

Careers Education

Research review 2022-23



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Introduction

Opportunities and choices for young people become markedly more diverse when they finish secondary school. These choices however vary according to geographical, social and educational background (Allen *et al.*, 2016). And they have an important impact on their outcomes in adulthood (Holt-White, Montacute and Tibbs, 2022).

Much has been said about the aspirations of students, with the suggestion that these are limited in the case of those from a disadvantaged background. This is not the case. However, the expectations of many students are limited by their experience and background, and this is what careers education seeks to address (Baars, 2019).

The Gatsby Benchmarks

The Gatsby Benchmarks are a set of indicators designed to support schools in establishing an effective careers education programme.

1. a stable careers programme
2. learning from career and labour market information
3. addressing the needs of each pupil
4. linking curriculum learning to careers
5. encounters with employers and employees
6. experiences of workplaces
7. encounters with further and higher education
8. personal guidance

(Gatsby, 2018)

The Gatsby Benchmarks are non-statutory, but the framework aligns with the legal requirements placed on schools to provide independent careers education. Expectations on meeting statutory and contractual careers requirements are structured around the eight Gatsby Benchmarks in guidance documentation (DfE, 2021a).

Progress

By the end of the 2019/20 academic year, schools and colleges achieved an average of 3.75 Gatsby benchmarks. Those in careers hubs and the Enterprise Adviser Network had accelerated progress (DfE, 2021a). Whilst 2020 Compass data is not comparable to previous years, there has been a continued increase in the proportion of schools and colleges fully achieving every benchmark (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2020).

To make progress in achieving the benchmarks in full, schools and colleges were found to need strong institutional leadership and distribution of accountability for high quality careers provision. This included a governor and there needed to be a skilled careers leader in post with authority to make changes (Hanson and Neary, 2019).

Outcomes

Linking destinations data to Compass returns has shown a positive link between the Gatsby Benchmarks and the likelihood of a student being in education, employment or training. After controlling for levels of disadvantage, school type, academic grades and location, there was a statistically significant relationship between school Gatsby Benchmarks and sustained education, employment and training destinations for 2017/18 Year 11 leavers (the most recent cohort for whom data is available). The relationship was considered particularly strong among the most disadvantaged quarter of schools (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

The choices that young people have to make in education can have a profound influence on their future lives and opportunities available to them. Many lack the social capital that can help them to make these decisions and avoid the risk of being outperformed by their more advantaged peers when building a career. There is an increasing evidence base to support a positive impact from career guidance that includes: increased engagement with learning, increased attainment, and more appropriate destinations (Hanson and Neary, 2019).

Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI)

This psychometric tool is a measure of impact and identifies four underlying themes for measuring career readiness:

- career planning and management skills
- transition skills
- information and help seeking skills
- work readiness

A pilot study found that learners in schools that fully achieved all eight Benchmarks, reported significantly higher career readiness scores in comparison to schools and colleges achieving only four Benchmarks (Hanson and Neary, 2019).

Careers education in schools

Statutory guidance for maintained schools and academies in England says they have a duty to ensure provision of independent careers guidance. The guidance applies to all students in school from Year 8 to Year 13, in college up to and including the age of 18, and up to 25 with a current EHCP. This includes providing information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships and the requirement not to promote higher education as better or more favourable than further education or apprenticeships. Often known as 'the Baker Clause', schools and colleges must support students to understand the full range of education and training options, particularly apprenticeships and T levels (DfE, 2021a).

Increasing numbers of staff are incorporating careers education in their subjects, with specific linking of content to jobs and industry, or highlighting relevant pathways and skills required. For example maths teachers might respond to a challenge set by an engineering firm, or English teachers link to local charities to explore social responsibility as a theme in a text (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

The Sutton Trust released a new report in March 2022. They found improvements (since a previous review in 2014) but continued variability, as well as differences between state and private schools, and between state schools with more and less deprived intakes. State school pupils are more likely to report not having taken part in any careers related activities at 38% compared with 23% of pupils at private schools. Schools in more deprived areas are also less likely to have access to a specialist careers adviser (Holt-White, Montacute and Tibbs, 2022).

