Research and analysis

Independent review of careers guidance in schools and further education and

skills providers

Published 29 September 2023

Applies to England

Contents

Executive summary

High-quality careers guidance is essential to enable all children and young people to understand the range of options available to them and realise their potential.[footnote 1] There have been substantial changes to the careers landscape in England over the past decade, including the introduction of the Gatsby benchmarks and Baker clause. In 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) asked Ofsted to review careers provision in schools and further education and skills (FE and skills) providers. During the spring term 2023, we carried out research visits to 30 schools and 14 FE and skills providers. We also reviewed a sample of inspection evidence and held focus groups with inspectors, employers and independent learning providers (ILPs).

In this review, we saw many examples of good practice. Most of the schools and FE and skills providers demonstrated commitment to providing effective careers guidance to their pupils and learners.

All pupils and learners should receive quality careers guidance that raises their aspirations and leads them to make choices that will help them realise their potential. We found that this could be achieved if leaders think strategically about careers and support employer engagement that is authentic, contextualised and personalised. For schools and FE and skills providers that were engaged with career hubs, these played an important role in ensuring effective employer engagement and contributed more widely to career programmes.

Senior leaders, the careers leader and subject teachers worked collaboratively.

They received appropriate input from specialist, qualified careers advisers, tailored to the local needs of schools and providers. This helped the pupils and learners receive all necessary information, advice and guidance on careers at the right time.

Many of the schools we visited ensured that pupils received unbiased guidance that was balanced between academic and technical options, but this was not the case in all schools. In general, a lack of unbiased guidance was usually not about schools deliberately choosing to direct pupils to particular courses that might benefit the school, but due to insufficient strategic planning and attention to the needs of individual pupils. Careers guidance was often underdeveloped in key stage 3, particularly for Year 7. It was not always as clear what the thinking was behind the careers programme for this age group.

Overall, the negative impact of the pandemic on careers guidance has begun to dissipate. However, changes in working practices, such as increased home working, are affecting the arrangement of work experience.

Leaders in schools and FE and skills providers can use destinations data to improve careers provision, but some noted that this was difficult in practice because of time and data protection requirements. There were a number of further challenges for schools and FE and skills providers. Many were limited by the time and resource available for careers guidance and were working hard to provide the best careers guidance they could in this context.

Note on terminology

Careers guidance is sometimes formally referred to as careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), indicating the range of potential activities for pupils and learners. In line with the DfE's statutory guidance on careers (hereafter 'statutory guidance'), we will use the phrase 'careers guidance' in this report to mean the full range of activities delivered under the Gatsby benchmarks. [footnote 2]

Main findings

Leaders and staff understand the importance of a quality careers programme.

Schools and FE and skills providers were aware that an effective careers guidance programme can help all pupils and learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, achieve their aspirations.

Overall, the role of careers leader was well embedded.[footnote 3] School and FE and skills leaders also recognised the importance of appropriately qualified careers advisers, in addition to a careers leader. Both schools and FE and skills providers found the Gatsby benchmarks useful to help strategically review and develop their careers programme. This reflects a shift in thinking around careers provision when compared with our 2013 report.[footnote 4]

However, there are challenges. For example, some reported that they were limited by the time available for careers guidance. They said they were, nevertheless, working hard to provide the best careers guidance possible within these constraints.

Close working between school leaders, careers leaders, teachers and careers specialists is important for effective careers guidance.

We saw collaborative working between senior leaders, the careers leader, a qualified careers adviser and subject teachers. This helped children and young people get the information, advice and guidance on careers that they needed at the right time.

Qualified careers adviser time was sometimes limited. Careers advisers can be internal (for example, a member of school or college staff) or external. Some schools and FE and skills providers worked with their careers adviser to prioritise pupils or learners for one-to-one guidance interviews. For instance, they prioritised those considered vulnerable or at risk of ending up not in education, employment or training (NEET). However, not all schools and FE and skills providers were doing this effectively. It is unclear from the nationally available data how well resourced schools and FE and skills providers are in terms of qualified independent careers advisers.

Most schools and FE and skills providers are linking curriculum learning to careers well.

Most schools and FE and skills providers we visited were linking the curriculum to careers effectively. However, this varied between subjects. Most schools used personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education as dedicated time for direct input on careers guidance. However, in less effective examples, careers was only taught in PSHE, and wider subject staff were not regularly linking curriculum learning to careers.

There were different successful models for linking the curriculum to careers. Some

schools and FE and skills providers focused on ensuring that teachers made regular links between their subject and future pathways, and explained the intermediary steps required for certain jobs. Others asked teachers to prioritise linking the curriculum to careers at particular points in the year, such as during a careers week.

Whichever model was used, effective collaboration and communication between the careers leader, tutors, lead for professional development or PHSE and – in some cases – careers advisers was important in ensuring that careers were embedded into the wider curriculum. However, several schools noted concerns about the time and resourcing required to do this.

Leaders sometimes lacked clarity about the specific aims for each year group, particularly in Years 7 and 8. It was often not clear what the thinking behind the careers programme was for these age groups.

Many schools find it difficult to collect and use destinations data.

Providers can use data on destinations to improve their careers provision.[footnote 5] However some school leaders said collecting destinations data was difficult and were concerned about the time required. Data protection requirements also made it harder to obtain destinations data. A few leaders wanted additional help with this and thought the system in their local area could be improved.

Schools and FE and skills providers understand the need to promote both technical and academic pathways. However, not all are achieving this.

In general, leaders understood their statutory responsibilities for careers, including those under the provider access legislation.[footnote 6] They were making progress towards fully implementing the required changes, which came into force in January 2023. Some schools said that they wanted further information, for example on what constitutes a 'meaningful encounter'. Some FE and skills providers give careers advice in schools: they told us it could sometimes be difficult to access schools. Some also had concerns over the quality of careers guidance that learners had previously received in schools.

