

Careers guidance: At a glance checklist and guide for college leaders

This document provides an overview of the roles and responsibilities of colleges outlined in the publication [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Statutory guidance for schools and guidance for further education colleges, sixth form colleges and independent training providers \(June 2026\)](#).

ELEMENT OF CAREERS LEADERSHIP	✓	ELEMENT OF GUIDANCE	SUPPORT SIGNPOSTING
Careers leadership		Our college has a trained Careers Leader.	Careers Leader training
Careers programme		<p>We have a written careers programme that is structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks and underpinned by progressive learning outcomes.</p> <p>Our careers programme is published on the college website.</p> <p>Careers is featured in the staff CPD programme.</p> <p>We are aware that DfE has published a new enrichment framework to ensure young people have access to help schools, colleges and specialist providers design and deliver a core enrichment offer, beyond the statutory curriculum, that is of benefit to all young people.</p> <p>Our Careers Advisers are qualified to an appropriate level.</p>	<p>Benchmark 1 suggested universal career related learning outcomes</p> <p>Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision (Careers Learning Journeys)</p> <p>The Careers & Enterprise Academy</p> <p>Schools and colleges can also use the CEC's Provider Directory to identify local and national organisations that can support the delivery of encounters with employers and employees across the Gatsby Benchmarks.</p> <p>Careers Guidance in Schools and Colleges: A Guide to Best Practice and Commissioning Independent Career Guidance Services</p>
Strategic planning		We have a current strategic careers plan that is aligned to college priorities and regularly monitored by the SLT and governing body.	Understanding how to create a strategic careers plan
Governance		<p>Careers is a regular agenda item at governance meetings.</p> <p>We have a careers link governor.</p>	<p>Guide for College Governors</p> <p>Governors: Introduction to careers module via The Careers & Enterprise Academy</p>

Quality assurance		<p>We have undertaken a Careers Impact internal leadership review.</p> <p>The progress and impact of careers provision are regularly reported to the SLT or governing body.</p>	<p>Careers Impact internal leadership review</p> <p>Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision</p>
Destinations data		<p>Learner destinations data (including learner aspirations, intended destinations, sustained and longer-term destinations) is regularly analysed by the SLT.</p>	<p>Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision</p>
Addressing the needs of all learners and careers guidance for learners with SEND		<p>Careers is embedded in our work to tackle disadvantage.</p> <p>Careers guidance for pupils with SEND is delivered through a person-centred, graduated approach, with EHC plan reviews focused on preparing for adulthood.</p>	<p>Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your careers provision: Educator Guide</p> <p>Vocational profiles</p>
Parent and carer engagement		<p>Parent and carer engagement is embedded throughout our careers programme.</p> <p>We consult with parents to ensure our careers provision meets their needs.</p>	<p>Resources and support from The Careers & Enterprise Company, including Parental Engagement in Careers CPD</p> <p>Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision (Careers Learning Journeys)</p>

Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Guidance for colleges

Careers Leader training and support

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 and commitment for the role, as well as support from their Senior Leadership Team (SLT), including protected time and sufficient budget to carry out the role effectively.

The Department for Education (DfE) strongly recommends that colleges engage with the [DfE's funded, flexible training offer](#), which is designed to support the growth of Careers Leaders at all levels. This includes training for new Careers Leaders, top-up training for experienced Careers Leaders, and senior leadership training focused on high-quality careers provision as a vehicle for wider college improvement.

All colleges **should** take the opportunity to join their local Careers Hub.

Reflection:

Does your college have a trained Careers Leader?

Does your college actively engage with the regional Careers Hub?

Signpost:

Access [fully funded flexible Careers Leader Training](#).

Find out more about Careers Hubs [here](#).

Careers programme (Careers Learning Journeys)

Every college **should** have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance, structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, that is known and understood by learners, parents and carers, staff, those in governance roles, employers and other agencies.

- Every college **should** have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of those in governance roles, the headteacher/ leadership and the senior management team, and has an identified and appropriately trained Careers Leader responsible for it.
- The careers programme **should** be tailored to the needs of learners, sequenced appropriately, underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to the whole-institution development plan. It **should** also set out how parents and carers will be engaged throughout.
- The careers programme **should** be published on the institution's website and communicated in ways that enable learners, parents and carers, staff and employers to access and understand it.
- The programme **should** be regularly evaluated using feedback from learners, parents and carers, teachers/subject staff and other staff who support learners, Careers Advisers and employers, to increase its impact.

DfE has published a new core enrichment framework to help schools, colleges and specialist providers design and deliver a core enrichment offer, beyond the statutory curriculum, that is of benefit to all young people. The guidance includes benchmarks, resources and case studies to support schools and colleges to build their enrichment offer more strategically and intentionally and improve access to a variety of opportunities for young people.

Schools and colleges will be expected to provide:

- opportunities for civic engagement
- arts and culture
- activities in nature
- outdoors and adventure activities
- sport and physical activity
- the development of wider life skills and future skills

DfE expects headteachers, principals and governing boards to support their careers team, especially their Careers Leader, and to invest in personal guidance provided by a qualified Careers Adviser. This will allow the continued delivery of high-quality, progressive careers programmes that support all learners to acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve and thrive.

