is that individual career-related activities are integrated within a wider programme. This was apparent among the schools and colleges successfully delivering workplace experiences. They typically offer multiple workplace experiences that are integrated with other types of employer encounter (Benchmark 5) and curriculum learning (Benchmark 4). The types of workplace experience vary by age and phase of education from school to college and universal activities (offered to all students) are blended with bespoke and targeted activities (offered to specific groups of students). This programmatic approach can help maximise the impact of workplace experiences.



Age-related experiences

In line with previous research, the schools and colleges achieving Benchmark 6 offer different activities and experiences depending on the age and Key Stage of students.²⁶ During Key Stage 3, the emphasis is typically on raising awareness of different possible careers through a breadth of activities. For some schools, this includes job shadowing which typically involves a student accompanying a parent or family friend to their place of work for a day. Other workplace visits, sometimes linking to the curriculum and usually in groups, also begin in Key Stage 3, as do employer-led activities that involve visiting a workplace.

As students progress, activities typically become more focused on specific areas of interest, allowing them to 'stress-test' their vocational ideas.²⁷ Work experience block placements lasting one or two weeks typically take place in Years 10 or 12 with the aim of aligning these to student interests. Volunteering and part-time employment are also encouraged by some schools and colleges as ways to experience workplaces.²⁸ The narrowing focus of workplace experiences as students progress through education is most apparent in post-16 vocational study programmes which involve industry placements as part of the course.

Alongside the established categories of workplace visits, job shadowing and work experience, the chart below also includes programmes in recognition that many of the schools and colleges achieving Benchmark 6 worked with employers to offer structured programmes of experiences around specific industry areas, combining a range of activities. These might include training or skill-development activities, employer talks, workplace simulations and actual visits. An element of these programmes is typically delivered on-site, involving a workplace visit.

26. Millard, W., Bowen-Viner, K., Baars, S. and Menzies, L. (2019). *More than a job's worth: making careers education age-appropriate*. London: LKMco.

27. *ibid*

28. Although part-time employment is an additional activity and does not count towards Benchmark 6.

	Key Stage 3 Ages 11-14	Key Stage 4 Ages 14-16	Post-16 Ages 16-18
Workplace visits	Curriculum: Led by curriculum areas and connected to the curriculum, but where discussion of careers or workplace roles can be incorporated.		
	Stand-alone: Organised primarily by careers or employability staff, these visits have an explicit focus on learning about the workplace. They may be offered to whole year groups, specific groups or classes.		
Job shadowing	Job shadowing: Typically one day work shadowing with parents or other family members.		
Work experience		Block placement: Typically one or two week traditional block work experience scheme, in Year 10 or Year 12. These may be offered with the support of a brokerage service.	
		Supported experience: Flexible and supported placements for students with additional needs. May involve working in internal school or college settings and may involve experiences across the school year.	
		Volunteering and part-time employment: Voluntary work and part-time employment may be encouraged by schools and colleges. Volunteering may be supported through schemes such as the National Citizen Service or Duke of Edinburgh.	
			Vocational work placement: For students on post-16 vocational study programmes, part of the course requirements.
Programmes	Employer/industry led workplace experience activities: Employers and industry bodies offer a range of workplace activities including running their own placement schemes, 'taster days', 'open doors' events and other experiences.		
		Workplace experience programme: Structured programmes, normally one week in length, comprising a range of work-related activities, skills development or training activities, and workplace visits.	



Approaches to workplace experiences by phase of education

The blending of the activities outlined in the chart varies across phase of education and type of post-16 provider. This section provides examples from different types of mainstream secondary school and college.

Models of delivery in mainstream secondary schools

The schools in the study typically have a universal offering for all students in Key Stage 3 and 4. Key Stage 3 activities may include job shadowing or workplace visits, and Key Stage 4 activities typically include either a block placement or a workplace experience programme that reaches the vast majority of students. The universal offer is supplemented by additional experiences offered in the curriculum or through external routes, allowing individual students to maximise the potential for securing a wide range of relevant experiences. Some schools have managed to achieve a highly flexible and bespoke approach based on offering a range of opportunities for students throughout the year. In these schools, the emphasis is on monitoring and supporting the uptake of these activities.

Traditional work experience placement

All Year 10 students access two weeks' work experience at the end of the summer term. Prior to work experience, in Year 9, students took part in relevant activities including an enterprise activity and 'Resilience Week' where students are off timetable and undertake a range of activities including four sessions with local employers, and one session introducing work experience. (Wadebridge School, a mainstream academy, South West)

All Year 10 students go on a one-week work experience placement. The school also has employer partnerships with a number of key employers, and these allow all students to engage in mentoring and/or to have at least one additional 'insight visit' between Year 7 and Year 11. (The Cumberland School, mainstream academy, London)

All Year 10 students go on a one-week work experience placement. This is supported by a whole year-group trip to an employer (a local zoo) in Year 7 and a work shadowing day (with parents or relatives) in Year 8, which approximately 75% of students engage in. All students complete a survey every year identifying their career interests, and additional insight visits of employers to the school are arranged for students in accordance with their interests. (Cliff Park Ormiston Academy, mainstream academy, East of England)

Workplace visits within career-focused weeks

All Year 10 students engage in a 'Careers Exploration Week'. During this week, on 'business day', all students go on two workplace visits. Approximately 35-40 choices of visit are offered, with about 10 students attending each visit, and 20-25 staff accompanying students. Students select the visits which are of most interest having had time to explore these in assembly and with detailed information. Employer visits include finding out about career entry routes and employability skills required, and students participate in a work-based group activity – for example practising suturing on fruit (on a medical visit), practising non-armed combat (with the police), dressing a mannequin for a display (on a retail visit), attending the local Crown Court. In addition, the week includes a 'Future Options Day' where employers come into the school and deliver short sessions (25 minute) and students choose five of these to attend and participate in activities to help them better understand their work. The Exploration Week also involves personal development exercises and a business game. This week-long programme is supported by other events across the school year including a Year 9 visit to a careers fair and regular lunchtime employer talks which all students are encouraged to attend creating a drip-feed culture of careers in the school. (St Peter's School, mainstream academy, South East)

All Year 10 students engage in a week-long programme, hosted by a local Further Education college. The first two days include a range of work preparation activities, followed by a university visit on day three, and then one to two days of workplace visits. These visits are matched to student interests which are identified via a survey earlier in the year. This programme is supported by workplace visits in Year 8 where students are randomly assigned a workplace visit in different environments in groups of 10-12 students. Students with additional needs are matched to the most appropriate workplaces. (Shuttleworth College, local authority secondary, North West)

