



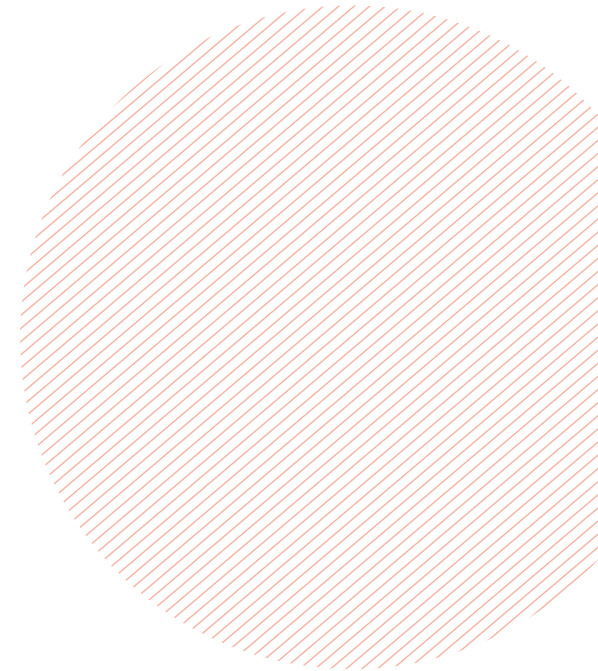
Engaging Parents to Empower SEND Futures

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Introduction

Congratulations on completing the course “Engaging Parents to Empower SEND Futures”. You now have access to this guide, which provides additional information, research, and links to resources to deepen your understanding and offer more setting-specific support.

The guide serves as a quick reference to the topics covered in the online course. If you received this guide from a colleague or associate, it is great that they shared it with you. However, we recommend completing the course yourself to gain the certificate for your records and to engage more deeply with the content.

The course emphasises the importance of a close and effective partnership between you, as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), and your Careers Leader to ensure that young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are well-prepared for life after school. Equally vital is the active engagement of parents and carers, whose insights and support play a crucial role in shaping realistic and meaningful pathways. This guide outlines key considerations, questions, and links to documents including tools and research papers to facilitate productive collaboration among professionals and families alike.

The guide follows the structure of the online course, making it easy for you to find the specific areas you are looking for.

We hope you find this guide valuable and encourage your colleagues to complete the course. This will support whole-institution improvement and provide insights into best practices.



Current Position

The recent update to the Gatsby Benchmarks, [The Next 10 Years](#), places a greater emphasis on parent and carer engagement (PCE), which was the inspiration behind developing this course and guide. As a SENCO, your Careers Leader plays a crucial role in driving the fulfilment of the Benchmarks across your setting. However, as part of the preparation for adulthood duty outlined in the [SEND Code of Practice](#), you are essential in creating the vision and implementing the provisions to ensure positive career outcomes.

[The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit: Schools, Special Schools & AP](#) supports schools and specialist provisions to effectively plan for impact in meeting all of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

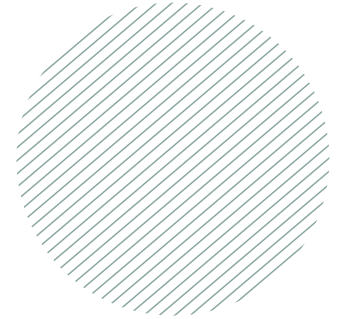
Focusing strategically on parent and carer engagement enhances the quality of careers advice and guidance, positively impacting young people, parents, and the institutions themselves. The report from The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC), in collaboration with the Association of Colleges (AOC), titled [Parental engagement action research report and toolkit](#), offers examples of how others have successfully achieved this.

Since the introduction of the updated [SEND Code of Practice](#) in 2015, the numbers of young people identified with SEND have continued to increase as you can see in the latest government statistics: [Special educational needs in England](#).

Within those statistics, the number of young people requiring an Education, Health, and Care Plan has also increased [Education, health and care plans: England 2025](#). Understanding your own statistics and comparing them to others in similar situations can help identify potential collaboration opportunities or simply provide reassurance. Here are two sites that can support you with this:

- [Compare the performance of schools and colleges in England](#) – this will allow you to look at the performance of schools around England. Useful to look at similar areas to your settings location and look at performance measures.
- [Compare schools - every school, every detail, completely free](#) – designed for parents but useful for settings.

