

Careers Impact:

# National System Review 2

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Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your  
careers provision: Educator Guide



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# Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your careers provision:

## Using this guide

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This summary highlights the essential insights from the Careers Impact National System Review conducted by The Careers & Enterprise Company. Use this summary to navigate the guide's relevant sections and access the key guidance on driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your careers provision.

For more information about the Careers Impact System and the National System Review, please click [here](#).

## Navigation

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### 1. Identify disadvantage and vulnerability using information and data:

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- Identify groups of learners and learner context that can indicate risk of disadvantage or vulnerability
- Identify outcomes/data insight that can indicate disadvantage or vulnerability
- Track, record and establish cross-team information sharing systems and processes to effectively identify learners at risk of disadvantage or vulnerability

### 2. Make careers provision responsive:

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- Use data and insight to underpin careers provision, with progressive learning outcomes responsive to the needs of cohorts and individuals
- Maximise the value of work experiences and employer encounters within Careers Learning Journeys
- Apply ongoing monitoring of learner progress (i.e. intended destinations and Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) data) and adjust interventions using performance and destinations data to address identified barriers

### 3. Integrate careers provision into strategy:

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- Develop a strategic careers plan and embed careers in whole school/college improvement planning
- Position careers provision as integral to the whole school/college approach for tackling disadvantage
- Ensure careers is embedded across the curriculum, focusing on personal development and skills development

### 4. Empower Careers Leaders and strengthen leadership support:

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- Give Careers Leaders autonomy to deliver a strategic and sustainable approach to careers and embed it into the school's/college's wider improvement priorities. Support Careers Leaders to engage in relevant continuing professional development (CPD)
- Ensure strong leadership support, with headteachers and governors prioritising careers as a strategic approach to raise aspirations and tackle disadvantage



# Insight 1

## Identify disadvantage and vulnerability using information and data

The Review highlighted how schools, special schools and colleges demonstrated a strong commitment and effective practices using comprehensive methods for identifying, tracking, recording and sharing information about learners at risk of negative impacts of disadvantage or vulnerability.

### Methods

1. Identification of groups of learners and learner context that can indicate risk of disadvantage or vulnerability
2. Identification of outcomes/data insight that can indicate disadvantage or vulnerability
3. Tracking, recording and cross-team information sharing systems and processes to effectively identify learners at risk of disadvantage or vulnerability

“Some schools – typically those serving the most deprived communities, where Pupil Premium numbers approached or exceeded half the school population – classed all or most of their students as being affected by disadvantage and vulnerability. Usually, these schools noted issues that they needed to tackle for their entire school, as well as identifying students who needed additional support.”

Chrysalis Technical Report

### 1. Identify groups of learners and learner context that can indicate risk of disadvantage or vulnerability

All mainstream secondary **schools** in the Review used Pupil Premium eligibility ('Ever 6 Free School Meals' (FSM) - and 'looked after' children) as a primary tool for identifying disadvantaged or vulnerable learners.

**Schools** with particularly strong monitoring and evaluation systems also examined historical data (e.g. about destinations) to identify students at risk of disadvantage or vulnerability.

The special schools and alternative provision settings involved in the National System Review stated that all their students were disadvantaged or vulnerable. In special schools, a very high proportion of students, sometimes all, had education, health and care plans (EHCPs). Often, additional factors exacerbated students' vulnerability. These included living in poverty and/or being looked after by the local authority (i.e. the same Pupil Premium criteria used by mainstream schools), the severity of student needs (e.g. profound and multiple cognitive and/or physical needs), and the inability of parents and carers (often due to their own special needs or disabilities) to provide and access support for their children outside of school.

Alternative provision settings saw students' challenges in engaging with education as a key manifestation of their vulnerability. For some students, these challenges were accompanied by formal indicators of disadvantage, such as living in poverty or an area of extreme socio-economic disadvantage. In other cases, settings had to identify the root causes of struggles to engage with education (e.g. mental health issues, adverse childhood experiences or significant amounts of missed learning).

“The local area has high levels of deprivation as well as widespread issues with substance misuse, seasonal employment, etc., affecting all levels of the population. Many students have social communication issues, and this can mean they struggle to build appropriate relationships. For some, there is a danger of exploitation and contact with the police or criminal justice system.”

Careers Leader, alternative provision setting

Most of the further education (FE) colleges involved in the National System Review viewed all or the vast majority of their learners as vulnerable and disadvantaged. In FE colleges, eligibility for free college meals did not emerge as a primary measure of disadvantage and/or vulnerability, although it was mentioned by the institutions involved in the Review as one of the indicators they monitor. The colleges did, however, use other deprivation data, most commonly in relation to the wards or postcodes where their learners lived. All colleges identified their learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) as one of the key vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. It is also notable that the FE colleges in the Review diagnose learner need as part of their recruitment strategy ahead of enrolment.