Flexible models

Employer visits are offered across all year groups and at all times of year, provided as a mix of visits run by curriculum areas, and those run by the Careers Leader. The school also has a number of programmes, mentor initiatives and enterprise activities for students between Years 7 and 13, many of which incorporate a workplace visit. The school also supports participation in the Challenge National Citizenship Service programme which engages students in volunteering as well as work experience activities. Work experience is offered to all students in Year 11 and takes place during school holidays. Although uptake is good, not all students engage in this with many choosing to do the Challenge National Citizenship Service programme and attend University Summer Schools instead. Students in Year 10 can also choose to take part in work experience following the same approach as in Year 11. Work experience has been rebranded as 'experiential learning' to encompass all kinds of learning that students may engage in. (Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College, mainstream academy, London)

Models of delivery in post-16 settings

Post-16 learners in colleges are engaged in a wide variety of study programmes with different levels of vocational focus, and different attendance requirements. Models of workplace experience offered by post-16 providers therefore are more variable than in schools and are more highly tailored to the needs of learners and requirements of study programmes. For learners on vocational programmes and in specialist land or arts-based colleges there is often a requirement for workplace experiences to be built into their courses. For others, including those following academic routes, highly bespoke forms of experience that tie in with their vocational or academic aspirations are the goal. Standard work experience weeks may be offered, but there tends to be a strong focus on students sourcing and engaging in relevant experiences throughout their learning – potentially engaging in paid work, volunteering, and other activities, either during free time or in holiday time.

Land-based college

As a specialist land-based college, the majority of students are studying vocational programmes with a work experience module embedded within them. Work experience requirements vary between courses, and for students on Entry Level and Level 1 courses, a great deal of their experience may be undertaken in a 'realistic working environment' provided through commercial enterprises the college is involved in, including the farm. An adviser is available to help students identify and secure placements. (Plumpton College, a land-based college, South East)

Further education college

This is a large college comprising approximately 2,000 learners. It has a team of six work experience consultants, who are allocated a specific set of curriculum areas and whose main role is to source placements. Once a placement is secured, the consultant passes the details to the department who help to allocate the available placements to learners based on their interests. Students are also encouraged to source their own opportunities. There is high level of variation in the nature of the placements, and how they are sourced – representing the high diversity of the curriculum areas that the college provides. The consultants have a responsibility (in liaison with departmental teams) to have an oversight of the opportunities being secured by students. (Further education college)

Sixth form college

The college has a cohort of BTEC students where work experience is embedded in the course. Apart from this cohort, students at the college are largely studying academic programmes. Students sign up to a Careers and Work Experience portal at the beginning of the year, where they identify their main vocational interests. This enables the college to send out details of specific activities offered by external organisations as they arise – for example company schemes, university summer schools, taster days and so on. Student activities are monitored through a termly survey where students are asked what work experience they have done. A curriculum audit has also helped the college to identify visits happening through the curriculum, and to encourage staff to utilise these visits for career and workplace learning (as well as curriculum enrichment). (St Dominic's Sixth Form College, London)

Every A1 (lower sixth) student experiences either a work placement or undertakes work-focused projects as part of the college's dedicated week-long project and work placement scheme held in June. Students are asked to formally apply for the scheme by completing an application form and producing a CV. Work placements provide the opportunity for students to work with and shadow professionals within a career area that they are seriously considering following in the future. The college helps to source work placements, or a student can find their own. A wide range of projects are available helping to develop a range of employability skills. A number of projects are designed to meet the needs of learners who are interested in specific vocational areas where work experience is difficult to source, for example journalism, law and media. Projects are often run by employers and some include a workplace visit. Throughout their time at college, all students carry out enrichment activities, including opportunities to volunteer in the community. (Greenhead College, a sixth form college, Yorkshire and the Humber)



Approaches to workplace experiences for students with SEND

In schools catering for students with special educational needs, workplace experiences are highly tailored. Typically, experiences are carefully designed in liaison with students, parents/carers and employers to ensure that they are appropriate. In mainstream schools, students with special needs are typically expected to engage with the universal offer of the school but are provided with additional support in order to ensure that they can benefit from these experiences.

Special School

This is a specialist school for students with complex needs, the majority of whom have autism. All students in Year 11 go on one week of work experience. The school has a database of established employers who understand the school and the students. The school also runs supported internships which are funded through the Department for Work and Pensions' 'Access to Work' scheme and supported by the city council. Interns are supported via job coaches and through accredited employability unit schemes. Visits to workplaces are also embedded throughout the curriculum. (Bank View High School, a special school, North West)

The school offers specialist provision for students with complex needs from ages 3-19. Throughout Key Stage 3 to 5, students have an entitlement for work experience. The school runs a commercial venture – a shop – and students are given a block of five days to go every morning for a week. This is offered on a weekly rotation, so students may get experience of this more than once a year. Students also do vocational learning slots on the college farm. Further in-house experiences are provided through smaller roles in the school such as the tuck shop, register duties, assembly monitors and so on. External placements are also offered where appropriate. Students fill in vocational profiles and then apply for work experience. Students discuss their interests with the Careers Leader, who then sources an appropriate placement for them. (Coppice School, a special school, Yorkshire and the Humber)

Top tips for designing an effective programme of workplace experiences

Experiences of workplaces are sequenced and part of a wider programme, rather than one-off activities.

- 1** | Build a progressive programme of employer encounters and workplace experiences, which are based on appropriate learning outcomes and support student skills development.
- 2** | Provide age-related opportunities for learners, for example:
 - At Key Stage 3, focus on breadth and include whole year employer visits or job shadowing.
 - At Key Stage 4, allow more student choice and target students' interests.
 - During post-16 learning, support individuals to choose a range of experiences, training and other activities congruent with their vocational aspirations.
- 3** | Ensure workplace experiences are appropriate to the individual needs of the learner, considering supported placements and internal placements for students who need the most support.
- 4** | Provide as wide a range as possible of additional experiences capitalising on workplace experiences and other schemes run by external organisations and employers.

3 | Securing sufficient opportunities for all students

Gatsby Benchmark 6 states that all or the overwhelming majority of students have experiences of the workplace which requires schools and colleges to be able to deliver their programme at scale. Critical to achieving this are strategies for effective employer engagement, and the identification of appropriate resources. These two areas are the focus of this chapter.



Enabling employer engagement

The schools and colleges delivering workplace experiences for their students identified three effective strategies for engaging employers: building contacts through networks, making it easy for employers to offer workplace experiences and maintaining relationships.

Building contacts through networks

For all the schools and colleges in the study, engaging employers for workplace experiences was part of a wider approach to managing employer contacts. Schools and colleges setting up experiences without the help of a brokerage service described an extensive and well-established pool of employer contacts built up over a number of years. Describing how they built their database, schools and colleges described the following approaches:

- School staff 'cold calling' employers: especially to meet specific student needs.
- Employers accessed through local or national networks including local business networks.
- Contacts made through support from an Enterprise Adviser linked to the school or college.
- Employers accessed via suggestions from school staff (often friends and relatives of staff).
- Employers accessed via suggestions from parents (normally parents themselves, but potentially others).
- Student-sourced contacts initially generated through work placement activity and retained by the school for future activities.
- Employers making direct contact with the school.