Schools and FE and skills providers generally understood and promoted apprenticeships, although some teachers' knowledge was limited. There were more gaps in teachers' understanding about T levels.[footnote 7] Pupils' understanding of technical pathways varied. Additionally, some learners in both school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges told us they did not get enough information about apprenticeships or vocational pathways.

Many schools made sure pupils received unbiased guidance that included both

academic and technical pathways. However, this was not always the case. In general, when guidance was biased towards a particular pathway, this was usually not because schools had deliberately chosen to direct pupils to courses that might benefit the school. It more commonly happened due to schools' lack of strategic planning around the careers programme and the needs of individual pupils.

Parents can be an important partner in supporting informed decision-making but are under-used.

Most pupils and learners we spoke to told us that their parents and family were among the main influences on their thinking and decision-making about careers. However, the extent to which schools and FE and skills providers engaged with parents varied.

Schools and FE and skills providers see work experience and other encounters with employers as important. However, pandemic restrictions have had some long-term adverse impact.

All schools and FE and skills providers held careers fairs and talks from employers, universities or other providers. These events were most beneficial when closely linked to the school or FE and skills providers' curriculum: staff prepared their pupils or learners for the event and followed it up in subsequent careers lessons. Pupils and learners said that attending careers fairs and visiting employers and universities helped them broaden their horizons and rule out certain pathways. Careers hubs were also important in ensuring effective employer engagement and contributed more widely to careers programmes.

The pandemic stimulated some innovative approaches to work experience that pupils and learners were positive about. For instance, some FE and skills providers were using hybrid work experience models that included both in-person and virtual elements. However, pupils and learners found virtual work experience less helpful.

Overall, the negative impact of the pandemic on careers guidance, including work experience, has moderated. However, long-term changes in working practices, such as increased home working, mean that some employers have now stopped offering work experience. Schools and FE and skills providers are finding it difficult to find alternative placements. Some schools have still not restarted work experience after the pandemic.

Recommendations

Schools and FE and skills providers should:

- ensure that they take advantage of the potential benefits provided by networks like careers hubs, such as support for employer engagement
- ensure that the careers programme is delivered by staff with the necessary expertise, and with appropriate support from careers specialists
- continue to develop staff knowledge of technical pathways (including T levels) and promote these equally alongside academic routes, using the DfE's updated statutory guidance [footnote 8]
- make sure encounters with employers, such as through careers fairs and talks, are delivered in a way that is most beneficial for pupils and learners

The DfE should:

- consider ways in which it may be possible to improve how post-16 and post-18 destinations data is aggregated back to schools or FE and skills providers, including exploring whether data already held by the DfE could be used for this
- consider how to increase the attractiveness of the careers adviser role
- review approaches to disseminating information about T levels to schools and employers
- make the aims for careers education for pupils in key stage 3 more explicit, including help with key stage 4 options
- explore ways to improve data collection to get a more accurate picture of the number of careers advisers working in schools and FE and skills providers, and the number of children and young people accessing personal guidance with a suitably qualified adviser

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) should:

- consider how it can ensure that all schools and FE and skills providers (including those that are already in a careers hub) are aware of and able to fully engage with the support it provides
- consider how it can further support schools and FE and skills providers to work more closely with each other around careers

Ofsted will:

- use the findings from the review to shape future inspector training on careers guidance

Introduction and background

Effective careers guidance can make a positive difference to young people's employment outcomes. There is an international consensus that well-targeted careers guidance can help all young people achieve their potential.[footnote 9] There are particular benefits for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not have access to the same levels of social capital as other pupils.[footnote 10]

Internationally, young people are facing a more dynamic and turbulent labour market, and more complex decisions about their futures. Unemployment for 15- to 24-year-olds is much higher than for those 25 and over. This suggests that young people are not as attractive in the employment market.[footnote 11] Research also shows that children and young people who think about and experience future careers while in school are less likely to be unemployed.[footnote 12] These factors bolster the case for ensuring that education providers offer effective careers guidance that can help children and young people understand the options open to them and make decisions that will allow them to maximise their potential.[footnote 13]

The education system also has a role in making sure that children and young people have the skills needed for the careers of the future. Although considering future skills needs was outside of the scope of this report, effective careers guidance will help children and young people make informed decisions about their futures.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) considers careers guidance as covering:

> " …services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers[footnote 14]"

Employers can be involved in careers guidance in many ways. Gatsby benchmark 5 states that pupils and learners should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about the world of work.[footnote 15] This can be through a range of activities such as visiting speakers, careers fairs and mentoring. Gatsby benchmark 6 concerns experiences of the workplace. These are commonly a part of careers guidance in secondary education and even more so in FE and skills, where they are a fundamental part of many programmes of study. These can include work visits, shadowing, or work experience.[footnote 16] Work experience placements are also distinct from industry placements, which are a mandatory part of T levels.