While we know that the number of young people identified with SEND has increased, the performance gap has not decreased, and their future life chances remain a challenge. [The employment of disabled people](#) statistics are particularly concerning. In Q2 2024, the disability employment rate was 53%, compared to 81.6% for non-disabled people. Additionally, those with SEND are under-represented in [apprenticeship](#) figures too.



This highlights the scale of the challenge we face. Many researchers and advocates are calling for change. Below are some links that may support you and your Careers Leader in considering how to improve this situation:

- [The Buckland Review of Autism Employment: report and recommendations](#) - A report of research and recommendations led by Sir Robert Buckland KC MP, supported by [Autistica](#), with secretariat provided by the [Department for Work and Pensions](#). A more detailed look at the plight of those with autism and accessing the world of work.
- [‘I did what I could to earn some money and be of use,’ 2025](#): A qualitative exploration of autistic people’s journeys to career success and fulfilment.
- [CEC careers landscape](#) - A useful document summarising the challenges of those young people with SEND in gaining employment.
- [Access to employment: A comparison of autistic, neurodivergent and neurotypical adults’ experiences of hiring processes in the United Kingdom, 2023](#) - Recommendations for how employers can improve recruitment processes.
- The Gatsby Foundation and The Careers & Enterprise Company have worked with Careers Leaders to explore ideas and good practice for working with parents in these challenging times. [The Parental Engagement: Toolkit](#) has resources, top tips, and activities to support careers guidance.
- [Building effective home-school partnerships](#) - A short guide written by Parentkind, in conjunction with ASCL and NAHT. The resource has suggestions, statistics and supporting links to help settings build effective PCE.
- [Parental Engagement - Evidence from Research and Practice](#) - A document from EEF reviewing international evidence and reviewing how parent engagement is being approached in England.



Effective Collaboration with your Careers Leader

We recognise the significant role you, as SENCOs, play within your setting and the demanding workload you already manage. In this module, we focused on clarifying responsibilities to ensure your time is used most effectively.

It is helpful to remember that careers support encompasses whatever a young person's next step is; this is especially important when considering those with life-limiting conditions you may be working with. Reflect on the CEC definition that careers encompass everything learners need to know, understand, and be able to do to:

- Make aspirational and informed decisions.
- Develop career readiness / prepare for adulthood.
- Make effective and sustained transitions.

It is also recognised that the entire staff plays a crucial role in developing and sustaining careers education within their own classrooms or subject areas, supporting young people with SEND in achieving their career aspirations.

What does effective collaboration look like?

One of the key elements for effective collaboration is having clear responsibilities. This prevents overlaps and ensures that the most suitable team member completes tasks efficiently and effectively.

When working on parent and carer engagement (PCE) in careers, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of how your role and the role of the Careers Leader interact to support the best outcomes for young people with SEND. The diagram below may help clarify these roles:

SENCO

Careers Leader

Subject Matter expert in SEND

Positive relationships with parents and carers

Subject Matter expert in careers

Responsible for the strategic direction for learners with SEND

Collaborative approach to strategic direction

Responsible for the strategic direction of career development

Management of other SEND team members – TAs, LSAs, specialist teachers, etc.

Management of other Careers team members – careers adviser, work experience, etc

How to get started?

Whether you are already collaborating effectively with your Careers Leader or looking to develop this partnership, here are some top tips to get started:

- **Identify Positives:** Gather positive feedback from parents and carers regarding careers and share these insights with your Careers Leader.
- **Schedule Discussions:** Set aside time to discuss with your Careers Leader where you currently stand on the co-production spectrum and use this as a foundation for creating an action plan.
- **Collaborate on Engagement:** Share your observations about the parents and carers of young people with SEND that you identified during the course. Work together to develop strategies for more effective engagement. [The Parental Engagement: Action Planning](#) activity from The Careers & Enterprise Company can be a valuable resource to kickstart your discussions.