Different approaches are thought to be effective under specific circumstances. For example, where a student or group of students has a particular interest, 'cold calling' an employer can be highly effective. To gain numerous new employer contacts, mailing all staff or parents can be valuable. Identifying employers through networks

(either through local business networks, or through staff or parent networks) can be particularly beneficial as employers are likely to be well-disposed to the school and have some understanding of the needs of the students.



We also have a local business club that is made up of lots of local businesses, and we have very strong links with them.

I'm a member of a few networks and Business In The Community, so a lot... is done through that as well.

By contacting our parents and asking them for help we got many more people than we ever thought we would.

We've got a fantastic Enterprise Adviser, he provides quite a few contacts.



When I've talked about the careers day, I've labelled that as 'bring your friend to work day' to the staff. So, it was people's friends, or relatives, or people that fancied it.

Using the existing staff team... my dentist is the partner of my music teacher, my paramedic is one of the head of house dads, so it's things like that. And then you've got loyalty there as well because they're loyal to the school.

Successful schools and colleges typically utilise many different approaches to employer engagement. As a school's reputation grows for their work with employers, schools describe increasingly being contacted directly by employers who are interested in working together.

It is also important to note that the context of the school or college influences the effectiveness of approaches to building contacts. For example, schools within commuting distance of London described a wealth of opportunities in large companies keen to engage with schools as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility. Schools in very rural areas typically described employer engagement through the lens of being part of a highly localised community, emphasising the personal connections of staff, students and parents, and the school's role within the community.



It tends to be... we know the people, it's local... they've been parents at the school.



Making it easy for employers

The schools and colleges achieving well on Gatsby Benchmark 6 recognise the barriers that employers face when offering workplace experiences and emphasise the importance of making the experience of offering a visit as easy as possible.

Sometimes, this relates to administration.

Employers may also be put off by their lack of confidence in working with young people and concerns about young people's needs. In response to this, successful schools and colleges typically have a 'menu' of ways that employers can engage with school life, from school visits through to work experience – allowing employers to build up experience and confidence rather than launching straight in with offering a work experience placement.



I think because [I] go in... do all the paperwork... meet them for health and safety... they're not doing any paperwork. We tried to keep that to a minimum because I think if you present people with a huge document, and say 'can you fill this in and send it back to me?', rightly so they're busy, they're a business, they don't want the hassle..



We try and have an open door policy really, so if they want to come in and have a look round the school, they're more than welcome, because just like we haven't been into businesses, the employers have not experienced schools since the day they left... and then if they want to come in, deliver assembly - some of those barriers for them are broken down, as well, because they've been into classes, they can see how teachers are interacting with students, and that really helps as well.

Assisting employers to develop an understanding of the young people they might work with is particularly critical where young people have additional needs. Helping an employer understand the specific needs of a young person, and to think through the viability of potential job tasks is important. Again, starting with small steps and giving employers the chance to meet young people was highlighted as beneficial. This helps employers overcome any stereotypes they may have about students with SEND.

Structured employer-led activities are common in workplace experiences – either through dedicated tasks set during work placements, or simulated work-based activities during workplace visits. Another key barrier for employers therefore includes knowing how to engage with young people, and what activities might be suitable. Successful schools and colleges often offer support to employers to help them to design activities.



Talk. Go to the employer, sit them down so they can physically see the child and see how the child is sitting listening.... I explain this to [the employer] on the telephone prior to the meeting... I give them an overview of the background as much as I'm legally allowed to give and I say to them I'd much prefer if we could come in for a visit and you can decide for yourself when we come in.



With local employers, to encourage them to have placements, I've done a lot of work with them, in going in, reassuring them, and helping them put a plan in, so they say, 'well they just come here and sit here, we never know what to do with them', so I'll go in and say 'right, on the Monday do this', and then I'll try and get them to give them a project, and draw a plan up with them what they could do, and then they feel a bit better then...



Maintaining relationships

Effective employer engagement is not a one-off activity for the schools and colleges achieving well on Benchmark 6. Instead, Careers Leaders put considerable effort into maintaining existing relationships with employers which means they can be relied upon to provide good quality experiences every year. They are also continually seeking new employer contacts, in recognition that employers' circumstances can change and contacts can be lost.



Most of my employer encounters and working with businesses is me networking or me putting a shout out for 'can anyone help?' through either an alumni network or through... a couple of those websites where you just stick a call out for help and see who turns up. Then when I've made that contact I'll see if we can develop it into something else.

We've got other companies like [large consultancy firm] who would come in, who tend to get very positive feedback, and again we try and use them more and more.

Ensuring, as far as possible, that employer engagements with the school or college are positive helps to build relationships. Maintaining relationships also involves regular communication both in the build up to experiences, and subsequently. Post-placement engagement through 'thank you' letters or events can

also be highly beneficial as a way of strengthening employer contacts and securing support for the following year's activities.

Bringing employers together at an event also helps to build a community or network of employers around a school or college.



What I'll do at the end of every work experience, is I'll send letters out to the placements, thanking them, and asking them if they could have a student next year.



We actually did a graduation presentation, we invited all the employers that we've been involved with, and the work placements places. We gave them all certificates of appreciation.... it was lovely actually. It was a really nice evening, but we made a bit of a networking thing for the businesses as well, we wanted them to talk to one another and say how good it all was basically.

Building relationships with employers also involves thinking about what schools and colleges can 'give back' to employers. This may include direct gifts – such as Further Education colleges gifting training vouchers or discounts on training. Or it may include schools promoting wider employer benefits including:

- Meeting the future potential workforce.
- Enhancing the skills of current employees – particularly in terms of working with young people, mentoring and coaching.
- Meeting Corporate Social Responsibility objectives.
- The 'feel good' factor – seeing students grow from their experiences.
- The value of the work or project a young person can engage in on work placement.

Schools and colleges typically promote these benefits when they first make contact with an employer. However, post-placement activities provide a key opportunity to showcase the impacts of workplace experiences, including sharing positive employer and student stories. This may include students writing to employers and describing the benefits they have experienced or talks and presentations at an event. Sharing stories on social media is also a way of promoting the benefits of workplace experiences to students, staff, parents and employers themselves, as well as providing the employer with extra publicity.



If we've had any really positive experiences we'll share them over LinkedIn; so we'll totally, completely anonymise them, make sure that the learners are happy that we might share an experience, we might thank an employer over LinkedIn, which then helps again share the awareness, but also say to an employer, thank you so much for supporting us, so there might be a full story to match it, it might just be, 'a big thank you to whoever for supporting our learners on placement this week, they've had an amazing experience, and we hope to repeat this in future'.



