

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

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## Aims of this resource:

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### 1. Clarify the role of the Careers Leader

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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

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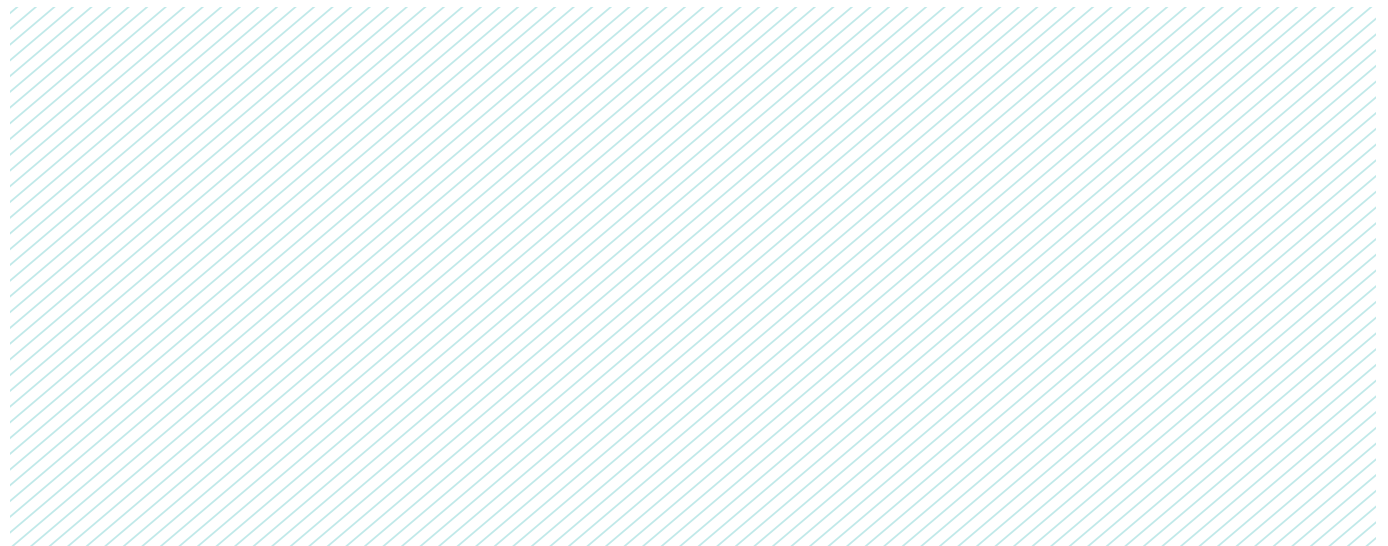
Understand the key elements involved in positioning careers leadership as a recognised driver of whole-school improvement, with an emphasis on long-term impact and positive outcomes for learners.



### 3. Enable reflective practice and continuous improvement

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



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- Key roles (careers provision)
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- Phase 2: Developing your careers provision and building a strategic careers plan aligned to whole school priorities.
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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 governing bodies, school leaders and school staff 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.

### 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.**

This guide is specifically aimed at secondary schools. There is a separate guide for colleges.

[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 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](http://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 Schools, Special Schools and Alternative Provisions and 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 institution'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 (SLT, governors, teachers, SENDCo, Careers Adviser) and external partners (Careers Hubs, employers, learning providers, etc.).
7. Lead the coordination of CPD, resources, and support to empower all teachers to confidently demonstrate the relevance of their subject and consistently connect the curriculum to 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.
- **Governance:** The governing body has ultimate accountability for the careers provision. One way to manage this is for the governing body to identify a Careers Link Governor who may work closely with the Careers Leader.

### Statutory Guidance

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

Careers Leadership: Key roles	
Role	Responsibility
Headteacher	<p>The headteacher should explicitly back the school's careers programme. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the programme is stable and well-structured.</li> <li>• Supporting the appointment of an identified and appropriately trained careers leader who is responsible for delivering the programme effectively.</li> <li>• Consider and allocate relevant resourcing and staffing required to embed high quality careers provision that meets the needs of all learners.</li> </ul>
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.
SLT with responsibility for careers* (*If Careers Leader is not SLT)	Ensuring that conditions for success are in place for sustainable and strategic careers leadership: leaders' vision, strategic careers plan, student 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.
Governor/Trustee	<p>Provide explicit backing and strategic oversight of the school's careers programme. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the programme is stable, structured, and aligned with the school's broader strategic priorities.</li> <li>• Supporting the headteacher and senior leadership team in prioritising careers education and provision.</li> <li>• Championing the appointment and development of an appropriately trained Careers Leader.</li> </ul> <p>Holding the college accountable for the quality and impact of its careers provision.</p>

Other possible supplementary roles:	
Role	Responsibility
Careers Coordinator	Co-ordinating or implementing a school's 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.
Central Strategic Leader for Careers (MATs)	A member of staff within the trust in a senior role with authority to act on behalf of the whole trust (not a single school) with strategic oversight and leadership of careers.
Careers Link Governor	A member of governing body who takes strategic responsibility for overseeing the strategic planning and impact evaluation of the careers provision.

