



Introducing Talking Futures



Why parental engagement is crucial for realising systemic change



Nicola Hall, Director of Education at The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)

Working with schools and colleges to help young people to find their best next step is the mission of the CEC and the role of the Careers Leader. As the “conductor of the orchestra” the role of the Careers Leader, as described by Sir John Holman of The Gatsby Foundation, is predicated by balancing complex pathway information, multiple priorities, stakeholders and indeed influencers in pursuit of the delivery of a world class careers guidance offer for the young people they work with.

Parents and guardians have significant influence on their child’s career decision making and choices, such that it is strategically important for the CEC to help Careers Leaders equip parents to have impartial, constructive, and well-informed careers conversations.

Both Gatsby and the CEC share an ambition to build on early pilot work and scale up the range of support available to all school and college Careers Leaders in respect to parental engagement in careers. Our role will be to provide Careers Leaders with the tools and inspiration they need to support parents to navigate complex careers pathways and a widening landscape of choice.

The partnership will see the Talking Futures programme rolled out at scale, whilst simultaneously continuing to test and pilot new and innovative approaches to parental engagement through the Careers Hub infrastructure. Talking Futures aims to realise an ambition of long term systemic and positive behaviour changes in the way that parents approach careers conversations with their children.

We ask and encourage all Education Leaders to guide and support Careers Leaders to identify opportunities to enhance parental engagement through the lens of careers, student transition and progression; to advocate impartiality and to foster positive relationships with parents that lead to openness when it comes to their children’s destination.

We’re excited to be able to give our key partners and stakeholders an introduction to The Careers & Enterprise Company’s latest programme – equipping Careers Leaders to embed sustainable parental¹ engagement methods in their everyday practice.



¹ Throughout this document and the Talking Futures materials, the word ‘parent’ is used to refer to parents, carers and guardians and other influencers on a young person

The role of parental engagement in careers guidance



Gatsby believes that every young person should have the careers guidance they need to make informed and ambitious

choices about their future. Schools and colleges have made great progress working towards the Gatsby Benchmarks, and providing young people with the experiences they need as they transition to their next steps, but it is widely recognised parents are one of the most influential forces in a young person's career and education decision making.

Since 2019, Gatsby has been researching and piloting activity to explore what more can be done to help parents support their children in their education and career decision making². Our work, including reviewing international best practice and multiple studies of parents in England, has highlighted that parents can find it difficult to understand the full range of pathways that lead to different occupations, relying on their own experiences to inform their discussions with their children and can struggle to know where to go for support. They also talk to their children about their future as early as Year 7, often long before discussions about options and pathways begin at school and college.

To help parents and families, particularly those in the most challenging circumstances, we believe there is a great opportunity for Careers Leaders to build parental engagement into their robust and impactful careers programmes. This can enable parents to work alongside schools and colleges to ensure that young people are receiving the best possible preparation for their next step. A strong relationship with parents can also bring great benefits to the wider careers programme, helping to evaluate and shape the programme (Benchmark 1) and also expand networks of employer contacts (Benchmarks 5 and 6).

Over the last year, Gatsby has built on these findings to pilot a programme of support for parents called Talking Futures in several schools and colleges in different regions across the country. The activities and resources were developed with insights from our research and in collaboration with Careers Leaders, careers advisers, parents and young people. This pilot has shown us that, even in a short time, working with parents as part of the school or college careers programme and using Talking Futures resources can:

- Broaden the sources that parents use to inform discussions
- Lead parents to be more open to a range of education pathways (particularly technical routes)
- Create a feeling of positivity in young people about careers conversations with their parents, inspiring them to carry out further research

We are therefore delighted to be continuing this work with The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) who, over the next two years, will be building on the current Talking Futures programme and supporting all Careers Leaders to enhance their own approaches to parental engagement. Gatsby will also continue to pilot resources and materials, and we look forward to learning from Careers Leaders as parental engagement is more strongly embedded into careers programmes in the years to come.

² <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/programmes/supporting-parental-engagement-in-career-guidance>

What the research tells us

We know that more needs to be done to engage parents in the career guidance of their children. We also know that there are several challenges associated with achieving this. Commissioned by The Gatsby Foundation, two recent pieces of research have generated insight into this area:

1. A literature review, undertaken by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research
2. A large survey, backed up by qualitative insights, of parents

Three key things the research told us:

- 1** | It's possible to identify four groups of parents, based on their confidence with their children and their attitude to school and college including careers provision. Careers Leaders could use these groups as a basis for differentiating parental engagement and support methods. Read more about the groups here.

Group 1

Have a strong relationship with their children. Content to take a back seat in decision making but happy to be involved by their institution.

Group 2

Highly engaged. Often educated to Level 3 and above. Have high expectations, have regular careers conversations but may hold misconceptions, especially about technical pathways.

Group 3

Have a more distant relationship with their children and/or limited engagement with their institution. May lack knowledge and confidence that holds them back.

Group 4

Highly anxious about their children's future. Receptive to engagement from their institution, but current approaches may not be appropriate for them.