Securing resources for work experience

As well as building and maintaining relationships with businesses and employers, achieving Benchmark 6 requires resource investment by schools and colleges. This includes tools, processes and staff to:

- Manage employer engagement.
- Manage and track student engagement.
- Complete necessary administrative tasks such as consent forms and health and safety checks.
- Provide additional support for students to prepare them for workplace experiences e.g. taught sessions, coaching or mentoring and career guidance.

The costs of administration are frequently identified by schools and colleges as a significant barrier, particularly to traditional block placement schemes, where paperwork completed by students, employers and parents is necessary, and where placements need to be assessed in terms of health and safety (although not all workplaces will require an onsite visit). A number of schools had moved to workplace experience programmes involving group visits instead of individual placements as a direct result of financial and time pressures. Week-long programmes still require resources – most notably staff time to organise the programme and costs of transport to and from workplace visits – but were perceived as generally more cost effective. Some of the ways in which the successful schools and colleges are meeting the resource requirements of workplace experiences are described in this section.

Brokerage services

Brokerage services are one way that some schools and colleges are addressing the resource requirements of traditional work-placement schemes. These services are typically engaged to:

- Provide a database of additional work placements for students - reducing the requirement for all placements to be sourced directly by students or by the school.
- Manage the health and safety aspects of work placements – with student-sourced and broker-provided work placements both being risk-assessed by the brokerage service.
- Facilitate tailored placements for students with additional needs.

However, the perceived value of brokerage services varied widely and depended on the nature of the services available in particular geographic areas. In some cases, brokerage services were reported as not having 'enough' placements for all students meaning that the majority of students still have to source their placements. Some schools reported that the use of a broker did not significantly reduce administration as tracking students and ensuring they complete their parts of the process remain the school's responsibility.

Schools and colleges were also concerned about the high costs of brokerage services, which in some cases made them untenable. Given that the main perceived benefits of brokerage centre on managing health and safety requirements, some schools had explored more cost-effective ways of managing these requirements themselves. In some cases, all checks were done by school staff (which may involve providing training to staff). In others, suitably qualified individuals or organisations had been commissioned. Where brokerage services are charged at a 'per pupil' rate, schools using other resources could use them selectively and save money.



It got to the stage where I felt it was pretty expensive for what we got, that was my personal feeling, and at the end of the day we were still left to actually come up with most of the placements... or getting the [students] to do it.



We've just been using someone locally... to do health and safety checks, risk assessments on the places that we think require one. Whereas before...you were paying a set fee whether they went into visit them or not - and most of them they didn't visit - I just felt, well what's the point of that?

The job coaches are... we've had to invest in paying for them all to become health and safety checked trainers basically so they're all certificated and we do the health and safety checks.



We used to use the education business partnership... and they offered a brilliant service to be honest, but it was very expensive, and also I think for a lot of schools, the main thing is that they were charging per student rather than per placement, so for example, if we have four students going to a primary school, doing exactly the same job, they would charge four times, whereas we've been to find a risk assessor that most of the other schools are now using, who charges per place rather than per placement.

[brokerage] puts that extra layer for things to potentially go wrong... I think we're quite keen on having direct oversight of it all, and there's sort of direct liaison with the company.

Managing placement schemes directly rather than using a broker was also identified by a number of Careers Leaders as allowing them to maintain clearer oversight of activities and develop more personalised working relationships with employers.

It is important to note that concern around health and safety requirements varied widely between schools, with some reporting that they felt health and safety was onerous and resource intensive, and others reporting that this was a 'myth'. The variety of perspectives, and lack of clarity suggests that additional resources for schools and colleges would be helpful in this area, allowing them to make an informed decision about the relative costs and benefits of different approaches.



Financial, staff and other resources

Schools and colleges achieving well on Benchmark 6 describe accessing different ‘pots’ of money and using these to offset some of the costs of workplace experiences. Sources of finance include: grants from local authorities, The Careers & Enterprise Company funding through being in an Opportunity Area, NCOP funding and the national Capacity and Delivery Fund. Some of these sources of funding do not directly fund workplace experiences but can be used to cover other careers programme costs and free up funding for workplace experiences. A small number of schools seek financial contributions from parents – particularly towards the costs of transport to and from workplace visits.

Resources for workplace experiences were also being provided by schools and colleges through staffing allocations. Typically, schools and colleges had staff who provided careers leadership, careers guidance, management of workplace experiences and administration support. These roles may be combined in different ways (e.g. Careers Leaders may also be careers guidance practitioners, workplace experience coordinators may also be guidance practitioners but have a separate Careers Leader, and so on). How roles are managed and blended depends on the size and profile of the school or college. However, schools and colleges reported that it was important that there was an identifiable member of staff with a clear remit for workplace experiences. The support of administrative teams or assistants was identified as critical, and many schools and colleges reported that administration was often an underestimated component in delivering workplace experiences.

Effective communication with the Senior Leadership Team was identified by Careers Leaders as critical in establishing a wider school or college culture that supports workplace experiences. Careers Leaders promoted the value of workplace experiences to senior leaders, including not only the impact on post-school destinations, but also potential benefits in terms of increased student confidence and maturity which

may have an immediate positive effect on classroom behaviour and achievement. Communication also involves establishing regular reporting procedures whereby key successes can be highlighted. A particular technique used by some schools was to engage senior leaders and other key staff in workplace visits so they can see the benefits themselves.



I think the more members of staff that can see that for themselves, and many come back and say 'oh, I couldn't believe the change in this young person, in my lesson they weren't engaged, I've never seen them smile, and there he was in a garage in a workshop, having a great time, and learning some great skills and talking to people!', so yeah, I think it's sensible to try and engage as many members of staff as you can.



We had a new head... who had cancelled the programme at his previous school, and was thinking of cancelling it here, but luckily because it's run very differently at our school, and we have many positive testimonials about its success, he sort of said, well if you could find a more cost effective risk assessor then I'm happy to continue, and actually he went out and visited students on placement as well, so he could see first-hand what the benefits were.

Tracking systems were described as increasingly important to the delivery of workplace experiences. These allow schools and colleges to provide more tailored experiences, and greater flexibility over how experiences are delivered.

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I would again advise if anyone is going to start doing this and on a bigger scale, try and invest, make sure you have some good software to start with because it will make life much easier.

We keep this spreadsheet... It allows us to see what students are interested in. Over the years the hope is... we can see if students' interests change and then it allows us to tailor their experiences.



Development of staff and resources

Successful schools and colleges are taking a proactive approach to developing the skills and resources needed to deliver workplace experiences. The Careers Leaders in this research described particular skills and attributes that they considered important including relationship

management, organisation, being proactive and able to work in networks. Attributes including being outgoing, confident, resilient and highly committed to careers and workplace experiences.



You've got to be personable for a start, and I am quite outgoing, and I will knock on doors, and I will be persistent, and I will follow things up, I have got quite a dogged approach to that, and you have to have a certain degree of resilience, you do get a lot of people who just want nothing to do with you, but I think it is just that, that drive, doing it for the students, and it's how you pitch it to the businesses, I am very friendly and I am quite bubbly.