Colleges **should** make sure that Careers Advisers (both internal and external) providing personal guidance to learners are trained to the appropriate level. Personal guidance is a critical element of a careers programme:

- Every learner **should** have at least one personal guidance meeting with a Careers Adviser. Meetings **should** be scheduled in the careers programme to meet the needs of learners.
- Information about personal guidance support and how to access it **should** be communicated to learners, parents and carers, and other stakeholders, including through the provider website.

Reflection:

Do you have a written-down careers programme that is structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks and underpinned by progressive learning outcomes?

Is the personal guidance offer delivered by Careers Advisers 'trained to the appropriate level'?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#).

Access the resource [Benchmark 1 suggested-universal career related learning outcomes](#).

Signpost all staff to the free training offer (including modules for Careers Leaders at all levels, special educational needs coordinators and teaching staff) via [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#).

Access the [UK Register of Career Development Professionals](#), held by the Career Development Institute, to search for an appropriately trained Careers Adviser who can deliver a particular service or activity, such as personal guidance.

Sharing your careers programme

Colleges **should** publish online the following information about their careers programme:

- The name and contact details of the Careers Leader.
- A summary of the careers programme, including details of how learners, parents, teaching staff and employers can access information about it.
- How the institution measures and assesses the programme's impact on learners.
- The date by which it will review this information.

This information **should** relate to how the institution is meeting the requirements and expectations set out in current statutory guidance, in particular demonstrating how they are working towards meeting all eight Gatsby Benchmarks.

Reflection:

Is your careers programme published on the college website?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#).

Strategic careers plan

Principals and those in governance roles **should** all be actively engaged in setting the direction for a whole-institution approach to careers guidance and **should** give explicit backing to the college's careers programme.

An effective Careers Leader **should** work with senior leaders to ensure the careers programme is informed by a strategic careers plan aligned to college priorities.

Aligning to whole institution priorities

The careers programme should be aligned with the institution's vision and priorities. This helps to establish a whole-institution approach where the careers programme can play an important part in addressing wider improvement priorities, including:

- attendance
- behaviour
- wellbeing
- inclusion
- attainment

Careers plans should be linked to the whole-school or college development plan, as this will help career guidance have the greatest impact on student outcomes. This might include alignment

with parental engagement plans, progression policies and the enrichment offer.

A new core enrichment offer is being developed to ensure young people have access to a wide range of enriching activities that broaden their horizons, stretch their abilities and develop wider skills. Schools and colleges will be expected to provide opportunities for civic engagement; arts and culture; nature, outdoor and adventure activities; sport and physical activity; and the development of wider life skills.

Reflection:

Is there a current strategic careers plan that is aligned to college priorities and regularly monitored by the SLT and governing body?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to create a strategic careers plan](#).

Governance

Every college **should** have a member of its governing body who takes a strategic interest in careers education and guidance and encourages employer engagement.

The governing body **should** provide clear advice and guidance on which the college leaders can base a strategic careers plan that meets the legal or contractual requirements of the college. The plan **should** be developed in line with the Gatsby

Benchmarks and informed by the requirements and expectations set out in statutory guidance. This plan **should** show how the careers programme will be implemented and how its impact will be measured.

The governing body **must** make sure that independent careers guidance is provided to all learners throughout their secondary education (11 to 18-year-olds), and learners aged up to 25 with an education, health and care plan, and that it:

- is represented in an impartial manner, showing no bias or favouritism towards a particular institution, education or work option.
- includes information on the range of education or training options, including apprenticeships and technical education routes.
- is guidance that the person giving it, considers will promote the best interests of the learners to whom it is given.

(NB Compliance with Provider Access Legislation is not a statutory requirement for colleges but is considered to be best practice)

Reflection:

Is careers a regular agenda item at governance meetings?

Is there a careers link governor?

Signpost:

Share the resource [Careers Education: A guide for college governors](#).

Signpost all governors to the free online module Governors: Introduction to careers via [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#).

Quality assurance, continuous improvement and impact evaluation

From September 2025, DfE expects all institutions to use the [updated Gatsby Benchmarks](#).

Institutions **should** ensure the quality assurance and continuous improvement of their careers programmes. DfE strongly recommends the use of the [Careers Impact System](#), which supports a quality assured, sustainable and strategic approach to careers leadership and establishes a shared and standardised language of quality improvement for careers aligned to college improvement. Colleges can undertake a free [Careers Impact internal leadership review](#).

DfE also strongly recommends that all colleges work towards the national [Quality in Careers Standard](#) to support the development of their careers programme. This external assessment allows independent judgement of the quality of careers provision, including its impact on learners' career-related learning. DfE also requires colleges to hold the [matrix Standard](#) if they are in receipt of funding from the DfE adult skills budget.