### Vulnerable groups considered by schools, special schools and colleges in the Review:

- SEND students (EHCP and SEN support status)
- Students supported by external agencies (e.g. social services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Service children (students with a parent in the armed forces)
- Young people experiencing personal difficulties (e.g. mental health issues, bereavement)
- Young carers
- Young people with a family member in the criminal justice system
- Young offenders
- Learners identified as at risk of exploitation
- Young people impacted by homelessness
- Young people living in areas of high deprivation (wards/postcodes)
- Students who joined mid-academic year
- Learners with low attendance/persistent absence
- Learners with a high number of behaviour referrals and/or exclusions
- Teenage parents and pregnant teens
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Learners with English as an additional language
- Learners with low literacy
- Learners with low prior attainment
- Care experienced young people
- Young people with low GCSE qualifications (particularly those without Grade 4 English/Maths)

### Key learning:

- Use Pupil Premium eligibility ('Ever 6 FSM' and 'looked after' children) or learner postcodes (FE) as primary identification methods
- Consider other key vulnerable groups (see above) and identify other contextual indicators to inform tracking, recording and information sharing systems

## 2. Identify outcomes/data insight that can indicate disadvantages or vulnerability

Schools, special schools and colleges in the Review also examined performance data and other insights to identify disadvantage or vulnerability. This included factors such as low value-added academic progress, low attendance or persistent absenteeism, high numbers of behavioural incidents or referrals, and exclusions. Additionally, schools utilised aspiration and intended destinations data, as well as learners' perceptions of their career readiness, to diagnose need. Some schools also engaged in stakeholder voice and data collection activities to understand the cultural beliefs of learners, parents and carers regarding education and careers. Some schools and colleges also established information sharing processes to ensure that Careers Advisers were able to feed insight into identification of vulnerable learners or those at risk of disengagement/becoming Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET).

### Key learning:

- Examine performance data (e.g. low attendance, behavioural incidents, exclusions)
- Utilise aspiration and intended destinations data
- Gather and analyse learner perception of career readiness (e.g. via [the FSQ](#))
- Engage in stakeholder voice and data collection activities to understand cultural beliefs in the community about education and careers
- Analyse action planning from personal guidance meetings

## 3. Track, record and establish cross-team information sharing systems and processes to effectively identify learners at risk of disadvantage or vulnerability

In settings where all or a very high proportion of students were vulnerable and disadvantaged, identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET was particularly important for Careers Leaders and education leaders. Some schools, special schools and alternative provision settings used what they described as 'vulnerable plus' registers to monitor and address additional and multiple factors of disadvantage and vulnerability. These schools had systems that consolidated information and intelligence from pastoral and support staff, triggering intervention from the careers provision when a certain threshold of 'red flags' was reached. For schools, special schools and colleges in the Review, identifying and tracking the progress of learners facing 'multiple layers of disadvantage' was critical to the effectiveness of support they offered to their most vulnerable learners.

### Key learning:

#### Implement comprehensive tracking and recording systems

- Develop and maintain robust tracking, recording and cross-team information sharing systems and processes to identify groups of learners and learner context that can indicate risk of disadvantage or vulnerability
- Establish systems to track, record and share data on vulnerable and 'vulnerable plus' learners, and learners at risk of becoming NEET
- Share data on learners' aspirations, intended destinations and perceptions of career readiness with relevant staff and teams responsible for identifying disadvantages and vulnerability
- Define clear criteria and indicators that trigger interventions, additional tracking, or support for learners

#### Engage Careers Leaders

- Involve the Careers Leader in cross-team information sharing to ensure the identification of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners is thorough and effective

## Tracking, recording and information sharing

### Practice insight 1 (secondary school)

“In every year group starting from Year 7, all students within a cohort are given a number rating, based on factors which may place them at disadvantage. Our identified ‘golden students’ are seen first by our Careers Adviser, who communicates directly with parents and carers after the appointment. Students are then given a second appointment to follow up.”

Assistant Principal, secondary school

### Practice insight 2 (secondary school)

In this mainstream secondary school, 58% of students receive Pupil Premium funding. However, staff believe that considering disadvantage based solely on free school meals or Pupil Premium funding is insufficient, as many more students are disadvantaged or vulnerable. The school uses a social mapping/pastoral tracking system to identify vulnerability, listing factors that could lead to underachievement. A total of 78% of students are on this register at least once, with many in multiple categories, including safeguarding, mental health conditions, bereavement, young carers, parents in the social justice system, new international arrivals, and families in insufficient housing. This tracking system helps accurately diagnose needs and informs the careers provision.

The Department for Education recently published updated guidance to [identify and support young people](#) at risk of being NEET and to support their transition into post-16 pathways. But collaborating on a Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) process also embeds key systems, relationships and ways of working – which enable partners to tackle broader priorities. Schools focus on students’ risk factors throughout secondary education. This allows them to tailor support for students to tackle priorities including attendance, engagement, motivation, aspiration and attainment. A RONI approach can both build on these strong foundations and support these priorities. RONI includes the following benefits for schools:

- It enables a whole school approach to tackling disadvantage and supporting transition
- It helps improve the impact of school careers education by using data to target young people with multiple needs and/or barriers and tailoring careers advice and support for individual needs
- It helps tackle priorities including attendance and inclusion by embedding a preventative approach. Persistent absence from school and becoming NEET at age 16+ are linked challenges
- It enables communication and collaboration with post-16 providers, to plan and deliver transition support
- It enables schools to access additional robust, quality-assured data on young people
- It saves time and resource by providing the RONI list in a structured format back to schools for further review
- It supports other school priorities, including improving attendance, etc.

Read more [here](#).



## Insight 2

### How to position careers as a key driver for tackling disadvantage

Here are key strategies and best practice to ensure that your careers provision meets the needs of all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### Step 1: Ensure your careers provision is responsive, targeted and personalised to the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners

Universal careers provision, i.e. provision in place for all learners

**Part 1:** Responsive universal careers provision, i.e. provision in place for all learners that is progressive and responsive to contextual and long-term data analysis

**Part 2:** Targeted additional careers provision, i.e. additional provision for specific groups of learners informed by contextual and long-term trend data analysis

**Part 3:** Personalised careers provision, i.e. where additional intervention/provision and strategies are put in place to address needs highlighted by ongoing monitoring (e.g. based on analysis of the latest FSQ responses or attendance data, etc.)