Further guidance to be shared with your Careers Leader and considered as part of the strategy of engagement can be found in the links below:

- [Engaging parents in careers guidance: Innovations in practice](#) - The Gatsby Foundation and The Careers & Enterprise Company have worked with Careers Leaders to explore ideas and good practice for working with parents.
- [South Somerset 14-19 Partnership 'SEND Transitions: Imagine the Possibilities and Making a success of Further Education'](#) - These resources have been developed as part of a transition project for students with SEND. The resources pull together key Preparation for Adulthood information that will enable mainstream, special schools, and FE Careers Leaders to understand the journey and support available for young people with SEND.
- [Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning](#) - this guidance report aims to help schools considering how they can work with parents and carers to improve children's learning. Schools work with parents and families in many ways and with a range of aims, for example, to involve parents in school decision making, to be proactive about safeguarding, and to engender relationships of trust and respect between school and home. In this report, they focus mostly on activities that aim to improve children's learning directly.
- [EEF - Effective parental engagement for pupils with SEND](#) - a one-page set of questions to be used as prompts when considering the implications of the conclusions in the report above for those young people with SEND.
- A Careers Hub Lead shares helpful perspectives on encouraging parent and carer participation in careers: [Every contact counts when engaging parents in careers education](#).

Who to collaborate with?

Careers education is everyone's responsibility. Collaboration and support are essential to ensure better outcomes for young people with SEND and to empower their parents and carers with the right information and consistent messaging. Your staff are your greatest asset in promoting, supporting, and developing careers awareness and provision in their classrooms. As a SENCO, you know that everyone is responsible for preparing students for adulthood, as stated in the [SEND Code of Practice](#), from the earliest years.

The resources listed below may help you address the question, "How can you use strategies to advance all staff to the green category?" These frameworks, tools, CPD opportunities, and subject-related careers resources can support you and your Careers Leader in identifying the best approaches to fully engage staff with the careers aspirations and messaging for young people with SEND in your setting.

- [My Learning My Future](#) - This is a suite of resources to support subject teaching staff, from 27 subjects at KS3, KS4 & Post 16, to engage students in curriculum learning by highlighting the relevance of their subjects to future careers, opportunities, and pathways.
- [How to make my career activities inclusive](#) - This resource will support with ideas to review the career programme from the point of view of your young people with SEND.
- [Teacher Development Courses](#) - Developed by The Careers & Enterprise Company, these courses are designed to support subject teachers in understanding the role they play in careers education and how they can, through their subject, support young people to make informed choices about their best next step and potential career pathway.
- [For those working with young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities \(SEND\)](#) - Through this collection there are views of leading practitioners and national experts on the importance of career guidance for young people with SEND. Each describes how they, or those they support, have successfully used the Benchmarks to deliver better career guidance for students with a wide range of needs and disabilities. The articles are drawn from many diverse types of provision, from residential schools and specialist colleges to mainstream schools.
- [Preparation for Adulthood \(PfA\) - Outcomes Framework](#) - This supportive tool has been designed by the Department for Education (DfE) to promote consideration of the four PfA outcomes as part of EHC planning across the age range. This includes consideration of aspirations, activity and provision that can support progress towards the PfA outcomes and what this might mean at different ages and stages of development.
- [Career Development Framework](#) - This framework has been designed for use by any career development practitioner supporting young people and adults, with materials to specifically support use in primary, secondary and further education. The Framework clarifies the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that individuals need to have a positive career.
- [Careers in the Curriculum PDFs](#) - A series of PDFs that link through to a wide-range of resources that can be used to teach careers in the curriculum subjects. Subjects covered are English, history, modern languages, RE, maths and science.
- [Top Ten Employability Skills - STEM](#) - a great poster to remind young people (and staff) of what skills are valued in the world of work.
- [Future Jobs Kit 2.0](#) - a set of resources to spark creativity in thinking about careers.
- [McDonald's Taste for Work Programme](#) - a programme of fully resourced lessons supporting skills found in the [Skills Builder](#) framework to support the teaching and understanding of workplace skills.

