GATSBY | THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

Understanding the role of the Careers Leader and strategic leadership of careers



A guide for Independent Training Providers

Aims of this resource:



1. Clarify the role of the Careers Leader

Establish a shared understanding of the Careers Leader's responsibilities and explore how to ensure they have the authority, time, and professional development to lead effectively.



2. Define sustainable and strategic careers leadership

Understand the key elements involved in positioning careers leadership as a recognised driver of whole-organisation improvement, with an emphasis on long-term impact and positive outcomes for learners.



3. Enable reflective practice and continuous improvement

Explore case studies and examples of good practice that support embedding impact-led, sustainable and strategic careers leadership.

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Section 1: Introduction

Statutory Guidance

The Gatsby Benchmarks are at the core of the government's strategy to provide high-quality careers guidance to all young people. The benchmark framework was updated in 2024 and revised statutory guidance for Independent Training Providers was published in May 2025. This guidance places the updated Gatsby Benchmarks at the heart of careers provision in schools, colleges – and now ITPs – and reaffirms its expectation that all institutions should have a named Careers Leader.'

This guide is specifically aimed at Independent Training Providers. There are separate guides for colleges and for schools.

Statutory Guidance

Every institution should appoint an appropriately trained Careers Leader to develop and direct the careers programme, in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Careers Leader should have the skills, commitment, and support from their senior leadership team. They should be given protected time and sufficient budget to carry out the role effectively.

Careers Statutory Guidance: At a glance guides for school, college and ITP leaders. This resource provides an overview of the responsibilities of schools and colleges outlined in the publication 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers.

The Gatsby Benchmarks

Effective careers guidance is crucial for all young people, whatever their background, and schools, special schools, colleges, and independent training providers (ITPs) play a key role in delivering it.

In 2014, the Gatsby Foundation published Good Career Guidance, a report by Sir John Holman, which used international evidence to define what world-class careers guidance for young people looked like. The critical elements of good careers guidance were developed into a framework of eight benchmarks. The benchmarks provide a shared understanding of, and common language for, careers guidance. They are now embedded in practice across more than 90% of secondary schools, special schools, and colleges, where they are used strategically to shape careers provision and drive continuous improvement. Following two years of research and consultation, the benchmarks have been updated to future-proof them as the standard for world-class careers guidance for young people. The benchmark guidance has been updated and now includes Independent Training Providers.

The eight benchmarks remain in place, but with key refinements to the summary descriptions and measurable criteria. The Gatsby Foundation's report Good Career Guidance: The Next 10 Years report, provides further detail of the updates. For more information and to read the full report, go to www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk

"The careers programme has helped me discover things and pathways I never knew were possible and had never thought about. It's widened my idea of what I can do and has stopped me thinking so narrowly."

Year 12 student Gatsby Good Career Guidance: The Next 10 Years

Meaningful achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks

Visit our Resource Directory Meaningful achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks page to find key information about the updates to the benchmarks, as well as links to key resources such as The Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit for Colleges and ITPs, which provide practical information and guidance on the updated Gatsby Benchmarks.

Section 2: Clarifying the Role of the Careers Leader: What does a Careers Leader do?

Responsibilities of a Careers Leader

An effective Careers Leader should:

1. Lead and be accountable for a progressive careers provision, aligned with Gatsby Benchmarks and underpinned by clear learning outcomes.
2. Coordinate, manage and communicate all elements of the provision, including its budget.
3. Collaborate with senior leadership and governance to ensure the careers provision aligns with the organisation's strategic priorities.
4. Plan and oversee engagement of parents and carers throughout the careers journey as part of a wider parental engagement strategy.
5. Build and maintain key relationships to drive improvement and ensure sustainability.
6. Engage and mobilise internal staff (management, owners / governance roles, teaching staff, coaches, tutors, SEN staff, Careers Advisers) and external partners (Careers Hubs, employers, careers learning providers, etc.).
7. Lead the coordination of CPD, resource and support, to enable all delivery staff to confidently highlight meaningful links between the curriculum content or occupational knowledge, skills and behaviours and careers, pathways, and the world of work.
8. Evaluate and improve the provision using relevant insight and data (e.g. destinations data, learners' perception of career readiness and stakeholder voice).

Clarification:

- **Strategic role:** The Careers Leader is a strategic leadership position, distinct from roles like Careers Coordinator or Careers Adviser. Effective careers leadership requires the ability to shape strategy and implement the programme. Ideally, the Careers Leader is part of the senior leadership team or reports directly to it. They must have the authority and expertise to lead and ensure the institution meets the Gatsby Benchmarks. They oversee the careers provision but do not deliver all aspects themselves.

  For further detail of requirements of statutory guidance and requirements of leaders in Independent Training Providers, please visit Careers guidance and access for education and training providers.