#### Part 1: Responsive universal careers provision

For schools, special schools and colleges in the Review with significant levels of disadvantage and vulnerability, there was a clear intent for the universal careers provision to be responsive to the specific needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners.

The universal careers provision was targeted to meet the needs shaping careers provision in such a way that it addresses or mitigates the effect of disadvantage on young people.

Virtually all participating schools, special schools and colleges (in the Review) had an explicitly articulated student learning journey for careers, which they saw as a key factor in ensuring effectiveness of their careers provision for all, including vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. For several schools, special schools and colleges in the Review there was an established approach to essential skills development within the universal offer.

“Our academies consider all of our pupils to be vulnerable and disadvantaged. Our academies have an embedded careers programme that aims to inform and encourage our pupils to consider their career options, and to take steps to understand their choices and pathways. By ensuring that our pupils are exposed and have access to an effective careers programme, we aim to bridge the gap between disadvantaged pupils and those who are in mainstream.”

Central Strategic Careers Leader, alternative provision setting (multi-academy trust)

In most but not all cases, careers provision was underpinned by clear learning outcomes for each year group or stage of learning and was progressive.

### What are Careers Learning Journeys?

All students are on a 'Careers Learning Journey' towards decisions at key transitions and lifelong career development. All schools, special schools and colleges implement careers provision to support students on that journey within and beyond education.

The term 'journey' is used deliberately here to represent progression or evolution, involving students' personal growth, deepening knowledge, challenges and self-discovery.

It is more than a programme of career learning activities.

It is more than a programme of taught or online lessons.

Intentionally planned Careers Learning Journeys that are responsive to need and that include clear, measurable milestones provide context and relevance to career-related learning, experiences and encounters.

**How to:** Access the [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#) resource for support in reviewing your provision and approach to Careers Learning Journeys.

### IMPACT:



Through effective careers provision, disadvantaged and vulnerable students can be supported to visualise a positive future. For example, one special school saw improvements in the levels of their learners' views on their future in relation to the world of work. As a result of the school's efforts to improve their learners' confidence and aspirations, the vast majority (95%) of students got to recognise that they might be employed in the future and that there might be a job that they could do, compared with only 40% before that intervention.

"You can start to allow the young person to have hope in their own ability, imagine a useful life in employment that they are good at. Careers is the tool by which young people become young adults looking to the future and imagining themselves in society."

Careers Leader and Assistant Headteacher, special school

### Responsive universal careers provision

#### Practice insight 1 (secondary school)

One school's careers provision responds to long-term tracking of learners' communication and leadership skills via FSQ and includes a specifically designed communication and leadership studies course for all Year 7-8 students, focusing on essential skills for breaking the cycle of poverty. This course lays the foundation for further development in later years.

Additionally, the school provides universal Careers Learning Journeys that include:

- A Job of the Week focus during form time
- A Futures Week event held six times a year
- Careers learning integrated into the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum for all year groups

#### Practice insight 2 (secondary school)

Another school's careers provision has responded to the narrow aspirations of learners and their community by providing multiple enrichment visits annually to all learners in Years 7-9. Each visit is designed with a strong career focus and integrated into the school's broader personal development and careers programme. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their experiences during these visits and connect them with other ongoing personal development and careers activities within the school. This holistic approach ensures that students can see the relevance of their experiences and apply the knowledge and skills gained to inform a broader aspiration in their future career planning and personal growth.

### Practice insight 3 (special school)

The careers provision for all pathways is mapped to the Gatsby Benchmarks, National Curriculum and Career Development Institute (CDI) framework. This provision helps students develop essential life skills and prepare for adulthood, with activities tailored for informal, semi-formal and formal learners. It includes independent living skills, understanding the world, and exploring post-school options through creative careers education and work-related learning. The provision emphasises communication and interaction skills, with events like a whole school Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Day, Business and Industry Day and Industry Week, where students run a café and participate in a community fair. The provision for each learner includes preparation for adulthood. Careers discussions are evaluated and shared with professionals annually through EHCPs and personalised learning plans.

### Practice insight 4 (FE college)

This college delivers universal careers provision to all students, recognising that 89% of the college population is disadvantaged. The provision includes a weekly progress curriculum, timetabled enrichment and enhancement sessions, and skills development opportunities throughout courses, with assessments at the start and end. Students participate in pathways fairs and have termly curriculum progress reviews with referrals to personal guidance. Work experience is often integrated into the curriculum and is open to all students. Experiences of the workplace and working with employers are supported by designated roles in all curriculum areas.



## Part 2: Targeted additional careers provision informed by contextual and long-term trend data – aimed at specific groups

Schools and colleges in the Review were very specific about the careers and wider support activities that their disadvantaged and vulnerable students could expect in addition to the universal careers provision, defining it as an entitlement and closely monitoring its implementation. Examples of additional provision for these groups included additional personal guidance meetings, additional employer encounters/experiences and additional parent/carer engagement provision.

Some institutions in the Review made this entitlement explicit in a 'charter' or entitlement document.