There can be a variety of outcomes from careers guidance during secondary education. There is strong evidence that it can positively affect shorter-term

measures such as career readiness: that is, young people's understanding of different occupations and options, how prepared they are for transitions and their ability to make decisions about next steps.[footnote 17]

There are challenges with isolating the specific influence of careers guidance in longer-term studies. Nevertheless, studies have shown an increase of up to 20% in wages can be attributed to careers interventions in schools.[footnote 18] Children and young people who take part in employer engagement, including work experience at school, are less likely to be NEET.[footnote 19] Additionally, an analysis of destinations data showed that the more Gatsby benchmarks a school achieved, the less likely that a pupil would be NEET.[footnote 20]

There is also some evidence that being uncertain about career aspirations at age 16 ('career uncertainty') is associated with poorer outcomes.[footnote 21] Similarly, young people who have underestimated the qualifications they will need for a particular job ('career misalignment') are more likely to be NEET.[footnote 22]

The careers landscape in England

Our last review of careers guidance was in 2013.[footnote 23] Since this report, there have been substantial policy changes to the careers landscape in England. In 2013, the statutory duty to ensure access to independent careers guidance was updated to apply to pupils in Year 8 and those aged up to 18 in schools, FE colleges and sixth-form colleges. In 2022 this duty was extended to pupils in Year 7.[footnote 24]

In 2014, the government established the CEC to be the strategic coordinating partner for employers, schools, colleges and other education/training providers. The CEC has worked with local enterprise partnerships, combined authorities and local authorities across England to build and co-fund a national enterprise adviser network. This network has enterprise coordinators, who match volunteers from business, called enterprise advisers, with local schools or FE and skills providers. Enterprise advisers work with schools and FE and skills providers to develop their careers programme and make links to their business area. In 2018, careers hubs were launched across the country. Each has a dedicated hub lead. They bring together a group of secondary schools and FE and skills providers with partners in the business, public, education and voluntary sectors.

There have been concerns about the balance between technical and vocational versus academic routes in England going back over many decades. Reports have noted the need for greater prominence to be given to promoting post-16 vocational

and training routes.[footnote 25] International research indicates that when young people do not receive effective careers guidance on technical options, they may rely on informal sources such as family perspectives. These may not always be reliable.[footnote 26]

Since 2018, all schools and academies have been required to give a range of education and training providers access to pupils in Years 8 to 13 to inform them about apprenticeships and technical education pathways (sometimes known as the 'Baker clause').[footnote 27] In 2022, this was strengthened with a new requirement for schools to offer a minimum of 6 encounters with education and training providers. From January 2023, their content and duration are also prescribed.[footnote 28] These requirements do not extend to tailoring encounters to pupils' needs, but the statutory guidance does state there is scope for schools to do this.[footnote 29] Providers such as colleges and local authorities are also required to work with employers to develop local skills improvement plans so that provision can meet local, regional and national needs. The process is led by employer representative bodies.[footnote 30]

The government's 2017 careers strategy took the Gatsby benchmarks as a framework for high-quality careers guidance that schools and colleges should use.[footnote 31] In 2018, the statutory guidance was updated to include specific reference to the Gatsby benchmarks.[footnote 32]

In addition to the CEC, there are other contributors to the careers landscape in England, including the National Careers Service, the Career Development Institute (CDI), the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the Department for Work and Pensions, and many other private and voluntary organisations that offer careers guidance services. These may provide support to schools, FE and skills providers or directly to children and young people. Higher education outreach programmes run by universities and colleges are also common. These support children and young people who might not have traditionally entered higher education, to do so.[footnote 33]

Recent research suggests some improvements in the quality of careers guidance since 2013. For instance, a longitudinal review of young people's experience of careers guidance indicated that, in 2018, 18- and 19-year-olds were satisfied overall with the careers guidance they had received. Their levels of satisfaction were higher than those of a similar cohort surveyed in 2009.[footnote 34]

A review of trends in careers education by the CEC found that careers was becoming more prominent in the curriculum. For instance, more teachers were linking their subject content to jobs that pupils and learners might do, and highlighting the skills needed for different careers. It found that general further education and

sixth-form colleges were further ahead with this, noting that this is established practice for vocational subjects.[footnote 35] The CEC regularly publishes statistics on schools' and colleges' voluntary submissions of progress made against the benchmarks. For the academic year 2021/22, this showed that schools and colleges fully achieved, on average, 4.9 out of 8 benchmarks compared with 4.0 the year before.[footnote 36]

There are, however, wider contextual challenges and impacts of the pandemic that are not all related to careers provision in schools and FE and skills providers. For instance, the recent 'Youth voice census report' found that over half of young people said their education has been substantially affected by the pandemic. A similar number thought the biggest barrier to work would be lack of work experience.[footnote 37] Nationally, youth unemployment rates for 16- to 24-year-olds have been declining but remain at 10.9% in June 2023, which is similar to June 2022.[footnote 38] The recent Education Select Committee report into careers guidance found that, although the right national framework is in place, progress towards meeting the Gatsby benchmarks has been slow. It reported that further work is needed, for example around connecting employers with schools.[footnote 39]

Data looking at destinations after key stage 4 shows that the percentage of young people in state-funded mainstream schools not in sustained employment, education or apprenticeships declined between 2010/11 and 2014/15 and has remained broadly similar at around 6% since.[footnote 40] For young people leaving 16 to 18 study, recent data shows a slight rise in those not in a sustained destination, from 18.8% in 2017/18 to 20.6% in 2020/21. This has been driven by lower rates of apprenticeship and employment destinations, which could be due to disruption from the pandemic.[footnote 41]

The Gatsby Foundation's review of the benchmarks and careers guidance is due in 2024.[footnote 42] The CEC is leading several pilots, including regional initiatives targeting disadvantaged children and young people and a programme to enable more encounters between teachers and industry.[footnote 43] The DfE has also recently expanded the supported internships programme for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) but without an education, health and care plan.[footnote 44]

The inspection framework and careers guidance

Careers guidance comes under the personal development judgement as part of the

education inspection framework (EIF).[footnote 45] We have strengthened the EIF since we first published it, and careers now has a stronger place in the framework. [footnote 46]

In inspections of secondary schools, inspectors consider:

- the quality of unbiased guidance
- how the school has made provider access arrangements
- what opportunities pupils have to encounter the world of work
- how the school uses the Gatsby benchmarks
- the school's published information about careers provision, including its statement on provider access arrangements

If schools are not meeting statutory requirements, inspectors consider what impact this has on the overall quality of careers provision. They take this into account when coming to an overall judgement for personal development.