Careers Leadership: Key roles	
Role	**Responsibility**
Senior Managers	Senior managers should explicitly back the organisation's careers programme. This includes: • Ensuring the programme is stable and well-structured. • Supporting the appointment of an identified and appropriately trained Careers Leader who is responsible for delivering the programme effectively. • Consider and allocate relevant resourcing and staffing required to embed high quality careers provision that meets the needs of all learners.
Careers Leader	Leads the overall careers provision. Not expected to deliver everything personally, but must coordinate, commission, and manage others. Needs authority to lead reforms and ensure alignment with the Gatsby Benchmarks.
Senior Manager with responsibility for careers * (*If Careers Leader is not Senior manager)	Ensuring that conditions for success are in place for sustainable and strategic careers leadership: leaders' vision, strategic careers plan, careers learning journeys, distributed leadership of careers, impact evaluation.
Careers Adviser	Providing information, advice and personal guidance to learners and collaborating with the Careers Leader on effective and timely personal guidance arrangements. This role could be internal (a member of provider staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level).
Governance	Governance should provide explicit backing and strategic oversight of the organisation's careers programme. This includes: • Ensuring the programme is stable, structured, and aligned with the organisation's broader strategic priorities. • Supporting the senior leadership team in prioritising careers education and provision. • Championing the appointment and development of an appropriately trained Careers Leader. Holding the organisation accountable for the quality and impact of its careers provision.

Other possible supplementary roles:	
Role	**Responsibility**
Careers Coordinator	Co-ordinating or implementing an independent training providers careers provision.
Careers Administrator	Supporting the Careers Leader by undertaking a range of administrative and logistical tasks.
Enterprise Adviser	A volunteer from business who will work with the Careers Leader and the senior leadership team to drive improvements in the institution's careers provision.
Enterprise Co-ordinator	Providing institutions with a local source of expertise and support for their careers provision.
Careers Hub Lead	Facilitating one of a national network of local Careers Hubs in England supporting schools and colleges to work collaboratively on developing their careers provision and to share practice.

Potential structures for leadership of careers

Model 1: Senior Leader as Careers Leader

- **Position:** Typically, a senior staff member responsible for overseeing the strategic direction of careers provision within the Independent Training Provider.
- **Reporting line:** Directly to the Senior Management Team or board (where applicable).
- **Role Scope:**
  - Strategic oversight of the organisation's provision and careers programme.
  - Coordination of all careers-related activities and stakeholders.
  - Planning, monitoring, and development of careers provision.
  - Delegation of operational and strategic tasks.
  - Accountability for the overall quality and impact of careers provision, including during inspections and accreditations.
- **Strengths:**
  - Centralised oversight ensures coherence and alignment across full careers provision and stakeholders.
  - Direct reporting to senior management or board (where applicable) enables strategic influence and integration with whole organisation priorities.
  - Delegation of operational tasks allows the strategic lead to focus on vision, planning, and impact.
  - Strategic leadership supports standardised collaboration and shared ownership across departments.
  - Clear accountability strengthens quality assurance and readiness for inspection or accreditation.
  - Efficient decision-making through a single point of strategic leadership, reducing duplication and fragmentation.
- **Limitations:**
  - Competing responsibilities: A strategic Careers Leader often holds multiple roles, which can limit the time and focus available for careers leadership.
  - High administrative load: Strategic leaders are often responsible for preparing for inspections and accreditations, which can be time-consuming and divert attention from strategic planning.
  - Delegation challenges: While operational tasks can be delegated, some strategic responsibilities are difficult to hand over without compromising coherence or quality. Also, there is a need to ensure that members of staff are upskilled sufficiently and confident to deliver careers activities.
  - Achieving consistency: In larger organisations it is difficult for one person to have oversight and influence over the quality and consistency of careers delivery.

Potential structures for leadership of careers

Model 2: Operational careers leadership

- **Position:** TColleague(s) responsible for managing specific components or multiple elements of ITPs careers provision in a devolved role. This may include careers services, employer engagement, work experience, embedding careers in teaching and learning, tutorial support, and marketing/ outreach.

- **Reporting line:**
  - Typically report to a curriculum manager or student services leadership, depending on the ITPs structure.
  - May report directly to the Senior Leadership Team, or one senior postholder in smaller organisations.

- **Role Scope: One or more of the following:**
  - Delivery and management of careers-related services across key areas.
  - Careers Services, including information, advice, and guidance.
  - Employability & Employer Engagement including workplace interactions and learner employment / progression preparation.
  - Work Experience management/coordination.
  - Teaching & Learning including supporting embedding careers into the curriculum.
  - Tutorial Provision including pastoral and participation support.
  - Marketing, outreach & pre-entry guidance including engaging prospective learners and guiding course selection.
  - Coordination with other operational leaders to ensure cohesive careers provision.
  - Implementation of strategic careers plans at operational level.