COVID-19 impact

One impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been to reduce opportunities for young people to experience the workplace. Only 39% of schools reported that most of their Year 11 students had access to a workplace experience in 2021, a fall from 57% in 2019. There is a consensus, however, that virtual approaches can usefully

complement face-to-face engagement for now and in the future (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

Some companies pivoting to virtual interaction were enabled to extend the geographical engagement of their approaches, for example Severn Trent focused particularly on social mobility 'cold spots'. Other changes were a greater openness of harder-to-reach industries such as video game design, or longer-form interactions over a number of weeks (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021, p.20).

The main impact of COVID-19 on careers education in 2019/2020 was the lack of face-to-face contact, and the cancelling of work experience. Engaging young people virtually was challenging (Gatsby Foundation, 2020). According to one study, 72% of teachers think the pandemic has negatively affected their school's ability to deliver careers education guidance. The figure was 16 percentage points higher for teachers in state schools, at 75% vs 59% in private schools (Holt-White, Montacute and Tibbs, 2022).

Careers leaders

Statutory guidance describes careers leaders as the 'critical factor in the development and implementation of an effective strategic careers plan' (DfE, 2021a, p.15). They should be a dedicated professional who is either a member of, or works closely with, the senior leadership team.

New research found that training for careers leaders led to increased knowledge across the four core areas of leadership, management, coordination and networking. The impact was seen in actions implemented in schools with updated strategic careers programmes and faster progress towards meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

An evaluation of careers leader training was carried out in 2019 to explore how well the model was working in schools. There was wide variety in the extent of careers experience, with some only having one or two years' experience, and others thirty-five years. There was also considerable

diversity in how the role was positioned in schools. Whilst recruitment was difficult initially, retention on programmes is high, and the vast majority successfully complete the training. Satisfaction ratings found 91% of participants were either satisfied or very satisfied with the overall training programme, and the majority found the course met their expectations. Accreditation was preferred on the whole as it improved the credibility and value perception of the courses (Williams *et al.*, 2020).

The Baker Clause

In January 2018 the Baker Clause was introduced with the intention of ensuring that all schools and colleges offered information on apprenticeships and other further education pathways, alongside more traditional academic university routes. Benchmark 7 of the Gatsby Benchmarks also covers guidance on further technical education (Holt-White, Montacute and Tibbs, 2022b).

Personal guidance

Gatsby Benchmark 8 covers the provision of personal guidance – the strongest performing benchmark among schools and colleges. Some 80% of secondary schools reported providing most students with an interview with a qualified careers adviser by the end of Year 11 (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021). This element may be of particular importance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are less likely to be able to benefit from networks of families and friends that provide insight into a wide range of career options (Holt-White, Montacute and Tibbs, 2022).

Labour market information

Schools and colleges reported sharing more information about the labour market with students, including information about growth sectors, skills gaps and career progression. Careers hub leads supported this work. Local employers also played an important role. In 2021 a small-scale survey indicated 76% of employers that worked closely with schools shared information about entry requirements and career progression. Three quarters shared information about pathways and

47% worked with careers leaders to increase their understanding of the labour market (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

Research suggests a disconnect between the career aspirations of young people and the jobs available. Extending and improving careers education in schools and colleges could help to reduce this disconnect, along with employer engagement (Chambers, Percy and Rogers, 2020).

Compass+ tool

Over 2,000 schools use the Compass+ careers education platform to manage their careers programmes. This links school data systems and records information at individual and cohort level. It includes the 'Future skills' questionnaire intended to measure a student's career readiness at points of transition and identify those in need of targeted support (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

Compass for Special Schools is a free digital tool available to special schools and specialist colleges to evaluate their provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks (Compass, no date).

Careers hubs

Between July 2021 and September 2021, the proportion of schools and colleges in England that were part of a careers hub increased from half to two-thirds. They bring schools, colleges, employers and providers together to collaborate on and improve Gatsby Benchmark provision. The schools and colleges that have been part of careers hubs for longer, report stronger performance.