In inspections of FE and skills providers, inspectors evaluate:

- the extent to which the provider has an effective careers programme that 'offers advice, experience and contact with employers to encourage learners to aspire, make good choices and understand what they need to do in order to reach and succeed in their chosen career'
- how well this benefits learners in deciding on their next steps

In our inspections of colleges, we now have an enhanced focus on links between the curriculum and skills for work. We always write about this in inspection reports for general further education and non-academy sixth-form colleges.

The most effective practice in careers guidance

There are many common elements and principles of effective careers guidance. These common elements appear differently at different phases of education and in different educational providers. For instance, the CDI Career Development Framework sets out different expectations and emphasis at different key stages. [footnote 47] In key stage 3, the framework indicates that pupils should be enabled to consider what they will do when they leave school. Pupils should be made aware of the full range of learning pathways available to them, including university, college and apprenticeships. The framework also specifies that pupils should understand the

different types of sectors and organisations where they can work, and the minimum qualifications and skills required for different jobs. At key stage 4, the framework sets out that advice and guidance should enable pupils to consider in more depth which learning pathway they wish to follow, as well as to research the learning and qualification requirements for jobs they may be interested in.

After the age of 16, young people may be pursuing their education at a sixth form, a general FE college, or with an ILP undertaking an apprenticeship. The form and content of careers guidance will depend on type of provider and the course being pursued. For example, effective careers guidance formulated and delivered for a learner undertaking an engineering apprenticeship with an ILP could differ from effective careers guidance for a student studying A-levels in a sixth-form college. In the former case, careers guidance will focus on how vocational training can lead on to employment or further study, as well as ensuring that learners understand the skills they have developed that could be transferable to other pathways. In the latter case, the careers programme may be more focused on understanding different career options and pathways, and helping pupils and learners to prepare for progressing to next steps. For instance, pupils might compare traditional versus degree apprenticeships, or work to understand the features to consider when choosing institutions to apply to. At the same time, for all FE and skills providers, good careers guidance should provide learners with unbiased, high-quality guidance and opportunities for encounters with the world of work, to enable them to succeed in future education, employment or training.

The following are select findings from our targeted literature review. We used this when determining good practice in this report, alongside our expectations for the quality of provision as laid out in the EIF and evaluative insights from inspectors.

The DfE commissioned a review of careers guidance interventions in 2021. [footnote 48] This drew significantly on the 2016 review of international literature on careers guidance by the Education Endowment Fund. This report found that an effective careers programme helped children and young people: [footnote 49]

- develop aspects of career readiness such as an understanding of their motivations and aptitudes
- develop networks of contacts (social capital)
- engage in real-life work experiences
- engage in career dialogue: meaningful conversations with teachers, parents, employers and careers advisers

The Gatsby benchmarks emphasise the role of leadership in careers guidance.

Benchmark 1 notes that schools and colleges should have a careers programme in place, with a named careers leader, who has the explicit backing of the senior leadership team.[footnote 50]

Providing careers education as a standalone subject has been associated with improved career readiness and educational outcomes. However, the evidence of effectiveness is less clear for alternative approaches, such as embedding careers in curriculum subjects or delivering careers as enrichment activities strongly related to the curriculum.[footnote 51] The CEC published a review of what works in careers in the curriculum in 2017. It noted that there is limited evidence available on how effective careers education is when delivered through PSHE. However, the available evidence does suggest it can be more effective when it is specifically timetabled within the PSHE curriculum.[footnote 52]

The research literature suggests that children's interest in and attitude towards roles can become fixed at quite an early age.[footnote 53] This is an important rationale for undertaking careers guidance throughout key stage 3 in England. However, the research literature contains less about what the specific aims and content of careers education should be in these phases.

The PSHE Association has published a programme of study for PSHE education for key stages 1 to 5.[footnote 54] This includes content on careers education, with outcomes focused on understanding options at the end of key stage 3 and learning about the range of opportunities available for future careers. It also includes reference to the need to challenge stereotypes and family or cultural expectations that might limit aspirations. As noted, the CDI has also developed learning areas by key stage in its 'Career development framework'.[footnote 55]

Evidence suggests that children and young people need dedicated meetings with trained careers professionals. The need for well-trained, unbiased career 'counsellors' is also well established in the literature.[footnote 56] Gatsby benchmark 8 recommends that every pupil should have an opportunity to meet a trained careers adviser.[footnote 57] The statutory guidance states that advisers should have a level 6 qualification in a career development subject. They could be an internal or external member of staff, provided they have the right level of qualification.[footnote 58]

There are no national recommendations for the number of careers advisers in relation to the size of schools and colleges, nor any reporting requirements in terms of numbers employed. The most accurate data (from 2011) suggests that around 800 careers advisers were directly employed by secondary schools in England and a similar number by FE and skills providers. More recent data from 2019 suggests around 300 advisers in schools and 400 in FE and skills providers.[footnote 59]

However, these figures have limitations in terms of date and coverage, and do not capture those not directly employed by schools and FE and skills providers. Therefore, it is difficult to find out the extent to which pupils and learners are accessing specialist careers guidance. It may be useful to look at more accurate and effective ways to capture the data on this in order to gain a clearer understanding.