2 | **When parents have careers conversations with their children, they take action.** This means it is crucial that Careers Leaders equip parents with current, accurate and encouraging information so that the impact of parent-child conversations is positive and appropriate. Read more about this here.

3 | **Parents feel more could be done** to help them advise their children about future career choices. In addition to this, an overwhelming preference from all parents was for information to be tailored and targeted to their child. Read more here about how to better support parents and see below for three key ways that Careers Leaders can help:

- ✓ Parents tend to start talking to young people about their futures as early as Year 7 – often earlier than schools start sending information home. There is a clear opportunity for Careers Leaders to engage parents in the careers programme right from the start of their school or college careers journey.
- ✓ 85% of parents said they would carry out careers activities with their child at home if prompted to do so. Careers Leaders have a great opportunity to lead the way with this.
- ✓ Careers Leaders can map out the stages involved in careers decision-making, the choices along the way and the routes available at each stage. This is good practice for the young person too.

2/3

of parents reported some positive action took place as a result of a conversation with their child

24%

of parents surveyed say their child did further research about careers options following a careers conversation

22%

of parents surveyed did further research with their child about career options following a careers conversation

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We get so caught up in schools with ‘this is what we’ve got to do’ and ‘we’re the experts’, but actually the most influential people are the parents so we need to empower them to have those conversations with their children to make our jobs easier.

Careers Leader

How the research was used

In 2020, The Gatsby Foundation committed to developing and piloting approaches to parental engagement in careers guidance, so that they could better understand how to help schools and colleges support parents to talk to their children about key education and career decisions.

Using the research sign-posted to above, and with input from educators, parents and students, The Gatsby Foundation commissioned the development of resources and tools to help parents and educators to work together to support young people to make informed decisions about their futures.

The output of this piece of work is the Talking Futures Toolkit and supporting resources, which can now be found on the CEC's Resource Directory.

During the 2020/21 academic year, Talking Futures was piloted with a mixed sample of age 11-16 schools, age 11-18 schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges across six different LEP regions in England.

We will be continuing to pilot and learn from Careers Leaders over the next academic year as they take up and experiment with Talking Futures in their own school or college context.



If I was looking for stuff to do with parents I wouldn't be going anywhere else. I would be going there [...] that's where I can get almost everything that I need for parents. How to present it and get it across and how to engage them, that's what is there. So that will be my default place to go to for anything to do with parents, certainly.

Careers Leader,
speaking about the Talking Futures content

Four key findings from the pilot

- Talking Futures is a flexible programme and schools and colleges have been able to use it in a wide variety of ways to embed parental engagement in careers – from multi-faceted use of different activities with parents and students, through to planning and reviewing how their programme should look in the future. **The most successful institutions were those who used the Talking Futures Toolkit to take a strategic perspective**, designing an approach that builds on current parental engagement activity across the institution and addresses a particular gap in provision.
- As for careers in general, Talking Futures was **most effective when senior leadership teams gave strong backing to their Careers Leader** to try a new approach and experiment.
- Talking Futures is having an impact on parents: two terms into the programme, **more parents are basing their conversations with their children on school/college information or events, rather than their own experiences**. More young people are also following up on these conversations with further research of their own.
- Parents involved in the programme have also had their horizons broadened: they are **more likely to consider the full range of qualification routes for their child**, with a strong increase in those considering T-Levels, and encouraging signs for other technical education options and apprenticeships.

You can find a summary of insights from the 2020-21 pilot [here](#).

Where the CEC will go next

The research and piloting work led by The Gatsby Foundation has reinforced the importance of parental engagement in careers guidance. The CEC are excited to be taking on the next phase of the programme.

Over the next two years, we will build on the current Talking Futures scheme - and innovate new approaches - so that Careers Leaders can embed sustainable parental engagement methods in everyday practice. We'll be doing this in four stages:

- 1. Raising the profile of parental engagement as core to career guidance** by engaging with our network and key partners
- 2. Finding the best ways to equip Careers Leaders to put parental engagement at the heart of their strategic programmes** through the development and testing of new resources, training and research

3. Identifying opportunities to weave a parental engagement focus into other areas of our work by thinking about the role that different stakeholder groups can play in this agenda

4. Amplifying our parental engagement focus in the second year by reviewing and refining our year one outputs and releasing new materials

All our work over the next two years will seek to tackle the problems that Careers Leaders face when trying to engage parents in career guidance. As such, we'll be thinking about how we can support schools and colleges to:

- Build strong connections with their parent community
- Create inclusive communications
- Provide current, accurate and encouraging information
- Ensure parent-child careers conversations take place at the moments that matter



How you can get involved

- Access all Talking Futures resources via the [CEC Resource Directory](#). We encourage you to direct your networks of Careers Leaders and other relevant stakeholders to the same place
- This is an evolving piece of work so look out in the usual communications channels for more updates over the academic year, including opportunities to participate in evaluation

We'd also like to know about good parental engagement practice already taking place in your local areas, schools and colleges., and welcome any feedback you have on the current Talking Futures resources.

Please email us at

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