Reasonable adjustments and SEND

Benchmark 3 is about addressing the needs of each individual pupil. Advice and activities should be tailored carefully to take account of prior knowledge and skills, and any additional support they may need to overcome barriers. This includes challenging stereotypes and inequalities, but also ensuring students from all backgrounds,

including those with SEND, can consider the widest range of careers. Looked after, or previously looked after children, and care leavers, may need particularly strong support to transition successfully to post-16 education or training (DfE, 2021a).

With the right support, the majority of SEND students will be able to access fulfilling jobs and careers. However, the benchmarks may need different interpretation in special schools and for some SEND pupils in mainstream schools (DfE, 2021a).

Accountability

Ofsted is legally required to comment on careers guidance provided in inspection reports. This is part of the judgement of personal development. In assessing the personal development offer at secondary schools, inspections will assess the quality of careers information, education, advice and guidance. This includes how well careers guidance benefits pupils when choosing next steps. They suggest that a successful careers guidance programme will be reflected in higher numbers of students progressing to positive and sustained destinations (DfE, 2021a).

Maintained schools are required, and academies and colleges expected, to publish information about their careers programme on their websites:

- name, email address and telephone number of the careers leader;
- summary of the careers programme and information about how to access information;
- how the impact of the programme on students is measured and assessed;
- the date of the next review of the published information (DfE, 2021a).

Primary schools

Expanding career-related learning in primary schools has the potential to reduce skills shortages and create better alignment according to research. It claims that getting children excited about learning can be encouraged through careers-related learning, as well as tackling

ingrained stereotypes or narrow aspirations (Chambers, Percy and Rogers, 2020).

Expanding careers education in primary school has been discussed for a few years. Many schools are already considering how best to introduce younger children to the world of work, without narrowing their aspirations or directing them towards particular routes. Careers advice is not appropriate in primary schools, but introducing work-related learning could be valuable for increasing their knowledge of a range of options and developing skills they will need in the future. In particular, it is important to challenge stereotypes that can start at a very young age (Chambers, 2018).

Early childhood career-related learning is relatively under-researched. However, there is some evidence that early interventions can have a lasting impact in terms of perceptions of different occupations and accessibility, and therefore aspirations. Career-related learning as early as age 5 can help shape perceptions about the suitability of different career paths. It should focus on exploring different careers rather than decisions or paths in order to broaden aspirations and expectations. Importantly it is not about asking children what they might do in the future, but about building awareness of the world of work (Kashefpakdel, Rehill and Hughes, 2018).

Work experience

Gatsby Benchmark 6 is about ensuring students are able to have experience of the workplace. The world of work has been changing, a change accelerated by COVID-19. Blended approaches that combine office and home work are increasingly common in many sectors. Blended work placements similarly offer an increased ability to access work experience for disadvantaged pupils.

According to one report of 2019, one third of employers are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied by the amount of relevant work experience young people have (CBI and Pearson, 2019).

Workplace encounters

Workplace encounters may include talks in assemblies, projects with employers, or careers fairs, many of which have been delivered virtually throughout the pandemic. Feedback suggests that there were benefits from these virtual encounters in the form of greater flexibility and efficiency, as well as the ability to draw on a wider pool of employers. A small-scale survey suggested 78% of employers expect to continue to engage with some form of virtual delivery of employer encounters in the future, and 55% for workplace experiences (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

Universal/essential skills

A broad set of skills linked to career readiness is associated with better outcomes for young people. These 'essential skills' are seen by a significant majority of employers, teachers and young people as fundamental to future success. However, defining these skills is problematic and confusing. We can differentiate between knowledge, character attributes and skills, but also sub-divide the types of skills into technical, essential and basic skills (Angus *et al.*, 2020).

The Skills Builder Partnership's eight essential skills draw on multiple studies, but the strength and depth of the evidence is mixed. The literature suggests that social and emotional skills such as listening, speaking and staying positive are associated with improved attainment amongst younger pupils. A propensity to aim high also appears to be linked to improved academic performance for students with SEND as well as predictive of success in employment – though there is also some evidence that not meeting high aspirations can result in poorer mental health.