Encounters with employers during school or college can have a positive effect on young people's future outcomes.[footnote 60] The Holman review, which was the basis for developing the Gatsby benchmarks, defined a 'meaningful encounter' as when a young person has an opportunity to learn about work or what it means to be successful within the workplace.[footnote 61] There is also guidance and support for schools and FE and skills providers to help them understand what is meant by a meaningful encounter.[footnote 62] Evidence suggests that for employer encounters to be effective, they should be 'authentic, real world, frequent, valued, contextualised, personalised and begin at a young age.'[footnote 63] The international literature also notes the importance of employer engagement, and structures to support schools and colleges in engaging with them, such as careers hubs or local enterprise partnerships.[footnote 64]

Research suggests that careers guidance should be personalised to meet individual needs and aspirations. This is particularly the case for children and young people from disadvantaged groups and those with SEND.[footnote 65] Monitoring engagement with, and outcomes from, careers interventions for these groups is also important. [footnote 66] Gatsby benchmark 3 recommends that schools and colleges should keep a record of the individual advice given to pupils and learners.[footnote 67] This may involve recording specific careers related events and other inputs, such as what types of work experience placement individual pupils and learners have attended, but does not require any detailed recording of careers content in curriculum subjects such as PSHE.

Parents play an important role supporting their children's career decisions. They are a large influence on children and young people.[footnote 68] The 2022 'Youth census report' of 11- to 18-year-olds indicated that parents were one of the most commonly cited source of careers support.[footnote 69] However, parents do not always understand the range of routes available. There is a lack of evidence on the most effective ways for schools and FE and skills providers to engage parents in their careers programme.[footnote 70]

There is a considerable body of literature on effective vocational education.[footnote 71] There is also literature, relevant for FE and skills providers, on positioning careers guidance effectively within the curriculum for vocational education. For instance,

Watts reviewed international strategies for how careers guidance can be integrated into vocational education.[footnote 72] Additionally, the CEC recommended a range of strategies in the English context for engaging learners in thinking about their career trajectory and career decisions through curriculum delivery.[footnote 73] Research into vocational education shows that strong links between training providers and the workplace help ensure that the curriculum has a clear line of sight to employment and/or further study. Teachers and trainers with up-to-date industry knowledge can help create these strong links.[footnote 74]

The National Foundation for Educational Research's evaluation of university technical colleges (UTCs) in 2019 found that their problem-based learning approach and close links to employers could have a positive impact on career readiness and employability skills. However, the study also noted that UTCs experience challenges with locating and engaging with enough high-quality employers, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises.[footnote 75] There have also been concerns about whether UTCs may push students into deciding on career pathways at too early a point.[footnote 76]

Methods

The scope of the review was to consider careers guidance for 11- to 19-year-olds in schools and FE and skills providers (and for students up to age 25 with a current education, health and care plan).

Our review focused on:

- whether school leaders saw careers guidance as a priority
- how leaders made sure their careers provision was of high quality
- the extent to which schools and FE and skills providers engaged with employers, careers networks, other providers and parents as part of their careers guidance
- whether careers provision contributed to local, regional and national opportunities and skills needs
- whether schools gave equal prominence to technical and academic routes
- how careers guidance was integrated into the curriculum
- whether pupils and learners felt the careers guidance they had received was effective

Our main research questions are set out in our terms of reference.[footnote 77]

We gathered evidence from:

- a literature review
- 4 focus groups with inspectors to develop the visit methodology
- analysing inspection evidence from 31 schools and 13 FE and skills providers
- 30 research visits to schools
- 14 research visits to FE and skills providers (including general further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and ILPs)
- a focus group with 9 employers (including SMEs and large multi-national companies)
- a focus group with 10 ILPs

During the visits, we spoke to a range of pupils and learners, including some with SEND, some eligible for the pupil premium, and some who speak English as an additional language. In total, we spoke to:

- 330 pupils in schools (from Years 7 to 13)
- 246 learners in FE and skills providers

We analysed the data from the different research activities thematically. We also asked some of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to analyse a selection of the visits data to identify emerging themes and examples of strong practice.

We were informed by our literature review, the expectations of the quality of provision as laid out in the EIF and the evaluative insights from inspectors when determining good practice.

When writing the report, we considered all data sources and participant groups. This was important for us to triangulate findings both within and between schools and FE and skills providers. In approaching this, we were led by the themes that occurred across the data sets.

The research was approved by the Ofsted research ethics committee and was in line with our research ethics policy.[footnote 78]

Detailed research methods and limitations are in the annex.

We would like to acknowledge the work of the project steering group and thank them for their time and input. We would also like to thank all schools, FE and skills providers and employers that took part in the project.

Schools findings

Leadership of careers

In most schools, the leadership team saw careers guidance as a strategic priority. In those schools where inspectors identified high-quality careers guidance, leaders were taking a 'whole-school' approach, and there was significant buy-in from leaders and staff. Careers was seen as everyone's responsibility. There was a clear line of communication between staff members, careers specialists and school leaders. There was also an emphasis placed on building staff's knowledge and experience. In one school, the headteacher had arranged for staff to undertake placements in another area of work. This meant that staff acquired knowledge of wider sectors, which they could then pass on to pupils.

In the most effective approaches to careers guidance, the school's strategy incorporated a range of provision, which was well planned and sequenced across all year groups. Pupils, including those with SEND, were well supported by a dedicated team of staff. Leaders were committed to improving the school's careers guidance offer. They regularly reviewed their careers programme, and governors were involved in this process.