Whenever we see something or hear of something we, sort of, jump on it and think like 'great, will you come into school?



I will find events myself on Eventbrite and send them to the students.

We pretty much keep our ear to the ground, so listening about the likes of the Law Courts, for example, only offers 2 placements, across the year, so we try and make sure that we're in on programmes like that.

Careers Leaders in the schools and colleges achieving well on Benchmark 6 were actively engaged in internal and external networks. Within the school or college, Careers Leaders described receiving support from school staff and their Enterprise Advisers. In some cases, the school has a dedicated careers working group.

Inter-school networks, including those built as part of Careers Leader training programmes, were also often mentioned as ways of sharing best practice, sharing ideas and resources, and assisting with personal and professional development.



Staff are generally quite positive towards it, I've got a group who help with enhancing careers in curriculum and they are all generally young and enthusiastic staff.



The most useful thing, honestly, is when you talk to other Careers Leaders, and they share their best practice... I've been doing the Careers Leader training... and the nicest part of that almost is the meeting up with the other people.

This networking often led to the sharing and developing of resources and materials such as student booklets, employer packs, letters and so on which improved the efficiency of setting up experiences. Other benefits of collaboration between schools include coordination of placements. For example, some schools stagger the work placement weeks to prevent employers becoming over-loaded with requests for experience, and others work together on specific programmes or approaches.



So we have stuck with the same week because [local schools are] all trying to go out at different times so we're not in competition. For years we've been the third week in June, just so again we stagger it with everybody else.

We as a partnership have got together to establish a common set of documentation, so that our local employers can see the same documentation from whichever five/six schools in [the area] they are having a student from and that helps them.



Top tips for securing workplace experiences for every student

Employer contact strategies are designed to achieve sufficient opportunities for all students to take part.

1 | Build a wide network of employers who can provide workplace experiences through:

- Involving parents and staff in sourcing employers.
- Engaging in business networks.
- Capitalising on student-sourced contacts.
- Providing a clear point of contact for employers.
- Develop partnerships or agreements with key employers.

2 | Maintain relationships through regular communication with employers to keep them engaged and maximise the opportunities through:

- Sending thank-you letters to employers after workplace experiences.
- Inviting employers to business breakfasts or other events.
- Communicating benefits of workplace experiences and good news stories.
- Providing incentives where possible - such as discounts on training provided by FE colleges or offering school/college space for business meetings.

3 | Make offering experiences of workplaces as easy as possible for employers by:

- Providing opportunities for employers to get to know the school or college, building confidence and exposure to young people.
- Providing simplified paperwork and offering support to complete it.

- Offering guidance on effective design of activities or structure of work placements.
- Providing guidance on safeguarding and health and safety.

4 | Meet the resource requirements of workplace experiences by:

- Identifying and articulating staff roles in delivering workplace experiences.
- Ensuring adequate support or allocation of time for the necessary administration.
- Considering the most efficient approach to health and safety checks which may include brokerage services, externally commissioned staff, or training internal staff.
- Seeking additional financial resources where possible which may include project funding for specific activities.
- Securing buy-in from Senior Leadership Teams, through:
 - Establishing regular reporting mechanisms.
 - Engaging Senior Leaders in workplace experience so they can see benefits first-hand.
- Making use of digital tracking systems (such as Compass+).
- Building capacity in the school or college including:
 - Investing in Careers Leader development and training.
 - Building networks or steering groups among school staff.

4 | Ensuring experiences of workplaces are meaningful

Schools and colleges successfully delivering workplace experiences do not just focus on the quantity of activities, but aim to ensure that they are meaningful so that students benefit through increased knowledge and improved skills. Careers Leaders noted that meaningful workplace experiences also have a wider benefit of building the reputation of the school or college programme, resulting in a 'virtuous circle' of increasing interest from pupils, staff, parents, and employers themselves. This section describes the practical ways in which schools and colleges make workplace experiences meaningful by maximising the opportunities for learning and tailoring to individuals.



Maximising the opportunities for learning

Embedding workplace experiences in the wider careers programme

One way that successful schools and colleges are ensuring that experiences are meaningful is by ensuring they are fully embedded in their wider careers programme. This helps students and teaching staff to make the connection with the curriculum and to understand how different careers-related activities combine to build skills and knowledge. For employers, it is valuable to connect with the school and college in different ways.

Establishing a school or college culture in which workplace experiences are seen as a 'core' part of careers provision is important and helps set an expectation that all students will engage.



I think making it a kind of blanket expectation... that it is part and parcel of [a student's] school career, and so they kind of see other students doing it, they know that it's coming, it's something that they can kind of look forward to, and I think more and more, it gets embedded into the school calendar, then the higher status it seems to get.

Thinking holistically and across the benchmarks helps connect workplace experiences to other in-school activities and to maximise their impact. The schools and colleges taking part in the research typically described addressing Benchmark 5 (Encounters with employers and employees) and Benchmark 6 together. This may involve, for example, an employer delivering a talk in school or college, which is followed up by a visit to that employer.²⁹ Many schools and colleges also report students securing work placements with employers who they have had contact with via classroom presentations, assemblies or employer talks.

There are also other links across the benchmarks, for example, where traditional block placement schemes are offered, schools and colleges describe utilising staff visits to work places as a way of engaging staff and assisting with Benchmark 4 (Linking curriculum learning with careers).



A lot of the companies that take work experience students, subsequently also come and support maths lessons, so we're quite pleased that we are meeting Benchmark 4 very well as well...and what I try to do, not always possible, but when I have fifty plus members of staff that offered to go and visit students, I will try and allocate them a visit that is linked to their subject area, so a food tech teacher will go and visit a catering establishment, that type of thing, or a science teacher will visit an engineering placement, really with the aim of them establishing some more links with companies that can support them with their teaching.

29. It is notable that Education and Employers (2019) and other research discusses 'employer engagement' in education more widely, rather than differentiating between off-site visits and school or college based activities.

Maximising the potential for trips undertaken in other parts of school life (for example through the curriculum or personal development activities) to incorporate a workplace component is also valuable. Specifically visits to higher or further education colleges (which meet Benchmark 7) may also become workplace visits.³⁰ Indeed for some students interested in academic careers, a university visit or summer school may be a highly relevant form of workplace experience.



We try and make sure they see the behind the scenes people, they meet the catering staff, they meet HR, they meet finance, they meet the marketing teams, so they've got more of an idea of what happens in the places.



30. Note that Education and Employers (2019) also classes visits to FE and HE institutions as 'encounters with the world of work'.

Preparing and debriefing

Maximising the learning potential of workplace experiences involves providing students with structured opportunities to prepare for and reflect on their experiences. This is supported by embedding experiences within the wider careers programme of the school as outlined above.