Benefits to Parents and Carers

During the course, you reflected on the barriers to engagement that parents and carers of young people with SEND may face. It is also important to discuss with the Careers Leader the reasonable adjustments that parents and carers of both young people with and without SEND might need to access the information provided to them.

There are many freely available accessibility tools to support communication with parents and carers. Here are some examples:

- [Accessibility tools in Microsoft 365](#) - a webinar looking at the accessibility tools available to use online to augment communication and to share with parents and carers to enable more engagement.
- [Assistive Technology](#) - there are many resources here to support in understanding how assistive technology can support accessibility.
- [What's the secret to engaging parents?](#) - A range of resources to support schools in building better partnerships with parents.

Building in flexibility and providing parents and carers with information on how to access it in a format that suits them best—such as having the information read aloud, available in their preferred language, or with larger text—can be beneficial. Sharing this information with all parents and carers in your setting, using an appropriate format, can help streamline communication and reduce the need to create additional resources, ultimately easing workload.

With greater collaboration among your entire staff team and your Careers Leader, you can draw on a wider range of expertise for crucial transition discussions, such as during teacher meetings, annual reviews, and more informal conversations. Providing parents and carers with the right information at the right time, and building a cohesive team around the young person, ensures that you are collectively raising aspirations while helping parents understand their responsibilities.



Importance of Parent and Carer Engagement in Careers

This section highlights the touch points you have with parents and carers and how careers can be the golden thread running through all conversations and interactions. It can be a significant challenge if your setting supports the career aspirations of children and young people, but their parents or carers are not aligned with these goals at home.

As stated in the [action research project report and toolkit](#) written by the AoC, High quality parental engagement in careers goes beyond the sharing of information, and instead actively engages and equips all parents to understand how to use information, such as labour market information (LMI), to support their child's decision making. It considers the differing needs of parents, at different stages of their child's education, providing support well ahead of key decision points.



What is important about PCE?

Earlier, you reflected on the participation of parents and carers of young people with SEND, focusing on collaboration with your Careers Leader to enhance engagement opportunities. Now, consider how you are meeting [Gatsby Benchmark 2](#):

“Parents and carers should be encouraged and supported to access and use information about careers, pathways, and the labour market to inform their support for learners in their care.”

Gatsby

Think about those parents and carers who are not yet engaged in careers education. What needs might they have, and how can these needs be met?

Below are some links to resources that can support Parent and Carer Engagement (PCE) by providing key information for parents and carers:

- [What Works in SEND](#) is a website devoted to best practice for working with young people with SEND. Below are some examples of best practice related to co-production with parents, carers, and careers:
 - › [Supporting young people with SEND into training and employment in Middlesbrough - What Works in SEND](#)
 - › [Genuine Partnerships and the Four Cornerstones approach to co-production in Rotherham - What Works in SEND](#)
 - › [Supported Internships in Manchester - What Works in SEND](#)

- [Option Choices](#) - Written for young people but great to share with parents and carers to broaden their insight into the world of work:
- [Preparing for Adulthood: Employment Resources](#) - A carefully curated selection of resources for parents to engage with.
- [Parental Engagement: Action research project report and toolkit](#) - A report filled with best practice examples from FE on engaging with parents and carers.
- [Parental Engagement: Evaluating your delivery](#) - Support and advice on getting feedback from parents and carers.
- [Ideas for involving parents and other tips for teachers](#) - Ideas for classroom activities, these resources contain suggestions about how to engage with parents and local employers.
- [A workshop for engaging parents](#) - This workshop aims to inform parents of the ways in which the labour market is predicted to change and the importance of having an entrepreneurial mind-set.
- [Education - Northeast Ambition](#) – Toolkits and resources to support and structure meaningful careers education – sections for primary, secondary and FE settings.

Why is PCE in careers so important?