### Targeted careers provision for disadvantaged/vulnerable learners

#### Practice insight 1 (secondary school)

The school has an enhanced careers programme for learners identified as vulnerable and disadvantaged. For instance, these students attend a specific careers event tailored for vulnerable students. They are also given priority access to personal guidance meetings, which are attended by their parents and support staff. Additionally, these learners receive extra transition support for their next stage, whether it involves further studies or employment. This support includes visits to their next destination before they leave school. Furthermore, the school arranges for employers to come in and deliver bespoke meaningful employer encounters for these learners.

#### Practice insight 2 (multi-academy trust)

One multi-academy trust, comprising over 30 primary and secondary schools, sixth form colleges and special schools, has implemented a Pupil Premium Charter aimed at enhancing support for learners receiving Pupil Premium funding.

This charter focuses on four key themes: academic mentoring and support; careers guidance; experiences and enrichment; and attendance and progress. Within these themes, targets outline the expected level of support.

For example, in the careers strand, the charter mandates that each Pupil Premium student is entitled to:

- At least three personal guidance meetings with an independent Careers Adviser
- At least one high-quality meaningful work experience placement
- At least five meaningful employer encounters

The achievement of these targets is evaluated by both the school and the trust's executive and trustees, with measurement criteria included in the trust's risk register.

#### Practice insight 3 (secondary school)

One secondary school in a highly disadvantaged area, where around 55% of students are eligible for free school meals, has developed specific programmes and pathways to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students. For example, the school identified that many Year 9 girls from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds lacked aspirations for further education. To address this, the school ran a year-long project introducing these girls to positive female role models from the world of work and focusing on interpersonal skills and attributes like kindness. This initiative helped the girls see their potential beyond traditional roles, motivating them to engage more with academic learning.

#### Practice insight 4 (FE college)

This college identified young carers as a vulnerable group needing extra support. Staff noticed that young carers often had lower attendance due to their responsibilities, which limited their participation in enrichment activities and careers guidance, despite their high academic performance. To address this, the college sought support and training from the NHS to better understand and assist these students. Staff also adjusted timetables to ensure enrichment and career activities were scheduled during the middle of the day, making them part of the mandatory timetable.

### Part 3: Reactive personalised provision to address needs highlighted by ongoing monitoring (e.g. Future Skills Questionnaire/intended destinations, etc.)

In the Review, careers data and insights provided crucial evidence that enabled schools, special schools and colleges to identify young people who were disadvantaged and vulnerable, and at risk of not achieving their full potential due to these factors. Through ongoing analysis of this data, institutions could offer targeted support to address the specific needs of these students, helping to mitigate the impact of their disadvantages.

#### Make effective use of your learners' careers readiness data to identify disadvantage or vulnerability:

If you use Compass+:

Access this handy [FSO checklist](#) for support with learner engagement and sharing the Future Skills Questionnaire as part of your ongoing monitoring of learner progress

Access this help centre article on [Recording interests and destinations](#) data on Compass+

Careers and related activities played a significant role in raising the aspirations of learners. This increase in aspirations often led to improved attendance, motivation and engagement in learning. For some disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, fostering these aspirations was an essential prerequisite for any effective learning to take place. By focusing on careers, schools and colleges could create a more supportive environment.

“[Last year, our Year 11] leavers achieved the best GCSE grades for 10 years and on average gained half a grade more than expected. Our Progress 8 gap narrowed and is on track to make continued improvement. Students were able to enrol on the course of their choice at college. Students at risk of being NEET were identified and the support in place enabled them to progress and continue education and training after leaving school. Students with mental health needs were given holistic support and progressed to college.”

Careers Coordinator, secondary school

#### Practice insight 1 (secondary school)

Individual Careers Learning Journeys are informed by ongoing learner assessments. Leaders describe the strategy as “continually growing and ever changing”. Because the student population is transient and the learners experience significant challenge with attendance and meeting expectations, the Careers Learning Journeys are highly responsive and are adapted mid-year where necessary. The Future Skills Questionnaire is used by all learners in each year group at the start and end of the school year. This enables leaders to understand changes in learner perceptions and knowledge and to identify previously unknown skills gaps and act upon areas of improvement regularly. After completing these needs analyses, the Careers Leader, with the support of relevant colleagues, identifies and articulates the required learning outcomes before planning the most appropriate and efficient opportunities to build that learning into the wider curriculum and bespoke encounters and/or experiences.

#### Practice insight 2 (alternative provision setting)

To accommodate new learners joining weekly for varying durations, the provision offers personalised Careers Learning Journeys, allowing learners to move along a flexible pathway. Induction data is shared with staff to support transitions, and baseline assessments identify academic, social, pastoral and career-related needs. The SEND Future Skills Questionnaire helps diagnose needs and track progress, especially for extended placements. Employability skills are regularly assessed and rated, while termly sessions gather learners' feedback on their learning experiences. This feedback helps leaders implement additional careers-related learning, encounters and experiences. Additional personal guidance meetings are also used to identify opportunities for bespoke provision.

## Step 2: Integrate careers provision into strategy

In the Review, in almost all special schools and alternative provision settings, most FE colleges and some secondary schools – all serving particularly deprived communities – the institutional improvement strategy focused on mitigating the impact of disadvantages for their learners, with careers seen as the key element and delivery vehicle. Frequently, these institutions articulated their mission as “everything we do is NEET prevention”. These institutions saw their entire role and purpose as “closing the gap”.