With traditional block placements, there is typically a long preparation period with schools and colleges introducing the scheme up to a year before placements take place. Preparation often begins with whole year group activities such as assemblies and parents evenings. This is followed by a series of more structured learning interventions conducted in lesson time or tutorial time focusing on key topics to help prepare students. These may include interventions on:

- CV and letter writing.
- How to find placements (including the value of networking).
- Company research.
- Interviews and phone calls.

For schools offering workplace experience programmes including one or more employer visits, additional preparation for the visits typically takes place within the programme itself.



[in the workplace experience programme]...for the first two days it's all preparation tasks. So how to write a C.V., what are skills, how do you identify skills, interview preparation, team building tasks, communications tasks, they will have a mock interview, they have to turn up in business dress, they look at formal language around skills and careers.

After workplace experiences, schools and colleges typically provide opportunities for reflection and follow up activities. This may include embedding reflection within subsequent careers guidance interviews, or

reflection embedded into class-based activities or offering a stand-alone post-experience event which allows for reflection and planning subsequent activities.



[this] will then feed into my careers meetings with these students, so we talk about how the work experience went, how they feel about it, what they feel they've learned about it.

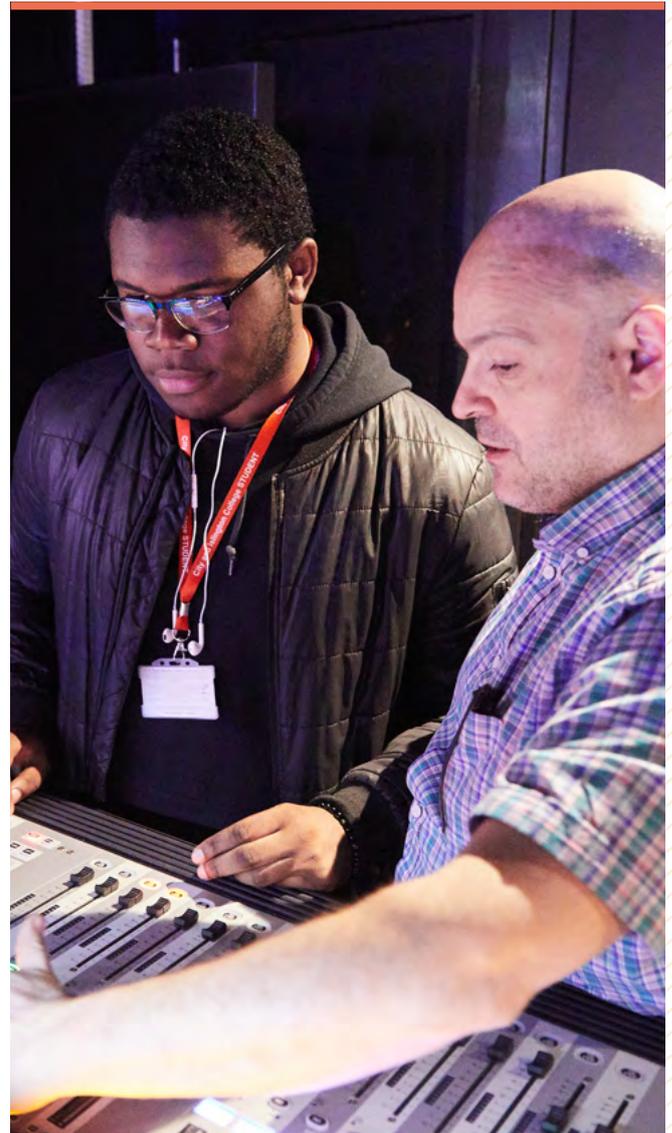
When they return to school, they share what they've done with people in their class groups because they will have all gone to different places.



So the first Monday that they come back into school, we have a collapsed morning of debrief activities, so they would complete an evaluation then, so that we can gauge their experiences. They'll write a thank you letter to the employer, they'll receive a certificate of achievement, and they also have access to staff, or a kudos programme to record the skills that they have learned. Often within different subjects, I'll ask students to produce a piece of work, that's related to their work experience, so they'll often do that within foreign languages.



We've got a celebration of work experience... I'll do a bit about work experience successes, and a bit of recapping, [an employer] will then do a ten minute talk about her journey, the importance of work experience, and what skills employers look for, and then she will then present the certificates... then I will finalise that with 'right, now, go - over the six weeks holiday - go and write a thank you letter, or an email, to your placement, update your C.V.', and I'll show them their C.V. and where they need to put their work experience in there...because the first collapsed timetable day we have in Year 11, which is in October, will be their mock interview C.V. application day, so they will all come in business dress with their C.V.s and have a mock interview, so that feeds in then to that.



Authenticity

It is important for experiences of the workplace to be 'authentic'.³¹ In this research, successful schools and colleges described the practical ways in which they maximised the authenticity of experiences.

Experiences which include a realistic application process, and relevant practical tasks are particularly valuable. Realistic application processes include students researching and contacting employers themselves. Additionally, some schools and colleges ask students to submit C.V.s. Where a database of placements is provided by a brokerage service, viewing these, selecting and applying may mirror a job-search process. In one school, the school itself sources placement 'vacancies', advertises these, and asks students to apply. Application processes may also be used for workplace visits organised by the school or college.



So I've got a vacancy board, which I advertise the vacancy... and they look on the board, and if they're interested, they'll write a letter to me, explaining why they want to go to that placement, why it's suitable for them, etc, that is how I allocate students to the placements that I've got, and if there's two or three, and there's only one place, I'll get them in another chat, and I'll decide which one I feel is best, and give them feedback if they don't get it, etc, so try and make it a bit of a real process.

We encourage them to self-place in effect, because we feel that that's all part of the work experience, the fact that they need to have some skills for confidence, to make initial contact with potential companies.