However, around a quarter of schools were demonstrating less effective practice. In these schools, the range of provision could be limited, the aims for each year group were unclear and staff delivering careers guidance were not appropriately trained or were working in an isolated way. Careers guidance was not a structured activity. This was reflected in our inspection evidence review, which showed that time and resources were significant barriers for schools in delivering a high-quality careers programme. Similarly, on the research visits, schools said that they could not always dedicate as much time as they would like to careers guidance. A third of schools referenced poor staffing levels and high staff turnover, and this led to gaps in the breadth of what schools were able to deliver. This often affected key stage 3 pupils, who might receive less careers guidance as a result. A quarter of schools noted funding as another barrier. One school, for example, said that this meant they were unable to offer work experience placements to pupils in Years 10 and 11. Another said that they relied on charitable funding as a means of trying to 'plug the gap'. In some schools, there was limited monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

Almost all schools saw incorporating feedback from pupils and parents into the careers strategy as a challenge. For instance, just under a third were collecting

pupils' feedback using surveys, forums and pupil discussions. Only 4 of the schools were getting parental feedback about their careers programme.

Almost all schools were using the Gatsby benchmarks to structure and review their careers programme. School leaders generally viewed the benchmarks positively and found them to be a useful framework for what good practice looks like. However, a few schools that were already meeting all the benchmarks questioned how useful the benchmarks were in helping them to make the next step to 'excellent practice'. They expressed concern that the benchmarks are a 'tick-box' exercise, rather than informing high-quality practice.

Several schools cited benchmark 3 as the most difficult to achieve. Benchmark 3 includes systematically recording the advice given to each pupil, and maintaining accurate data on their education, training or employment destinations. Schools found it challenging to maintain accurate destinations data. This was often because of the time it took to collect this data. Leaders said tracking destinations for 3 years could be 'almost impossible', and they were not able to efficiently collect the data they needed.

Tracking the careers guidance given to each pupil varied across schools. The best intentions were not always matched to reality. This was also reflected in our inspection evidence review. Leaders told us that maintaining records can help staff know where each pupil was in terms of their career planning. Guidance could then be tailored accordingly. Most leaders had a greater focus on tracking pupils with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, some leaders told us tracking individual careers guidance was challenging and time-consuming and needed more help with this. Around a third of schools we visited were using the tool Compass+ for tracking and evaluating their careers provision.[footnote 79] These schools considered it to be useful when integrated with current management information systems.

> ### Case study: how one secondary school was using destination data and tracking pupil engagement
>
> This is a secondary school in one of the most deprived areas. Staff found Compass+ useful for reporting back to governors and saw it as an effective auditing tool that helped them to focus on how careers guidance needed to develop. The school was using Compass +to carry out evaluations 3 times a year. The school found it straightforward to access and analyse the information in Compass+. This enabled staff to effectively track pupils'

engagement with careers opportunities, such as work placements, and analyse data by gender, ethnicity and other relevant attributes.

Although the school was keen to track destinations data, staff noted that this was hampered in practice by data-sharing restrictions within the local authority. There is no county-wide data-sharing agreement. The school had to, instead, use more informal networks, such as contacting pupils by email or questioning siblings who still attended the same school. The former resulted in very few responses from each cohort and was time consuming for staff. The school would like to see more data-sharing and suggested a central database where it could access former pupils, and track those who had gone on to college and those who had dropped out. Staff believed this would allow them to carry out systematic tracking in a more time efficient way and effectively analyse the impact of their careers guidance programme.

Using labour market information (LMI)

LMI includes current trends in employment sectors and recruitment patterns. In general, we found how schools ensured pupils and parents had access to LMI to be variable. Most often, schools included local LMI during careers lessons or may have held a local careers week where teachers in all subjects focused on jobs in their local community and the pathways to enter these careers. Careers leaders said links to hubs and local enterprise partnerships were helpful for accessing local and national LMI. In general, we saw very little evidence of parents being encouraged to access and use LMI to support their child or young person, even though this is needed to meet part of the Gatsby benchmarks.

We did not see evidence that schools were excessively focusing on the local labour market. A few schools in more deprived areas were aware of the limitations of this, and their strategy included making pupils aware of national opportunities to widen their options. This was similar for schools in more rural areas.

Impartial guidance and equal prominence for technical and academic pathways

The provider access legislation was strengthened in January 2023. A few schools were still in the early stages of meeting the new requirements, particularly at key stage 3. Leaders in all schools were aware of their responsibilities around this.

Pupils had encounters with providers of apprenticeships and technical education, but it was not always clear whether this met the criteria for 6 'meaningful encounters' spread deliberately across specific key phases. However, all schools we visited were mindful of working towards the new legislation. There is existing guidance for what constitutes a meaningful encounter, but a few schools were still unclear or wanted more clarification about what would meet this requirement.[footnote 80]

In approximately half of the schools we visited, careers guidance did not seem biased towards a particular route or provider. In the remaining schools, it was unclear whether this was the case, or else there was a mixed picture of how well this aspect of careers guidance was working. When it was working well, it was often part of leaders' deliberate strategy to make sure pupils understood all the options available to them. In these schools, leaders had ensured that equal importance was assigned to all possible career pathways. Relevant staff had useful training that developed their knowledge of the different pathways. Pupils had a one-to-one interview with a suitably trained impartial careers adviser and were given information from a range of sources, such as events, work experience, visits and individual guidance. Leaders had also analysed destinations data to identify less popular career paths and see whether guidance about them was suitable.

Pupils in schools where things were going well were positive about the information they had received. They told us that all pathways were explained to them. One pupil said:

> " I am staying at this school for sixth form, but we get lots of information about lots of other post-16 options so we get to know about T levels [and] apprenticeships."

However, a few schools gave information that was biased towards their own sixth forms. For instance, one school was reluctant to allow other providers in because they were direct competitors. This was reflected in our inspection evidence review where a few schools were not giving pupils enough information about options beyond continuing in their own sixth forms.