The landscape of the world of work has changed significantly since many parents and carers were in school. Staying informed is crucial. For parents and carers of young people with SEND, there are numerous pathways to employment or further education, many of which differ from traditional routes. Below are some links to help you share the latest information on accessing employment in this evolving landscape:

- [Work experience and employment](#) - This links parents and carers to the award-winning programme called Employ Autism for autistic people aged 16-25. The programme provides opportunities to access paid work experience with leading organisations and companies. It also has its own supported internship for those aged 19-25 with an EHCP, autism, or learning difficulty.
- [Internships Work: Resources for Young People & Families](#) – all the current information around internships for young people and their parents and carers.
- [SEND Advisory Network](#) – Brought to you from Amazing Apprenticeships, this is a network to support widening access to apprenticeships for individuals with additional needs.
- [National Apprenticeship Week](#) – A week-long celebration that brings together businesses and apprentices across the country to shine a light on the positive impact that apprenticeships make to individuals, businesses, and the wider economy. Find toolkits, events, and links to employers.
- [Pathways to employment](#) – A range of resources about the pathways to employment for SEND learners including a webinar from the ETF Centre for Excellence in SEND Employer Spokes and National Star focusing on the self-employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- [Careers Hub](#) – this is a local careers hub, showcasing what information is available in the Tees Valley. You can find your local career hub here: [Contact your local Careers Hub](#).
- [T Level Parents and Carers' guide](#) - A guide for parents and carers to the T-levels

- [Pathways To Getting a Life](#) - A guide to transition planning for young people with SEND with some great real examples.
- [Careermag for Inclusion](#) - Aimed at employers this is a useful guide to share with all parents and carers as they may be able or willing to develop work experience to young people with SEND or those without. Useful to see what is possible for parents and carers.

Impact on Young People

There is substantial evidence that the engagement of parents and carers in careers education is crucial for expanding opportunities for young people. Statistics show that 69% of young people seek careers support from their parents or carers, compared to 46% who turn to teachers and only 23% who consult Careers Advisors. ([Youth Voice Census Report - Youth Employment](#)). Therefore, parents and carers remain the primary source of information. To effectively impact young people with SEND and provide them with a robust and inspiring careers education, it is essential to include their parents and carers.



Person-Centred Practice

This section aims to enhance your practice with additional ideas and tools centred around focused on person-centred practice. These tools and practices have their foundation in person-centred planning, an approach to social justice and inclusion originally developed to support individuals with learning disabilities.

The key principles are:

1. The individual is at the centre, involved throughout. They choose who they want to be involved and have input into the setting and timing of any meetings.
2. Parents, carers, and advocates are included.
3. Outcomes reflect what is important to them as well as for them.
4. Actions are linked to holistic outcomes, focusing on what is possible, not just what is available.
5. Ongoing listening, learning, and further actions.

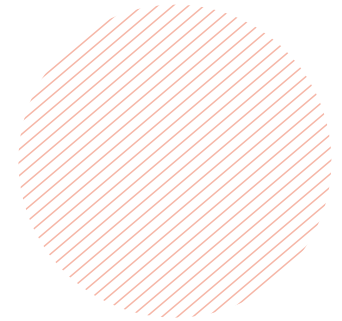
Adhering to these principles is crucial for supporting parent and carer engagement. As research indicates, one-to-one, tailored, bespoke, and individualised support is highly valued.

Tools and best practice

There are many tools that can support your person-centred approaches within your setting, here are some examples:

- [Personalising Education - A guide to using person-centred practices in schools](#) - A guide to a range of tools to support person-centred approaches.
- [Circles of support - Challenging Behaviour Foundation](#) - tools for considering and ensuring that the correct people are included in person-centred meetings.
- [Themed one-page profiles](#) - a selection of themed one-page profiles ideal for the younger age range.
- [One Page Profile](#) - A tool to help those who support young people to better understand what matters to them, what they are good at and how to provide great support.
- [Preparing for Adulthood: Person-centred Planning Tools](#) - A set of templates and profiles from NDTi to support person-centred planning created as part of the preparation for adulthood toolkit, many have accompanying videos to support application.
- [Journey/roadmap \(Learner Journey\)](#) - A visual way to present the careers milestones to parents and carers and young people. Each can be edited and personalised for your young people.
- [What is Person-Centred Planning?](#) - A guide to the principles, methodologies, implementation, and benefits of person-centred planning from Inclusive Tech.com.

To hear more about person-centred planning take a look at the Lunch and Learn session from [Beyond Autism](#). You can also download a [planning template](#) to help you and your stakeholders.