1. listening
2. speaking
3. problem solving
4. creativity
5. staying positive
6. aiming high
7. leadership
8. teamwork

(Angus *et al.*, 2020)

The 2021 White Paper, Skills for Jobs, focuses on reforms to further education to support post-16 skills. This includes putting employers at the heart of the system so education and training leads to jobs, investing in higher-level technical qualifications as an alternative to a university degree, and making sure people have access to training and learning flexibly. The decisions include 'supporting outstanding teaching', through recruitment for FE, basing initial teacher education on employer-led standards, improving professional development provision, facilitating a strong relationship between industry and providers, supporting apprenticeships teachers and lecturers with professional development, and

introducing comprehensive workforce data collection (DfE, 2021b) p.12.

A report by the CBI and Pearson into the relationship between schools and the modern workplace, emphasises the importance given to wider character, behaviours and attributes in recruitment. Being 'work ready' is a priority for many employers (CBI and Pearson, 2019).

Life skills

Increasing importance is being given to the development of life skills for the success of young people. Skills such as confidence, motivation, resilience and communication are seen as crucial in the workplace, along with flexibility, creativity and teamwork (Cullinane and Montacute, 2017). The Government has placed the idea of 'character' as a requirement of schools, possibly in response to the belief that this has been a central element of private education, but patchy in the state sector (DfE, 2019).

Research suggests that extra-curricular activities are important in developing 'soft' skills whilst also being associated with other positive outcomes linked to achievement and attendance. Life experience gained from extra-curricular activities is not always available for marginalised groups in society, with household income the most important deciding factor in opportunities to participate (Donnelly *et al.*, 2019).

Career aspirations

A report of 2020 found a disconnect between young people's career aspirations and jobs in the UK, both current and projected. For example, five times as many young people want to work in art, culture, entertainment and sport as there are jobs available. Young people are confident in their choices however, despite this disconnect and the possible future frustrations. There is some evidence that those who benefit from careers activities and multiple career influences are more likely to have aspirations that are better connected to the labour market (Chambers, Percy and Rogers, 2020).

Financial literacy

FFT Education datalab has compiled some research about financial literacy skills in young people. They found that the gaps between socio-economic groups is large and it emerges pretty early. They found that the financial skills of 15-year-olds from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are approximately the same as those of 11-year-olds from the most advantaged backgrounds. The root cause of inequalities in these skills therefore happens before they even enter secondary school (Anders and Macmillan, 2021; Jerrim, 2022).

STEM

STEM industries are the current key focus as a driver of economic growth in UK policy, and therefore across the education sector more widely. The literature suggests that some children have narrow and limited understanding of the relevance of science to careers beyond stereotypical roles of doctors and science teachers (Kashefpakdel, Rehill and Hughes, 2018).

The labour market

A report on GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings suggests that the largest marginal returns are associated with moving from grade D to grade C and from grade C to grade B in most subjects (the research is based upon cohorts that completed GCSEs long before the recent reforms as the only way to measure long-run outcomes). However, this does not distinguish between the value relating to the knowledge and skills gained, or the value of the qualification itself providing admission to further study and or employment. The most robust difference in returns averaged across subjects, is between male and female students. Female students have not only smaller lifetime earnings overall but also smaller average absolute returns to grade improvements. Returns for free school meal eligible students are also lower on average. The report points out that causal mechanisms are uncertain: human capital theory or signalling can both be at play which matters less for the individual, but more for policy decisions (Hodge and Little, 2021).

At age 25 years, 23% of free school meal recipients who attended school in England, had recorded earnings above the annualised full-time equivalent of the living wage in comparison with 43.5% of those that did not. A larger proportion of males who received FSM than females was earning above the living wage (Office of National Statistics, 2022).

Whilst the focus of recent years has been directed towards STEM, the British Academy did some work to quantify demand for arts, humanities and social science skills. They found that studying these subjects enabled individuals to move across many areas of employment, suggesting a greater amount of flexibility and choice than those available to STEM graduates. Graduates in the arts and humanities are highly employable and these sectors are growing. They also have skills that are valued by employers: for example independent learning, critical thinking, being innovative and creative and effective at working with others. Whilst starting salaries are lower, they highlight that strong progress up the career ladder can lead to roles attracting higher salaries (The British Academy, 2020).