### Practice insight 3 (FE college)

Careers learning journeys at this FE college are personalised as a result of ongoing learner skills assessments and reflections. Skills assessments are embedded as part of ‘Getting to Know You’ initial assessments, which are then linked to learners’ termly reviews, indicating their strengths and areas for development; this enables the creation of individualised learning outcomes. Learners regularly complete reflective journals (daily on some courses), which, along with direct tutor and employer feedback, build into an online portfolio of development. This enables learners to reflect on and articulate their progress and, crucially, understand their next steps in development.

Schools, special schools and colleges were able to embed careers into strategy via the following approaches:

- Careers leadership and distributed leadership of careers
- Leaders’ vision, ambition and intent for careers
- Careers Learning Journeys
- Planning for strategic improvement
- Impact evaluation

“As a school, where all pupils have significant cognitive impairment, social and communication difficulties, 70% are eligible for Pupil Premium funding and around 10% of pupils are living in care, we consider all of our pupils to be disadvantaged. We strive to raise ambition and provide the very best education for all, ensuring all pupils have opportunities to develop their personal skills across the curriculum. This is the driver for all school development priorities. Careers underpins everything we do as a school.”

Careers Leader, special school

For secondary schools in the Review with fewer learners eligible for Pupil Premium funding, addressing disadvantage was less central to their development strategy. These secondary schools considered tackling disadvantage as one of several key priorities rather than something fundamental.

“In recognition of our context in which the majority of students could be identified as ‘disadvantaged’, every element of our school has been planned in order to address this. For example, the teaching and learning process is consistent across the academy, with staff explicitly taught through deliberate practice how to teach to support all learners who may have barriers (for example EAL [English as an additional language], SEND, reading age below chronological age, low prior attainment) ... Our academy has the identified key drivers of Careers, Personal Development, Literacy, Voice and Diversity, which feature in all curriculum maps, and ensure that these factors are actively driven by staff across the academy ... [So, careers] is an academy key driver; all students engage with a comprehensive careers programme from the start of Year 7.”

Assistant Principal, secondary school

For these institutions, “closing the gap” goes beyond improving academic outcomes. It involves breaking down the barriers that prevent disadvantaged students from reaching their full potential. Careers is strategically embedded within the school/college improvement plan as a critical tool in this process. This includes making careers a central focus within curriculum planning, development priorities and specific actions aimed at addressing socio-economic disadvantage.

“Our academies consider all of our pupils to be vulnerable and disadvantaged ... Therefore, there is no single specific strategy that is in place to tackle this, as tackling disadvantage is embedded into everything that we do.”

Central Strategic Careers Leader, alternative provision setting (multi-academy trust)

In schools and colleges with high proportions of disadvantaged students, careers provision is not merely an add-on; it is integral to wider school/college improvement and to the wider student experience. These schools and colleges place careers at the heart of their mission, ensuring that careers education, advice and guidance permeates every aspect of the curriculum. This approach includes personalised pathways, targeted support and interventions designed specifically to address the barriers faced by vulnerable learners. The ultimate goal is to raise students’ aspirations, help them envision their future careers, and equip them with the skills and knowledge to pursue these careers.

Raising aspirations is a core element of this approach, acting as a powerful catalyst for improving engagement, motivation and attendance. Careers provides a platform for students to think critically about their future, fostering a sense of purpose and direction. For disadvantaged students, this is particularly crucial – boosting motivation becomes a vital precondition for academic success.



## Integrate careers provision into strategy

### Practice insight 1 (secondary school)

One school implemented a 'classroom equity' strategy focusing on three main components. First, equity-driven pedagogy, where staff skilfully deploy teaching and learning strategies that significantly impact the learning and outcomes of disadvantaged students. Second, rapport and care, with staff using strategies and scripts to foster positive relationships both in the classroom and beyond. Lastly, future thinking, which emphasises careers and pathways, using future-focused language across the curriculum. This approach aims to support all students, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Some institutions go further by embedding career-focused learning directly into the curriculum, ensuring that careers education is not isolated but is instead woven throughout the student experience. This broader approach to personal and academic development is driven by a commitment to equity and an emphasis on the importance of future careers. Strong teacher-student relationships, an inclusive approach to teaching, and a consistent focus on future pathways help create a learning environment where all students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – are supported, motivated and inspired to make informed, ambitious career decisions. This enables them to make effective and sustained transitions into further education, training or employment.

The success of integrating careers into a school or college strategy for tackling disadvantage depends on explicit leadership and governance. Headteachers, principals and governors who prioritise careers as part of their commitment to supporting disadvantaged learners play a pivotal role in ensuring that sufficient resources and staffing are allocated to this area. The empowerment of Careers Leaders is also crucial. When Careers Leaders are given the autonomy, expertise and responsibility to shape careers provision, they can directly influence the school's or college's broader development strategy. This ensures that careers is embedded across all areas of school/college life, providing students with the guidance and opportunities they need to thrive.

### Practice insight 2 (secondary school)

The school's mission statement emphasises giving students the opportunity to thrive and be ambitious. The vision for careers is closely linked to this mission, shaping the development of the careers provision and informing the academy improvement plan. Staff plan to broaden students' horizons and develop cultural capital, empowering them with the knowledge to live happy and fulfilled lives. Leaders aim for every student to leave with a positive destination and the skills to bridge the gap from school to college or the workplace.

Careers is used as a strategy to mitigate the impact of disadvantage, ensuring students are aware of a wide range of jobs and can imagine a different future. The school focuses on helping students believe they can break the cycle of poverty. The ambitious vision for careers has been developed over three years, with strategic oversight from the Deputy Head and the Careers Coordinator. Careers leadership is embedded across the staffing structure, with systems to support shared responsibility for careers learning.