- **Strengths:**
  - Specialised expertise in specific areas of careers provision.
  - Direct engagement with learners and staff, enabling responsive support.
  - Flexibility in structure where roles can be adapted to fit ITP needs.
  - Potential for integration with other services (e.g. student support, curriculum delivery).
  - Supports strategic goals through practical implementation.

- **Limitations:**
  - Fragmentation risk where roles may be dispersed across departments, leading to lack of cohesion.
  - Role ambiguity where not all staff may identify their work as careers related.
  - Variable influence and may lack authority to drive cross-organisation change without strategic backing.
  - Differing priorities on time and resource capacity can reduce effectiveness and impact of devolved model.
  - Limited strategic oversight as focus is often on delivery rather than long-term planning.

It is recognised that the nature of independent training provider organisations is such that in small organisations responsibility for strategic and operational careers leadership may be held by just one person.

Section 3: Careers Leadership Roadmap:

Key steps to embedding effective careers leadership as a driver of whole institution improvement.

Phase 1

Understanding sustainable and strategic careers leadership.

Phase 2

Developing your careers provision and building a strategic careers plan aligned to whole school priorities.

Phase 3

Effective impact evaluation of the careers provision.

Phase 1: Understanding sustainable and strategic careers leadership.

Strategic and sustainable careers leadership is supported by setting a clear vision, creating a strategic careers plan, developing progressive and responsive Careers Learning Journeys, engaging stakeholders, and continuously improving the careers provision to meet the needs of all learners. Careers leadership ensures that all learners have access to high-quality careers guidance, experiences, and opportunities that help them make effective and sustained transitions into further or higher education, training, or employment.

The Careers Impact Maturity Model provides a structured framework and shared language for understanding what effective, sustainable, and strategic careers leadership entails. It positions careers not as a standalone function but as a **core driver of whole-organisation improvement**, aligning careers provision with wider priorities and development planning. Through its themes such as leadership vision, strategic planning, and impact evaluation, the model outlines how careers leadership can be embedded across staffing structures, supported by governance, and informed by data and stakeholder voice.

By undertaking an internal leadership review based on the model, independent training providers can assess their current position, identify areas for growth, and implement a continuous improvement cycle that enhances learner outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

Training offer for Careers Leaders

Our learning and development offer for Careers Leaders is designed to support you to meaningfully achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks and to embed a strategic and sustainable approach to careers leadership in your organisation.

Getting started:

Access the free online Careers Leader induction module via The Careers & Enterprise Academy.

Signpost senior leaders and governance to the free online 'Understanding careers leadership' modules via The Careers & Enterprise Academy.

Phase 2: Developing your careers provision and building a strategic careers plan aligned to whole institution priorities.

Developing your careers provision and building a strategic careers plan.

To build a sustainable and strategic careers leadership approach and create a stable and embedded careers provision we recommend; setting a clear vision, creating a strategic careers plan to support one of the models described in Section 2*, developing responsive Careers Learning Journeys, and regularly evaluating provision to meet the needs of all learners. In this section we will support you to get started:

- Developing a progressive and responsive careers provision underpinned by learning outcomes.
- Creating a strategic careers plan.

*This will depend on the size of your organisation however taking the approach that careers education is everyone's responsibility will help embed an approach that ensures maximum reach and impact and maximises resource.

Developing a progressive and responsive careers provision underpinned by learning outcomes.

Depending on the type of your provision and delivery model, your careers provision and related learning outcomes may be shaped accordingly.

- Review your current career provision. This can be completed using the Careers Impact Maturity model for ITPs and completing an Internal Leadership Review. This will help you to explore the strengths and areas for improvement in your careers provision.
- Plan Careers Learning Journeys with responsive, progressive learning outcomes. If relating to apprenticeships, your learning outcomes may be mapped to the occupational standards and the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are required to be developed on the apprenticeship journey. If relating to a study programme or other short programme, consider what you would like the learner to be able to know and do when they complete the programme. How can this be embedded in their programme of study or through tutorial or wrap around provision?
- Use data effectively to ensure a responsive, personalised careers provision for all learners. Data may include information about intended and destination and previous progression pathways for learners on a similar programme, labour market information, potential NEET indicators, student personal data (e.g. disadvantage indicators).

Access the 'Benchmark 1: Suggested universal career-related learning outcomes' resource to:

- Access suggested universal career-related learning outcomes as a starting point.
- Support the development of clear, progressive and responsive careers learning outcomes and learning objectives that underpin a coherent, high-quality careers provision.

Creating a strategic careers plan

A strategic careers plan aligns the institution's career provision with its long-term goals and is a whole organisation process.