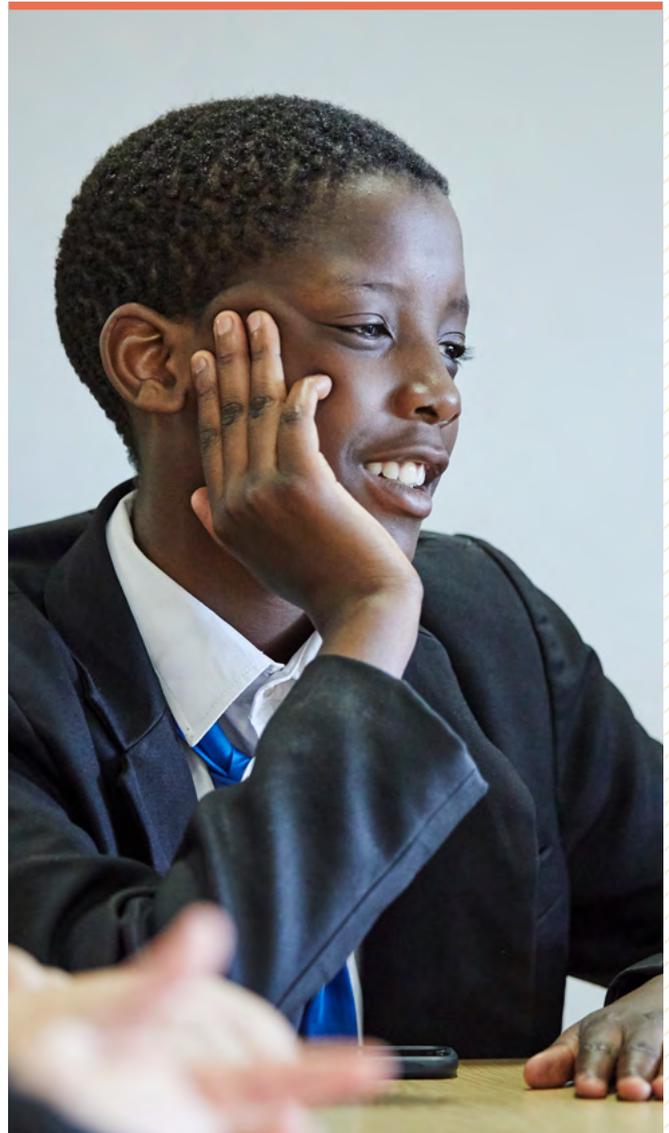
31. Education and Employers (2019). *What is a meaningful encounter with the world of work?* London: Education and Employers.

Other means of providing authentic experiences include encouraging students to attend workplace experiences in working dress, and to make their own way to visits or placements on public transport.

Ensuring workplace experiences involve relevant practical tasks and avoiding work placements which just include 'making the tea', or workplace visits which are non-interactive is also important. Where traditional block placement schemes are offered this can involve schools working with employers, or through a broker to design a job description for a student. In some cases the student is expected to negotiate with an employer themselves to lay out activities for the week. The school may also support an employer to think of relevant tasks that they could set for a student while on placement.³² Where workplace visits are offered schools and colleges often support employers to design a structured programme for the visit, which typically comprises of a workplace tour, a talk, and an interactive activity.³³



...in [name of city], we have [] manufacturing week... I do a range of assemblies, leading up ..., and anybody who is interested in going to visit one of the companies has to send me a letter of application as to why they would like to do that again, just getting them ready for the world of work, and the formal side to it.



32. Further details of how schools support employers to deliver meaningful experiences is contained in the earlier section of this report on employer engagement.

33. Further details of the design of meaningful experiences in workplace experience programmes is contained in the earlier section of this report on models of delivery.



Tailoring to individual needs

Challenging inequalities and raising aspirations

There is a risk that workplace experiences reinforce social inequalities between students, especially in traditional block placement schemes where students identify their own placements, and rely on their family networks.³⁴ However, there can be benefits to students setting up their own experiences. Successful schools and colleges manage this dilemma by building

in multiple employer experiences through the early years of secondary school, reinforced by a strong careers education programme. This helps provide broad exposure to different kinds of careers and workplaces, challenge stereotypes and raise aspirations. As a result, by the time students engage in workplace experiences in upper secondary, they are able to make more informed choices.



Well, Years 7/8/9 I get them to start thinking about their skill set, what their interests are. I try and widen their thought process as much as I can... exposing them to a range of different businesses and that sort of thing. Then when they get to Year 10 they will do some work on possibly a kudos or First Start programme where they answer all the questions about different jobs, then I get them to do some research into those jobs so that they can see those. So that by the time they start looking for work experience they at least had some exposure to a range of different sectors.



Particularly in Year 8 [workplace visits] it is a lot easier to [challenge stereotypes] as they're not related to aspiration, so I deliberately send girls to engineering companies for instance. We've got about 45% Pupil Premium so they are prioritised to some of the key employers just because it tends to be those who have the least idea about the range of opportunities there are.

34. Buzzeo, J. & Cifci, M. (2017). *Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits. What works?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.



The fact that we encourage students to find their own placements I think is really important and we've put an emphasis on the fact that they should be looking at an area that they're really interested in. But I actually think that we raise aspirations in different ways for our careers programme, so our insight into industry sessions that we put on for example, we challenge those stereotypes by the employers that we have in. So we've had female engineers coming in for example, female lawyers are coming in, so industry areas that they're traditionally seen as being male dominated we make sure that we have that balance in there.



Enabling appropriate matching of interests to workplace experiences

Ensuring a 'match' between a student's vocational interests and their workplace experiences is another important aspect of ensuring that experiences are beneficial. By Year 10 most of the schools and colleges in this research were using some form of survey or vocational profiling to identify their students' career interests. By this point, students have been exposed to a range of options and have been developing their ideas. The profiling activities then provide staff with information about the interests and needs of each individual student. For schools offering traditional block

placements this information is often used alongside details of students' academic achievement to identify the appropriacy of the placement selected by the student. Where there is a mismatch, schools commonly provide additional support.

Where a school is offering a workplace experience programme including employer visits, information from student surveys or vocational profiles is normally used to enable the school to design an appropriate 'menu' of employer visits.



I've prepared this overall spreadsheet to show where everybody's going, and the type of work experience they're planning to do, so they [the pastoral team] will also have sight of that, and can flag up any that they feel perhaps is not the best fit, or not the most suitable, and we can have that conversation with the student.



Prior to day one, I complete a Year 10 audit, where it's literally, an A4 piece of paper with all the sectors on, and they have to choose two jobs, or careers that they think they might like to go into, that I collate all of that information, so when it comes to their workplace visit, I match them up with what they've asked for, and I would say 95% of students have got exactly what they've asked for.



Additional support

Some students require additional support where they are struggling to identify their vocational interests, or to find and secure a work placement (in the case of traditional block placement schemes). This support may be offered by a Careers Adviser or a job coach, and may be delivered in small groups or one to one.



I keep a database... so I know who's going where and I know which students haven't got anywhere... [After September] I start picking those students up that haven't got anywhere. I just have a quick meeting with them. Do you know where you want to go, how are you doing with finding things, what have you done? And if they say they have no idea whatsoever then that's when we sit and start talking about all the different areas. I might get them some numbers or some email addresses and ask them to go away for two weeks and have a go themselves and then I'll get them back and see how they're doing. If they're still really struggling, that's when I'll jump in and say right, OK, I'll make some phone calls and I'll try and sort that out. But they are encouraged as much as possible to have a go themselves.

At post-16 level, where students are typically more vocationally focused, support may require a level of subject or sector expertise. This can be addressed

through liaison between careers staff and departmental staff, or in larger colleges may include a team of careers staff or job coaches allocated to different subject areas.



In January we start what we call our matching process and that's when we meet... it's myself and a team of staff, usually it is staff from a related department, so for instance performing arts brings in the head of our theatre studies department, for politics placements, politics teachers get involved and so on. We then start this matching process where we'll meet with the students [in small groups], tell them more about it. We try and build in a little bit of careers advice and guidance at that stage as well.