Careers Learning Journeys start in Year 7, with heads of year and careers ambassadors in every department ensuring careers is embedded into every subject. The headteacher explains that the number of students who are NEET is a key performance indicator. Leaders believe that learners understanding the opportunities unlocked by qualifications positively impacts their motivation and behaviour.



## Insight 3

### Spotlight on practice

#### Spotlight on work experience

The Review highlighted the significant opportunity for schools, special schools and colleges to better use work experience as a key strategy to address or mitigate the effects of disadvantage.

**High-quality** work experiences are particularly valuable for disadvantaged or vulnerable learners, helping them to build confidence and develop employability skills to prepare for their next best steps.

#### Recommendations to maximise the value and impact of work experience for disadvantaged students:

1. Expand the concept of work experience to include diverse activities beyond traditional placements, such as industry masterclasses, virtual work experiences and employer-led projects
2. Ensure that work experience is a core part of the career strategy, particularly for disadvantaged students. Position work experience as a continuous journey, offering multiple touch points, and not just a one-time event
3. Start early and offer multiple, varied work experience opportunities for students at different stages to ensure well-rounded Careers Learning Journeys. This can include both traditional placements and alternative activities like workplace visits and employer-led projects
4. Foster strong relationships with local employers, community organisations and partners to create meaningful and diverse experiences. Engage employers in the planning and evaluation process to ensure placements are valuable and meet students' developmental and regional needs
5. Offer additional preparation and support systems for vulnerable students, including mentoring, travel assistance and detailed planning for bespoke experiences
6. Regularly assess and reflect on the outcomes of work experiences to measure their impact. Use post-experience reflections and feedback from students, employers and families to continuously improve the work experience process
7. **Further education:** Embed work experience within the curriculum, particularly in vocational education, by collaborating closely with careers teams and academic departments. Ensure that vocational pathways include hands-on experiences like job shadowing, live briefs and employer-run workshops

## Work experience

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### Practice insight 1 (secondary school)

One school ensures that every single student has a minimum of six workplace experiences in Years 7 and 8 as part of their Empower drop-down afternoons. Careers is called 'Empower' at the school because staff believe in empowering all young people to reach their full potential. Careers is a key driver, integrated into all curriculum areas to empower students to reach their goals. It is seen as 'everybody's business' at the school.

### Practice insight 2 (secondary school)

One secondary school serves a highly mobile, disadvantaged community within one of the most deprived wards in the country, with 65%–70% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. To mitigate the impact of disadvantage, the school intentionally uses encounters and experiences with employers. Leaders and staff have embedded explicit skills throughout the curriculum and crafted a universal Careers Learning Journey, providing regular and consistent engagement with employers from Key Stage 3. For example, they have integrated entrepreneurship into the curriculum through a partnership with the local university, facilitated by the school's Enterprise Adviser. This partnership allows students to develop knowledge and skills through relevant encounters and experiences, both on-site and through external visits, tailored to their year group.

### Practice insight 3 (alternative provision setting)

In this alternative provision setting, experiences of workplaces and encounters with employers are designed to be progressive, starting with small, hands-on activities in a school environment and one to two-hour workplace visits. Depending on the length of their time at the provision or prior experiences, learners may then progress to a week-long work experience in Year 10 or an extended placement. Before entering the workplace, students attend sessions by employers on what to expect and how to prepare, such as planning their journey by public transport.

A local provider is used to target employers who are inclusive and willing to learn about students' individual needs and therefore provide meaningful experiences of the workplace. Employers are supported to understand those needs, often by breaking down employers' fears or myths, and educating them on how to support students effectively, including sharing individual placement targets. In order to set up students for success, an in-person induction conversation is facilitated, attended by the student, employer and Careers Leader, to build relationships ahead of the placement; this also acts as a screening to ensure the placement is suitable for the individual.

#### Practice insight 4 (special school)

The school provides multiple meaningful encounters with employers for learners in each phase and pathway. Leaders and careers staff work hard to bring in speakers, who tailor their talks to help learners understand the skills they need to succeed. Workplace tours are emphasised to show different employment settings. In phases 2 and 3, professionals visit the school to discuss their career journeys, ensuring the encounters are relatable and highlight necessary skills.

To tackle disadvantage, the school offers meaningful experiences with employers. A dedicated Work Experience Coordinator (LSA3) supports learners, improving placement effectiveness. The school has built relationships with local businesses, ensuring placements are accessible and beneficial. Careers staff focus on what students can do and the skills they can develop. Leaders are committed to helping learners develop the skills needed to pursue their interests.

#### Practice insight 5 (FE college)

At this FE college, all learners participate in workplace experiences, supported by the Work Experience Team to develop both curriculum-related and broader employability skills. The Work Experience Coordinator collaborates with Curriculum Leads to ensure all students access work experience. The tutorial programme prepares students in advance, and industry placement officers help connect learning with work experience. Tutors assess barriers and provide individualised support, including confidence-building activities like phone calls to employers and initial introductions. Learners reflect on their experiences to inform future career decisions, supported by strong relationships between college staff and employers. For full-time learners aiming for apprenticeships, work trials are organised, and support is provided for CVs, time management, financial assistance for uniforms and travel bursaries.



## Spotlight on personal guidance

All institutions involved in the Review ensured that all their vulnerable and disadvantaged students could access personal guidance at key points of their school or college journey. Many viewed this as one of the main ways of achieving equity of careers provision.