The strategic careers plan should:

Set a clear vision and intent for your careers provision.

• Establish key strategic priorities and how these link to overall organisation goals.

• Agree strategic objectives.

• Articulate action steps (including delivery methods, rationale for careers learning outcomes and distribution of responsibilities).

• Embed milestones and key performance metrics including data and evaluation methodology.

Phase 3: Effective impact evaluation of the careers provision.

This phase focuses on understanding and embedding effective impact evaluation as a core element of strategic careers leadership. Building on the foundations laid in Phase 2, it supports leaders to assess the effectiveness of their provision and ensure it continues to meet the needs of all learners.



Impact evaluation is the process of:

- Assessing the effectiveness of careers provision against its planned intent, strategic aims, and learning outcomes.
- Identifying what difference the provision makes, not just in terms of what is delivered, but how it is delivered, including personal impact of individualised and tailored provision.
- Reviewing destinations data, learner perception of career readiness, and stakeholder voice to inform continuous improvement of provision.
- Analysing longer-term outcomes, including destination data, to evaluate sustained impact.
- Embedding evaluation within quality assurance mechanisms and strategic planning, ensuring careers leadership is aligned with whole organisation priorities.

Understand how to approach impact evaluation.

Plan

Access:

- Your careers strategy is the starting point to revisit your vision statement and strategic priorities for your careers provision and the top-level criteria that you will be evaluating against.
- The careers learning outcomes you have set out for your learners and the methods you will use to assess whether these have been met.

Consider:

- How can evaluation of careers be embedded in existing quality assessment processes and procedures e.g. work scrutiny, observations, self-assessments etc?
- What are the success criteria for measuring the impact of your careers provision?

Collect

Type of impact evidence	Sources
Sustained and longer-term destination data	Consider making effective use of: • Planned destination data, including UCAS & employment information. • Sustained education, employment, or training participation data (e.g. 6 months or more post-completion). • Apprenticeship uptake data, retention and completion rates. • Destination tracking over 1, 3, and 5 years. • Data on sector and level of employment or further study. • Progression route data (e.g. from Level 2 to Level 3, or into HE).
Learner perception of their career readiness	Consider making effective use of: • Survey/questionnaire responses on career confidence, clarity, and preparedness. • Student representative minute/meeting notes. • Feedback from personal guidance sessions. • Focus group insights on perceived relevance of careers provision. • Self-evaluation tools or readiness scales. • Comparative data across cohorts or demographic groups.
Aspirations, intended and immediate education, training or employment destinations	Consider making effective use of: • Intended destinations captured during guidance or tutorial / contact sessions. • Application and offer data (e.g. UCAS, apprenticeship applications, employment offer). • Learner-stated career goals or subject interests. • Parent/carer input on aspirations. • Tracking of actual vs intended destinations post-completion.
Stakeholder voice	Consider making effective use of: • Learner voice via surveys, focus groups, feedback from personal guidance, etc. • Staff voice via teaching staff/tutor feedback, staff surveys or observations/informal feedback. • Employer and partner voice via post encounter/experiences reflections, focus groups, surveys, or partnership reviews, etc. • Parent and carer voice via surveys, feedback forms or focus groups, etc. • Alumni storytelling. • Business / employer feedback.

Collect

Type of impact evidence	Sources
Education engagement	Attendance data Behaviour data End of unit/ year tests, termly/annual effort grades, teacher reports, public exam results, bespoke survey using established questions.
Feedback on specific elements of provision	How to write survey questions Example questionnaires
Education engagement	Consider making effective use of: • Attendance records. • ILP records. • Engagement data. • Progress tracking. • Intervention records. • Exam results. • Predicted grades. • Student reports.
Quality Assurance	Careers Impact internal leadership reviews (annual) The matrix Standard Quality in Careers Standard

Review

Reviewing impact evaluation data enables you to:

- Measure progress and celebrate success in relation to your careers provision's intent, aims, and outcomes.
- Drive continuous improvement by ensuring universal provision remains responsive to emerging insights and trends.
- Inform personalised and proactive interventions to better support learners at risk of disengagement or becoming NEET.

Act:

- Share the success of your provision: Communicate what is working well across the organisation and with external stakeholders. Use data and stories to highlight impact, celebrate progress, and build momentum. This can support inspection readiness, stakeholder confidence, and learner motivation.
- Elevate the responsiveness of universal provision: Use insights to refine and adapt your core careers offer so it better meets the needs of all learners.
- Personalise Careers Learning Journeys: Identify learners who may need additional support or tailored interventions. Use destination intentions, engagement data, and learner voice to shape individualised pathways, ensuring equity and relevance for every learner.

For additional resource and support with impact evaluation, access the Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision.

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