So the Work Placement Job Coaches are the people who work one on one with the academic areas and the students across all of our different academic areas, and they're the ones that will help to make sure that they're making the right choices from the work placement point of view and work experience activities and that they're prepared to actually get the best out of it, setting them targets.

A highly personalised approach is evident in schools and colleges working with students with additional needs. Typically, staff work as a team including support workers, teaching assistants, SENCO, and often parents or carers, to help build an appropriate opportunity for a young person. In mainstream schools, students with additional needs are often given the same opportunity as other students to identify their own placement, but are typically offered enhanced support from an earlier point.



Those who are Pupil Premium or disadvantaged we will do that support early on, so we'll give them a couple of weeks to go and find a placement and then come October half term we will start putting that support in immediately to try and get them into... a work placement that's a bit more aspirational.... So the intervention goes in early to try and say, "actually it's only one bus ride, you can get it here, it's easy to do this," and try and do something different to try and widen their horizons.



Flexible models

Building in flexibility to workplace experience programmes is important to allow students to secure the most relevant experiences. This is particularly the case for students aspiring to certain careers where 'hands on' experience in that career may be difficult to source, because of restrictions on what a student is able to do, or where there is high demand and limited availability of placements.³⁵ This is particularly commonly mentioned in terms of careers such as medicine and law.

Flexibility involves thinking broadly about what constitutes an experience of the workplace, and helping employers, students, and staff to think creatively about how relevant experiences can be designed. Particularly in terms of traditional block-placements, this involves recognising that shadowing may in some cases be more effective than hands on experience, especially if complemented with structured on-site activities. Flexibility also involves allowing opportunities for students to engage with relevant experiences at different times in the year, and not just at certain points in the academic calendar.³⁶ Again this is particularly important for individuals with a clear vocational focus, allowing them to access relevant schemes run by employers or sectoral bodies.

In one school, flexibility extended to accommodating workplace experience which takes place outside of 9-5 hours, including shift work.



So, a learner sourced a placement with the NHS Trust, and it was a week's placement, but it wasn't during the placement period. It was too good an opportunity for them not to go and do it. So, the curriculum managed to [arrange it] so that the learner came in on their own time during the half-term to catch up on any work they missed.

What we're trying to do is get students to shadow professionals when they're out so clearly every single placement is different and it depends on the organisation as to how they're structured. Some will get the student to do little mini projects and will literally have them observing only and can't actually do anything clearly that's confidential or you have to be highly trained to do it... I think that helps as well because we don't dictate to a company what they must do.

35. Buzzeo & Cifci (2017). also identify the importance of shadowing in technical and highly skilled areas of work.

36. Also identified as important by Buzzeo & Cifci (2017)

Top tips for making experiences of workplaces meaningful

Workplace experiences are integrated with other career learning opportunities, are tailored to student needs and interests are authentic.

1 | Embed experiences of workplaces in the wider careers programme by:

- Making experiences of the workplace a central part of the careers programme and establishing a clear expectation that all students will engage.
- Identifying mechanisms to enable workplace experiences to integrate with other Gatsby Benchmarks, including:
 - Developing an integrated approach to workplace experiences and employer and employee encounters.
 - When allocating staff to workplace visits, linking staff to employers relevant to their curriculum area to support CPD and potential future curriculum-employer linkages.
 - Including a workplace experience element during visits to FE and HE providers.

2 | Balance student choice and raising aspiration by:

- Providing experiences throughout Key Stage 3 to raise aspirations and challenge stereotypes to enable students to select stretching experiences in Key Stage 4.
- Seeking vocational interests of students prior to workplace experiences to enable matching and monitoring.

- Providing a clear structure and timeline for students who are choosing workplace experiences. Provide additional support through careers guidance or job coaching to those students who do not identify suitable experiences within these timescales.

3 | Provide opportunities for students to maximise their learning by:

- Preparing students for workplace experiences through structured activities such as company research, C.V. and letter writing, networking, interviews and phone calls.
- Providing booklets and resources to help students track and record their workplace experiences.
- Providing reflection and debriefing opportunities after workplace experiences which may include events, 'off-timetable' days or careers guidance sessions.
- Identifying how to make experiences as authentic as possible – including using realistic application processes.

4 | Build flexibility into programmes to allow individuals to take part in multiple workplace experiences at different times in the academic year if this is more suitable to their interests and aspirations.

5 | Summary and sources of support

This report provides insights from the Careers Leaders in 28 secondary schools, colleges and special schools that are successfully delivering experiences of workplaces. The intention of the report is to provide practical ideas about the design of workplace experience programmes, how schools ensure effective delivery of volumes of workplace experience, and how schools ensure that experiences

are meaningful. The report also describes how the Careers Leaders addressed the common challenges of funding, resources, and health and safety. Their experiences varied widely, shaped by local context and the availability of support. 'Top tips' are shared to help other schools and colleges develop their provision of workplace experiences.

Support available from The Careers & Enterprise Company

The Careers & Enterprise Company provides support to schools and colleges across England to help them meet the Gatsby Benchmarks. Details and links are provided below.



The **Gatsby Benchmark Toolkits** provide resources on Benchmark 6 that are tailored to schools¹, colleges² and special schools³. These include tips for education providers and employers, the evidence for why workplace experiences matter, links to toolkits and resources developed by other organisations and links to The Careers & Enterprise Company's free online training module⁴.



Schools and colleges in the Enterprise Adviser Network also receive support from a trained **Enterprise Coordinator** who provides information, advice and support to schools and facilitates link to local employers.



Compass +⁶ is a new digital tool to help schools benchmark, manage, track and report on their careers programme. Compass+ is available for all secondary schools, special schools, sixth-forms and PRUs in England. The tool helps Careers Leaders to target careers activities on the students most in need and to reach and build a wider network of employers and career partners.



The Enterprise Adviser Network⁵ supports schools and colleges by linking them to an **Enterprise Adviser**, a senior business volunteer, who can help the school or college to develop its careers and enterprise plan, connect with local and national employers and find out more about the local and national labour market.



Compass⁷ and **Tracker⁸**, which enables schools and colleges to log activities and see the impact on Compass results, can also be used outside of Compass +.



The **Youth Social Action Toolkit⁹** makes it easier to join up social action with careers education in schools and colleges. It provides free resources, ideas and case studies for enabling young people to take part and for engaging employers.



Find an Activity Provider¹⁰ helps connect schools and colleges with organisations that provide workplace experiences and employer encounters. The search can be filtered by area, type of activity, industry sector and suitability for young people with SEND.



The **meaningful encounters framework¹¹** and checklist¹² are a useful resource for workplace experiences. It highlights considerations to maximise the value of encounters with employers at each stage of planning, implementation, reflection and progression.



The **Careers Leader Training¹³**, available online and face to face, helps Careers Leaders to understand their role and to develop the skills required to strategically and successfully embed a careers programme in their school or college.



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