In the remaining schools we visited, there was a lack of a deliberate strategy. Leaders could not talk in detail about how pupils were made aware of technical options. For instance, a few leaders said this would happen naturally 'through the wider curriculum', without giving any specific details of when this was planned to happen.

Case study: how one secondary school with a sixth form was ensuring that pupils received information on a range of pathways

This is a secondary school based in a highly deprived area. Leaders made sure there was a careers policy, provider access statement and careers strategy on the school's website. The policy covered how the school met the updated statutory guidance and evaluated its provision against the Gatsby benchmarks. The careers strategy detailed the different opportunities mapped across the school's curriculum and personal development programme.

Leaders described a strategic change in their approach over the last 2 years to include more providers of T levels and apprenticeships in events such as assemblies and careers fairs. Pupils start meeting a range of employers from Year 7 and leaders saw this as important to 'widen horizons'. Pupils also meet with representatives from a FE college once a year. Leaders valued the support from their enterprise adviser, who helped forge links with employers and training providers in the local area.

The school's sixth form was promoted alongside a range of other post-16 options. Pupils move on to a range of post-16 opportunities, which leaders see as evidence that the school's advice is unbiased. The school has an independent careers adviser who comes in once a week to meet with pupils in Years 11 and 13. Pupils and learners said this helped them explore their post-16 and post-18 options, and they valued the personalised advice they received.

All schools promoted higher education as a possible pathway to pupils. In some cases, this included ensuring that all pupils considered higher education as an option, for example, those from first-time university families. One school had developed a mentoring scheme for pupils with SEND, where they were mentored by local university undergraduates with additional needs so they could see that university was a potential pathway. Schools with sixth forms ensured their careers programme gave practical help and guidance to those who wanted to progress into higher education, such as helping pupils with UCAS applications.

Our inspection evidence review showed gaps around apprenticeships and T levels (although the latter are relatively new, having only been introduced in September 2020), and a few schools not promoting these effectively. Some teachers did not

have enough knowledge of what T levels offer as an alternative qualification route. Additionally, some employers and ILPs we spoke to said that technical pathways were not promoted well enough in school. Pupils' awareness and understanding of technical and vocational pathways varied in the schools we visited. In approximately half of schools, pupils either said they did not understand technical pathways well enough, or the inspector noted that they were unable to demonstrate knowledge of them. In a small number of schools, pupils said more emphasis was placed on A levels than on technical pathways.

Meeting with a careers adviser

An appropriately qualified careers adviser was vital to give impartial and unbiased guidance to pupils. The statutory guidance states that every pupil should have opportunities for individual guidance interviews with an adviser qualified to level 6. [footnote 81] Many pupils identified meeting with a careers adviser as crucial to their decision-making about their next steps. For instance:

> " Most useful thing from careers adviser is that I got a different perspective I wouldn't have thought about. I already knew what colleges I wanted to go to, so the meeting was mostly for university choices and the adviser showed me the variety at universities."

Just over two thirds of schools had access to an internal or external careers adviser who had completed, or was completing, level 6 training. Three further schools had a careers lead qualified to level 6 who was responsible for guidance interviews.

In a few schools, pupils said they had not received one-to-one interviews with a careers adviser at all. There was a similar picture in our inspection evidence review. Not meeting an adviser meant that even though pupils were learning about careers elsewhere in the curriculum, they were less likely to meaningfully link what they had learned to their future careers and choices.

A small number of schools found it difficult to access specialist careers guidance because they could not source enough advisers for all pupils needing advice. This meant that schools had to prioritise pupils for guidance interviews. Typically, this was pupils in Year 11. Around a third of schools prioritised pupils they identified as being vulnerable or those at risk of becoming NEET when they left school. In some schools, pupils in Years 9 and 10 also met with an adviser. This enabled them to talk about their key stage 4 options, which pupils said they found beneficial. However, a couple of schools were not strategically prioritising their careers advisers' time. For instance, they were neglecting to identify those pupils who would benefit most from early or regular advice. This meant that some of those most in need were missing

out or receiving information too late to help inform their choices.

Key stage 4 options

In some schools, the key stage 4 options programmes created a barrier to some pupils' progression to certain pathways.[footnote 82] When pupils' key stage 4 subject choices were limited, this risked limiting their future progression into some areas of study and training.

Some pupils said they had received useful support around their options, and we noted this as effective practice. In these instances, schools had linked options and qualifications to future careers early in key stage 3 and built options into the PSHE curriculum or personal development programme and subject lessons. Pupils were also able to meet with a careers adviser or senior member of staff one-to-one to discuss options in Year 9.

Many pupils said they could feel rushed into the decisions they were making and so building in enough time for the options process is important.

We also identified good practice in those schools that engaged parents in the options process. For example, schools invited parents to an options information evening, so they could better understand the options available and how these linked to future pathways and careers.

Involving employers, FE and skills providers, and higher education and training providers in careers

All schools visited were involving employers, colleges, and training and higher education providers in their careers programme. Typically, this was through careers fairs, assemblies, work experience and visits to workplaces or universities. Links with employers were a feature of good practice in around half the schools we visited. There was a similar picture in our inspection evidence review. UTCs demonstrated particularly strong links with their alumni, who returned to give talks to current pupils about different career pathways. Pupils in the schools we visited valued their interactions with employers, FE and skills providers and universities, and said they influenced their career decisions.

Whole-year or cross-school events such as careers fairs, talks and employer assemblies were common in all schools across the review. Staff and pupils broadly found them useful. However, some pupils did not find them as beneficial as leaders

thought, and some employers questioned the impact of these activities when carried out as standalone events. A CEO of a creative development agency highlighted:

> " You can see some schools getting a strategic agenda and linking it to operations and curriculum, but in others you get wheeled into a career event at lunchtimes where students just get piled in and piled out again – it's like a mass transit event: I don't think anyone comes out any the wiser."