The Review found that all institutions ensured personal guidance sessions were delivered by appropriately qualified staff, with many employing Careers Advisers holding Level 6 or 7 qualifications. However, special schools faced challenges in finding well-qualified advisers who understood their learners' unique needs. To address this, some schools shared Careers Advisers or brought in external organisations for independent advice and guidance, with these providers often conducting monitoring and quality assurance. Senior education leaders in the Review valued the impartiality of external guidance, which could help students make informed decisions about their future education and training.

Schools and colleges in the Review also ensured that Careers Advisers had access to relevant information and insights to make guidance sessions effective for disadvantaged and vulnerable students, often through data sharing and collaboration with other staff members. Most schools, special schools and colleges tried to ensure that Careers Advisers providing personal guidance had access to information and insight to make meetings with disadvantaged and/or vulnerable students as impactful and effective as possible. This could involve data sharing, working closely with colleagues in different roles (e.g. pastoral or teaching staff or special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and Careers Advisers), or both.

All institutions involved in the Review described their personal guidance meetings as flexible, bespoke and tailored to the needs of each learner, and many explained that they were also carefully planned. Schools, special schools and colleges described how they planned personal guidance sessions using the aims and intended learning outcomes of their careers provision, as well as drawing on information related to individual needs and circumstances.

Involving parents and carers, sometimes at multiple points, was another common feature of good universal personal guidance practice. In most instances, this involved communicating with parents and carers about any plans agreed or additional support and opportunities offered. In some cases, parents and carers were invited to accompany their children to personal guidance meetings.

“Parental engagement is also key to ensuring the quality and impact of personal guidance we provide to our vulnerable and disadvantaged students. This includes encouraging their attendance at career appointments with the Careers Adviser. Support is also available for parents, including parent events in school where they can come in and get advice on how best to support their child. They are also provided with timelines and ‘conversation cards’ and other resources to support discussions about destinations with their child. This also ensures that parents have the knowledge about different pathways to be able to have those discussions.”

Senior Leader and Careers Leader, secondary school

Some institutions recognised that their disadvantaged and vulnerable students required a much greater volume and frequency of personal guidance meetings. In secondary schools, this meant offering personal guidance to students from Key Stage 3. This was part of an established pre-planned intervention or ‘entitlement’, with additional personal guidance meetings being put in place in response to ongoing monitoring (e.g. FSQ/intended destinations, etc.).

“Our disadvantaged and vulnerable students get repeated one-to-one guidance throughout their time with us; this includes during Key Stage 3.”

Central Strategic Careers Leader, multi-academy trust

“Our disadvantaged and vulnerable learners are prioritised for one-to-one meetings with a Careers Adviser in Year 10. They then have a personalised follow-up session in Year 11.”

Senior Leader, secondary school

Many institutions also carefully monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of their personal guidance through student voice activities; student skills and career readiness self-assessments, including through FSQ; feedback from teaching staff and curriculum teams; and analysis of destinations data.

### Practice insight 1 (alternative provision setting)

The Careers Leader and Careers Adviser work across two alternative provision settings, adopting a supportive and individualised approach to personal guidance tailored to each learner’s unique background and challenges.

Key strategies include building trust and rapport to create a non-judgemental space; using a personalised, trauma-informed approach to address complex life challenges; and setting collaborative, manageable targets to help learners take ownership of their personal guidance journey. The Careers Adviser also ensures flexible communication to accommodate barriers to regular attendance, and emphasises confidentiality and safety to build trust. This comprehensive approach aims to make guidance accessible and responsive to the needs of vulnerable pupils.

### Practice insight 2 (secondary school)

At one school, senior leaders played a crucial role in providing personalised support for disadvantaged and vulnerable students. This support is in addition to the personal guidance offered by qualified Careers Advisers for all learners. Believing that successful learning occurs when students understand how their lessons relate to future aspirations and employment, the school invests significantly in allowing time for senior staff to meet and reflect with learners. This approach was highlighted in the whole school improvement plan as a key driver for raising aspirations. Students in Years 10–12 participated in four one-to-one catch-ups with middle or senior leaders to reflect on their personal guidance meetings, action plans and transition decisions. Following these catch-ups, learners can be re-referred for additional time with a qualified Careers Adviser, receive additional interview practice with governors, or be paired with an external business mentor volunteer, etc.

### Practice insight 3 (alternative provision setting)

In Years 10 and 11, all students receive personal guidance interviews, with Year 9 students who may not return to mainstream schooling also prioritised. A Level 6 CDI-registered Careers Adviser uses student data to tailor these sessions. The resulting action plans are integrated into the school’s approach to ensure realistic and achievable aspirations. The Careers Adviser is familiar to students, attending key events and providing group sessions for Years 7–9. Quality assurance assessments are conducted to improve guidance. The impact is evaluated through monitoring by SENCO and curriculum staff, student feedback and destinations data analysis. School staff review the effectiveness of personal guidance as part of the overall Careers Learning Journey.

### Practice insight 4 (secondary school)

In this mainstream secondary school, staff believe that considering disadvantage based solely on free school meals or Pupil Premium funding is insufficient, as many more students are disadvantaged or vulnerable. The school uses a social mapping/pastoral tracking system to identify vulnerability, listing factors that could lead to underachievement. The school partners with an external careers guidance service, providing 300 personal guidance slots per year. Currently, 263 Year 11 students receive impartial guidance to support their post-16 decisions. Students are prioritised based on tracking system data and academic performance, with three waves ensuring those most in need receive guidance first. Recognising that Year 11 may be too late for some disadvantaged students, the school uses remaining appointments for early intervention with Year 10 students in the summer term. This helps identify at-risk students who could become NEET, ensuring they receive post-16 guidance at the end of Year 10 and an individual session in Year 11.