Higher education

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are still less likely to progress to higher education than their more privileged peers, despite increasing numbers undertaking degrees. Even when controlling for prior attainment, this gap remains despite efforts to widen access. There remains a lack of evidence in terms of the impact of outreach interventions on actual enrolment rates, as opposed to increased aspirations and awareness which may not translate into enrolment. Much research concentrates on post-16 learners but as attainment differences are a big factor in explaining participation gaps, there is a need for research looking at the impact of earlier interventions. Providing information, advice and guidance to under-represented students during secondary school is likely to be a cost-effective and scalable intervention, integrated with career advice and guidance (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020).

Social mobility

There is a significant body of literature looking at social mobility and as a concept it forms an important element in debates around equity and policy. Its importance is contested by many depending upon its perception of being about opportunities for the few rather than the many.

Traditional or historical foci on social mobility as enabling access to higher education (and moving away from an area), is increasingly being rejected in favour of looking at non-degree routes to higher skills through e.g. apprenticeships particularly those located in the area in which people live rather than requiring a move elsewhere. The challenge today is to create a larger number and wider variety of opportunities that benefit a greater number of people and places. One article highlights the importance of taking account of the actual aspirations and ambitions of people and what social mobility means to them (Francis, 2021).

Apprenticeships

There is some evidence that suggests pupil and parent perceptions of work-based learning routes are changing. Schools and colleges are providing more opportunities for young people to learn about the full range of apprenticeships – 84% of schools reporting most of their students received information, an increase from 73% in 2018, which is driven mainly by schools with sixth forms. Being informed increases the likelihood of take-up. New analysis linking schools' Gatsby Benchmark performance with school-level destinations data found a positive relationship between good careers guidance and apprenticeships take-up (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021).

NFER research into the barriers for young people accessing opportunities has found that the 'Find an Apprenticeship' FAA service is an important way for young people to find opportunities but that it is mostly colleges and training providers engaging with the service on behalf of employers. Apprenticeship opportunities advertised via the FAA usually have some formal qualification requirements, particularly English and mathematics, which can be a barrier to lower attaining young people, who are more likely to be disadvantaged in other ways. There are indications that employers specify minimum requirements to avoid the cost of taking on those without the qualifications who will need additional support and training. Qualification requirements vary substantially across sectors. Communication skills (verbal and written) are the most commonly required skills by employers. Importantly, the availability and accessibility of apprenticeship opportunities vary substantially across the country (Straw *et al.*, 2022).

Apprenticeship levy

The apprenticeship levy began in April 2017, in effect a tax of 0.5% on the pay bill of UK employers with annual wages of over £3 million. They can 'spend' their contributions on

apprenticeships delivered by registered training providers, and other employers can access the funds as well. According to one report, in the 12 months before the levy came into operation, 564,800 learners started an apprenticeship. This fell to 364,000 in the 12 months afterwards, with a slight recovery in 2018/19. There has also been a decisive shift from lower to higher levels of training – ie. from Level 2 to Levels 4 to 7, a trend particularly pronounced among those employers paying the levy. It also appears that the age of those starting an apprenticeship has increased. The report concludes that the bulk of the levy is being spent on existing adult workers rather than supporting young people into the workplace (Richmond, 2020).

Vocational routes

In 2020 the government introduced T Levels – equivalent in size to three A-levels. At the same time they announced the withdrawal of funding from 'low-quality' level 3 courses (BTECs) that overlap with A-levels and T Levels from 2024. T Levels are intended to offer a mixture of classroom-based learning and 'on-the-job' experience during an industry placement of at least 9 weeks¹.

Courses available now or in the near future include building services, design, digital production, education and childcare, health, accounting, manufacturing, agriculture, catering, craft and design and legal services alongside others².

The Wolf Report in 2011 that found that 1/4 to 1/3 of young people aged 16–19 were doing nothing at all or pursuing courses without a route to higher education or meaningful employment (Wolf, 2011). Following this a further review was carried out in 2016, the Post-16 skills plan, which led to the development of T Levels (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016).

¹ <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/06/20/t-levels-what-courses-are-available/> [accessed 21/06/2022]

² <https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/students/subjects> [accessed 21/06/2022]

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