From November 2025 Ofsted:

- began inspecting under the revised Education Inspection Framework for school and further education and skills settings.
- report cards provide greater transparency, granularity and insight, giving parents, carers and education professionals the information they need to drive improvement across the education system.
- renewed the inspection framework to clearly identify areas of strength and where a setting needs to improve.

In further education and skills settings, Ofsted is legally required to comment on the careers guidance provided at colleges and sixth forms to students aged under 19, and to students aged 19 or over with an EHCP.

Ofsted inspectors will also inspect and comment on careers guidance on inspections of all FE and skills providers as appropriate.

Ofsted inspects careers guidance, particularly when considering how the provider contributes to the participation and development of learners and apprentices with coherent careers education and tailored guidance, a relevant programme of work-related learning, and the development of appropriate employability skills and personal attributes. Inspectors also consider how well leaders ensure learners and apprentices access structured, tailored careers education and guidance that reflects their interests, aspirations, and potential next steps.

Ofsted considers the extent to which further education and skills providers will support learners and apprentices to:

- develop the employability skills and attributes they need to progress to their chosen next steps.
- understand the range of progression routes to inform decisions about their future learning, employment or training.
- explore and plan for progression from their current role or course in particular if they are disadvantaged, have SEND or high needs, or face other barriers.

Ofsted's school inspection [toolkit](#) and further education and skills inspection toolkit provide further detail on how inspectors gather and evaluate evidence. The [CEC's Education Inspection Framework Guide](#) for Careers Leaders and Education Leaders highlights key changes in Ofsted's approach, reassures leaders on what is expected and emphasises the importance of meaningful implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Reflection:

Have you undertaken a Careers Impact internal leadership review?

Have the progress and impact of your careers provision been recently reported to the SLT and governing body?

Signpost:

Are you ready to confidently articulate the intent, delivery, and impact of your careers provision?

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

Access the resource [Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision](#).

[The Ofsted Education Inspection Guide](#) provides a structured framework and series of questions for consideration.

Systematic record-keeping

Colleges **should** keep systematic records of the participation of learners in all aspects of their careers programme, including the individual advice given to each learner and any subsequent agreed decisions.

The records of participation and advice given **should** be integrated with those given at the previous stage of the learner's education (including their secondary school), where these are made available. Records **should** begin to be kept from the first point of contact or the point of transition.

Reflection:

Are you keeping records at an individual learner level of involvement in the careers programme?

Destinations data

DfE has removed the expectation to track the destinations of young people who left education up to three years before, to allow resources to be focused on helping current learners to secure and sustain a destination. Sustained and longer-term destinations data continues to be valuable and **should** inform the evaluation of careers programmes and help colleges to build and maintain alumni networks.

- Colleges **should** collect, maintain and use accurate data for each learner on their aspirations, intended and immediate education, and training or employment destinations to inform personalised support.
- Colleges **should** use sustained and longer-term destinations data as part of their evaluation process, and use alumni to support their careers programme.

Reflection:

Has learner destinations data (including learner aspirations, intended destinations, sustained and longer-term destinations) been recently analysed by leaders?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Understanding how to effectively evaluate your careers provision](#).

Meeting the needs of all learners and careers guidance for learners with SEND

Institutions **should** tailor careers activities and educational goals to the needs of each learner, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and those who are absent.

Institutions **should** provide any additional support that may be needed to help young people navigate these barriers to career progress.

Careers guidance for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) should be delivered through a person-centred and graduated approach in line with the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

Chapter 8 of the SEND Code of Practice sets out that careers guidance is a core part of preparing children and young people with SEND for adulthood.

For young people with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans, local authorities must ensure that the EHC plan review at Year 9, and every review thereafter, includes a focus on preparing for adulthood. For those without EHC plans, transition support is provided through SEN support and impartial careers guidance. In all cases, appropriate advice is sought and information shared to ensure continuity of support and smooth transition into post-16 pathways and employment.

Reflection:

Is careers embedded in your work to tackle disadvantage?

Signpost:

Access the resource [Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through your careers provision: Educator Guide](#).

Work experience

All institutions should have adopted the strengthened benchmark and ensure that every pupil has multiple first-hand experiences of workplaces by the age of 16 and at least one further such experience by age 18.

Colleges and ITPs should ensure that every learner has had at least one experience of a workplace during their programme of study. High quality and meaningful experiences of workplaces are a funded component of 16 to 19 study programmes.

Reflection:

Are work experiences **meaningful** according to the updated Gatsby definition of 'meaningful' for Benchmark 6?

Signpost:

Access the resource and checklist [Understanding how to embed progressive work experiences](#).

Undertake a [Careers Impact internal leadership review](#) with a particular focus on Theme 5.

Parent and carer engagement

Every institution **should** have a clear approach to engaging parents and carers embedded throughout the careers programme. There **should** be a focus not only on sharing information, but on supporting parents and carers to make the best use of it and to get involved in any opportunities offered.

Reflection:

Is parent and carer engagement embedded throughout your careers programme?

Signpost:

Access [resources](#) and support from The Careers & Enterprise Company, including [Parental Engagement in Careers CPD \[continuing professional development\]](#).

Access the resource [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#).