Shouting about your Successes!

One of the best ways to demonstrate your commitment to careers and person-centred practice is by hosting an alumni event or creating a dedicated space on your website where young people, including those with SEND, can showcase their achievements since leaving. Nothing inspires parents and carers more than seeing how your setting has supported young people in reaching their goals.

Having alumni visit and talk to young people shows them what someone from their own background can achieve, and how your setting was a crucial part of that journey. Some settings use their social media presence to share success stories, host events where alumni discuss their post-setting journeys, or maintain a webpage dedicated to alumni achievements. The methods are diverse, so be creative!

Below are some excellent examples of settings hosting alumni pages:

- [Catcote Academy](#)
- [Wellfield School](#)
- [The Kingsley School](#)
- [The Royal National College for the Blind](#)

Using digital profiles to highlight young people's learning journeys and highlight their academic and holistic skills in a more interactive and personalised way can be highly valuable. These profiles benefit young people, their parents, and carers, as well as potential future employers or training placements. Young people can display their talents, include pieces of work, upload videos, and express their unique abilities, making it easy to share with future employers or training programs.

The links below, some of which are paid resources, are not endorsed by The Careers & Enterprise Company or nasen. However, they may provide insight into the benefits and serve as a starting point:

- [A complete guide to using a Digital Portfolio – My Sphere](#)
- [Globalbridge schools Tutorial Session 2 - YouTube](#)
- [Why digital literacy is important for Careers - Adobe for Education](#)
- [The Complete Guide to Student Digital Portfolios](#)
- [The Benefits of Digital Portfolios for Holistic Student Assessment: Embracing a Comprehensive Evaluation Approach – Learning Mole](#)

Conclusion

We hope you have been inspired and supported in reflecting on your collaboration with your Careers Leader and have identified actionable steps to advance this partnership. Below, you will find additional resources that can assist in considering the strategic overview of careers as an SLT, along with links to further support and research.

- [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers](#) - In this resource you can find the link to the Statutory Guidance and The Carers & Enterprise Company at a glance guide for schools and college leaders and training providers.
- The [CDI framework](#) is a structure for identifying needs, designing, delivering learning and evaluating your careers programme.
- [Discover Autism Research and Employment \(DARE\)](#) - DARE work with organisations across the UK to understand the experiences of autistic employees and job seekers. DARE aims to build a holistic and longitudinal evidence base for understanding the factors behind the current autism employment gap disadvantaging autistic adults.
- [Transition to Employment Toolkit](#) - Explore the toolkit around supporting transitions to employment, FE, or training, designed for autistic young people but suitable for all, with sections for educators, young people, employers, and professionals.
- If apprenticeships is still an area of consideration for your parents and carers, staff and pupils, this e-learning module may support their understanding: [Apprenticeships - Aspire Higher](#).
- Meeting with employers is a key part of the Gatsby Benchmarks. Here are some videos that may support this if engaging more locally is a challenge: [Careers - Aspire Higher](#). You can also engage with your local STEM Ambassadors: [How to Access STEM Volunteers - for Educators](#).

- If when reviewing your current offer, co-production was an area that you want to enhance, this guide should support you: [Genuine Partnerships and the Four Cornerstones approach to co-production in Rotherham - What Works in SEND](#).
- There may be funding-related issues that parents and carers identify as barriers to accessing the world of work. The links below may provide useful support in addressing these concerns:
 - › [Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition](#)
 - › [Benefits and financial support if you are disabled or have a health condition](#)
 - › [Apply for communication support at a job interview if you have a disability or health condition \(Access to Work\)](#)
 - › [Disability Students Allowance](#) - support to cover the study-related costs due to a mental health problem, long-term illness, or any other disability.
 - › [Universal Credit and young disabled people in education webinar](#)

The Careers & Enterprise Company, nasen and the funders, The Gatsby Foundation, hope that the course and guide have been valuable in your role. We deeply appreciate the contributions of SENCOs and recognise the significant impact you have on the young people in your care. Thank you for your dedication and hard work in supporting their career journeys, both now and in the future.