## Potential structures for leadership of careers

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### Model 1: Senior Leader as Careers Leader

- **Position:** A member of the senior leadership team.
- **Reporting line:** Holds direct responsibility for careers leadership.
- **Role Scope:**
  - › May also have other senior responsibilities.
  - › Likely to delegate operational tasks.
- **Strengths:**
  - › Greater strategic influence and authority.
  - › Easier integration of careers into whole-institution priorities.
- **Limitations:**
  - › May require strong delegation to manage workload effectively.

### Model 2: Middle Careers Leader Reporting to Senior Leadership

- **Position:** A middle leader (teacher or non-teaching staff).
- **Reporting line:** Should report to a senior leader who holds overall responsibility for careers.
- **Role scope:**
  - › May combine careers leadership with other duties (e.g. teaching or Careers Adviser).
  - › Has line management support but not direct strategic authority.
- **Strengths:**
  - › Allows for focused operational delivery.
  - › Can be effective if the senior leader provides strong strategic guidance and influence at SLT level.
- **Limitations:**
  - › May lack influence over whole-institution strategy unless well-supported by senior leadership.

## 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 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-institution improvement, aligning careers provision with institutional 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, schools can assess their current position, identify areas for growth, and implement a continuous improvement cycle that enhances learner outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Find out more [here](#).

#### 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 school or special school.

#### Getting started:

Access the free online Careers Leader induction course via [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#).

Signpost SLT and governors to the free online 'Understanding careers leadership' modules via [The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#).

[Register for fully funded Careers Leader training.](#)

Our training courses help Careers Leaders accelerate their school, special school, or college towards meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks. Over 3,900 Careers Leaders have completed our flexible, fully funded training to enhance their careers provision. Whether you're experienced or new to the role, we offer courses to support you in guiding young people to their next best step.

## 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 a distributed leadership approach, 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.

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

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.

Access the following resources to fully develop and implement a whole school, special school, or college responsive careers provision:

- [Understanding how to embed careers in the curriculum.](#)
- [Understanding how to embed progressive employer encounters and work experiences.](#)
- [Understanding how to embed progressive encounters with further and higher education.](#)

### Undertake a Curriculum Audit

Use the [curriculum audit tool](#) to:

- Enable a whole institution view of where, throughout the curriculum, knowledge is being delivered and evidence is being gathered against the universal career related learning outcomes.

### Creating a strategic careers plan

A strategic careers plan aligns the institution's career provision with its long-term goals and is a whole school, special school, or college process.

Access the '[Understanding how to develop a strategic careers plan](#)' resource to:

- Set a clear vision and intent for your careers provision.
- Establish key strategic priorities.
- Agree strategic objectives.
- Articulate action steps.
- Embed milestones and key performance metrics.

### 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.
- 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 strategic planning, ensuring careers leadership is aligned with whole school priorities.

#### Use the OnTrack+ feature in Compass+ to:

- Recognise your most vulnerable learners who may be at Risk of NEET, who may benefit from additional support.
- Embed an evidence-informed process for early identification and intervention, ensuring learners receive the right support at the right time.
- Track the impact of your provision for your most vulnerable learners.

#### Measure the effectiveness of support for parents and carers through the use of a parents and carer questionnaire. This will help you to monitor and understand:

- Effectiveness in engaging and informing families across all year groups.
- Where gaps in parental understanding may impact learner outcomes or destinations.
- The extent to which families of young people with SEND, receive appropriate, tailored information.

#### Coming Soon:

A new parent and carer questionnaire will be available within Compass + from July, and on Compass from September.



## Understand how to approach impact evaluation.

### Plan

Access: [Understanding How to create a strategic careers plan](#) for resource and support in setting a vision statement and strategic priorities for your careers provision.

Access: [Understanding how to develop progressive and responsive careers provision \(Careers Learning Journeys\)](#) for resource and support in setting progressive learning outcomes that support progress towards your vision and ambition for learners.

### Collect

Type of impact evidence	Quick links
Sustained and longer-term destination data	<a href="#">Longer term destinations Gov.uk</a> <a href="#">Get Information about Schools - GOV.UK</a>
Learner perception of their career readiness	Impact of targeted support: <a href="#">OnTrack+ data</a>
Aspirations, intended and immediate education, training or employment destinations	<a href="#">Compass+ data on intended and actual destinations</a>
Stakeholder voice	Through the use of the Parent/Carer Questionnaire or via focus groups/ surveys with specific questions aligned to vision, intent and aims of provision.
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	<a href="#">How to write survey questions</a> <a href="#">Example questionnaires</a>
Quality Assurance	<a href="#">Careers Impact internal leadership reviews (annual)</a> <a href="#">Quality in Careers Standard</a>

### 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.

#### [OnTrack+ Guide](#)

#### Act:

- Share the success of your provision: Communicate what is working well across the school 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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