### Personal Guidance - Recommendations to support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners:

1. **Universal access:** Ensure all learners, including vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, access personal guidance at relevant points in their Careers Learning Journey
2. **Appropriately qualified advisers:** Deliver personal guidance sessions with appropriately qualified and impartial professionals
3. **Data sharing and collaboration:** Ensure Careers Advisers have access to relevant information and insights through data sharing and collaboration with other staff members (e.g. pastoral staff, teaching staff, SENCOs)
4. **Diagnosis of need:** Use insights gathered from personal guidance meetings about individual students' barriers to transition to their next stage of learning or employment to personalise careers provision and respond to need
5. **Well-timed provision:** Plan personal guidance meetings to be tailored to the needs of each learner at relevant milestones in their Careers Learning Journey, using the aims and intended learning outcomes of careers provision. Ensure that learner personal guidance needs are met in response to ongoing monitoring (e.g. FSQ/intended destinations, etc.)
6. **Parent and carer engagement:** Involve parents and carers in personal guidance provision, sharing plans and resources/support, and inviting them to meetings when appropriate
7. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Carefully monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of personal guidance through student voice activities, self-assessments, feedback from teaching staff, and analysis of FSQ/destinations data, etc.

## Spotlight on parental engagement

Recommendations for Careers Leaders to maximise the value of parental engagement:

### 1. Long-term approach:

- Begin engaging parents early, particularly with younger students or during transitions, to build strong, positive relationships from the start.

### 2. Specialised support for vulnerable families:

- Provide tailored support for vulnerable families, such as dedicated advice evenings, SEND clinics, and sessions addressing specific challenges like post-16 transitions or housing issues.

### 3. Consistency in engagement:

- Maintain regular, consistent communication with parents through updates, meetings and interactions to ensure ongoing, positive relationships.
- Involve parents in career-focused activities, including advice evenings, personal guidance meetings and encounters, to engage them in their child's Careers Learning Journey.
- Offer various communication methods (in-person, digital, translated materials) to meet the needs of all parents and ensure accessibility.
- Continuously gather feedback from parents on their preferred engagement methods and adjust support based on their input.

### 4. Focus on positives:

- Highlight students' achievements and progress within their Careers Learning Journey to reinforce positive connections with parents.
- Regularly share and celebrate students' successes with parents to reinforce positive engagement and maintain a supportive environment.

**Minimise workload. Maximise impact. Access [free training and resources](#) to structure a targeted, progressive and integrated approach to parental engagement throughout your careers provision.**

#### Practice insight 1 (special school)

Leaders emphasise the importance of preparing learners for adulthood and their next steps after leaving school. Since EHCPs can extend to age 25, it is crucial for learners to understand potential career paths. The school has integrated the EHCP process into long-term career planning.

Parents and carers are informed about their role in supporting learners' personal guidance. They are invited to participate in STEM and enterprise activities with their children. Parents are also involved in 'careers chats' and personalised learning plan and EHCP review processes. The school values parents' and carers' input, especially for learners with communication needs.



# Overview of the Careers Impact System and National System Review

Careers Impact National System Reviews form part of the Careers Impact System. They provide system-wide insight and sharing of learning on system challenges. This document shares the learning from the second National System Review and focuses on how using careers provision as a strategy for institutional development can help reduce the effects of disadvantage on young people.

The Review asked the following questions:

1. How do institutions try and ensure their careers provision is equitable?
  - How do schools and colleges define disadvantage?
  - How do institutions set up, deliver, and monitor work experience and personal guidance to ensure equity?
  - What does effective careers leadership look like in institutions that focus on equity?
2. Do institutions use careers as a strategy to improve their overall development and reduce the effects of disadvantage? If so, how?
3. What evidence shows that equitable careers provision and using careers as a development strategy helps reduce disadvantage and improve outcomes for students, including career-related outcomes?

Between September and December 2024, 35 educational institutions took part in the Review, either hosting a visit to their setting or taking part in an online research forum. Of these, 15 were mainstream secondary schools, 7 were FE colleges and 13 were either special schools or alternative provision settings. The institutions were identified and selected in response to recognised good practice in the identification of and response to disadvantage or based on data insight showing progress in driving equity and tackling disadvantage.

The following guide shares insight and best practice explored in the Review. For more information on the Careers Impact System, please click [here](#).



## Careers Impact internal leadership review

All schools, special schools, alternative provision settings and colleges in the Review undertook a Careers Impact internal leadership review as part of the Review process.

The internal leadership review supports schools, special schools and colleges to put careers at the heart of strategy. The process supports increased and shared understanding of good practice in:

- Careers leadership and distributed leadership of careers
- Leaders' vision, ambition and intent for careers
- Careers Learning Journeys
- Planning for strategic improvement
- Impact evaluation

Get started with a Careers Impact internal leadership review [here](#).

"Careers is the cornerstone of education, and the internal leadership review showed us how much we haven't thought about yet. The internal leadership review takes a lot of that thinking work away – it enables us to work out where we are and what we need to do next because it's written down for us – so we can focus on strategy and implementation."

Senior Leader, May 2024

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