In schools that used these activities more effectively, careers events were closely linked to the school's curriculum and were part of a well-planned programme for careers guidance. Pupils were taught the necessary knowledge to prepare them for the event, and this was built on in subsequent lessons. In these schools, pupils told us that careers fairs were followed up with tutors, or that they had time in advance to find out about the employers and think about questions they might want to ask. One pupil said, 'We talk about careers in tutor time and reflect back on events that have happened.' In another school, pupils had a booklet to complete during the careers fair, which they used in future careers lessons.

Almost all of the schools visited were part of a careers hub. In general, schools that engaged with careers hubs found it a useful way to build professional networks and drive improvements against the Gatsby benchmarks. Seven schools said their enterprise advisers or coordinators were particularly helpful in doing this.

Other schools reported less positively. For instance, one school said it received minimal input as its enterprise adviser was supporting so many other schools. Another school that was part of a hub described support stopping because of the pandemic. A few schools were not fully aware of careers hubs and felt communication about the hubs could be poor. There was also little mention of hubs in the evidence bases for the sample of inspections.

The 4 schools we visited that were not in a hub were part of other networks that served a similar function. One school had set up a careers network with other local schools to share resources and information. Another school was part of a careers group in its multi-academy trust.

Experiences of the workplace

In general, the pupils we spoke to valued quality experiences of the workplace. They said these were one of the most useful things to help them make career decisions. However, almost all schools told us the pandemic had affected their work with employers and other providers. Many leaders now saw it as a priority to rebuild connections, increase opportunities for pupils to experience the workplace and

return work experience placements to pre-pandemic levels. Generally, this was working well and the number of pupils experiencing the workplace was increasing.

However, some schools told us that employers had stopped offering work placements or were reluctant to have pupils on site. Schools had kept some of the practices they developed during the pandemic to address the reduced number of work experience opportunities. For instance, one school had developed a pop-up salon and restaurant in school for work placements. Pupils were positive about this and said it helped them think about their career aspirations and next steps. Other schools had continued with virtual work experience, but there was a mixed picture from pupils on how valuable this was. For instance, one Year 11 pupil said:

> " The face-to-face interactions are the best, but this was lost a lot because of COVID."

Schools mostly offered work experience placements in Year 10, and in Year 12 if the school had a sixth form. Three schools were not offering work experience placements at all, mainly because they had not restarted these following the pandemic. It was unclear whether pupils were gaining experience of the workplace through other means, such as visits or shadowing. A further 3 schools had stopped offering work experience placements in Year 10 and had shifted their focus to Year 12. One school cited limited funding as the reason, and leaders felt they needed to prioritise Year 12. In another school, leaders told us it was because pupils are now in education until Year 13, and they felt it was more beneficial to have work experience in Year 12.

Linking careers to the curriculum

In around two thirds of the schools we visited, careers guidance was included effectively in the school's curriculum. Most schools used PSHE lessons as dedicated time for careers education, supplemented by additional lessons or 'drop-down days' (off-timetable days) for later year groups. Pupils typically learned about employability skills, CV writing, the world of work and skills for specific jobs. Subject teachers also made links to careers within their lessons. In some schools, teachers made regular links between their subjects and future career pathways. In others, teachers focused on careers at particular points in time, for example during careers week.

In schools that linked careers to the curriculum well, leaders had assigned a high profile to careers education. They had integrated careers into curriculum plans, and

joined up the work of all staff including leaders, careers specialists, PSHE staff and special educational needs coordinators (SENCos). This was important because staff teaching careers often did not have any specific training in careers education or guidance. Joining up the work across the school meant those with specialist careers knowledge could support non-specialists to deliver careers education effectively. For example, the careers lead would often help teachers by providing training or developing teaching resources such as booklets or presentations. In a few schools, the careers adviser provided additional support, for instance through delivering talks to tutor groups.

In schools with well-developed careers education, the programme of learning was sensibly sequenced, the aims for each year were defined, and the curriculum cumulatively built knowledge over time, preparing pupils for their next steps. For example, in one school from our inspection evidence review:

- the Year 7 and 8 curriculum focused on encounters with employers and professionals to help pupils understand the range of possible jobs and pathways; this helped pupils to be well prepared to make their key stage 4 option choices
- the independent careers adviser gave talks to all tutor groups in Year 9; senior leaders also interviewed pupils to give support with their options
- during key stage 4, pupils had work experience, an extended interview with a careers adviser and time in PSHE lessons and drop-down days for CV writing and to learn about the world of work relevant to their interests

In younger year groups, careers provision tended to be less well planned, particularly for those in Year 7. Leaders were unclear about the aims for this age group, and the purpose of careers guidance was less explicit. A few schools in our inspection evidence review did not start their careers programme until Years 8 or 9 and therefore were not yet meeting the requirements of the updated statutory guidance.

Around a quarter of schools visited had a specific focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in relation to careers. These schools had developed links with STEM ambassadors, had after-school STEM clubs, and made efforts to increase gender equality across STEM subjects. Careers was typically integrated better into the curriculum for science-based subjects than for others, such as humanities.

In a quarter of schools, linking curriculum learning to careers needed more development. Careers was not integrated into the curriculum in a planned way. The schools mostly saw it as a PSHE activity, and PSHE teachers, subject teachers and careers specialists did not collaborate enough.

Meeting the needs of all pupils

In the most effective careers programmes, a qualified careers adviser delivered personalised guidance to all pupils and the school identified pupils' individual needs early. Particular attention was given to pupils with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds. SENCos worked closely with the careers leader and careers adviser to ensure pupils received high-quality personalised careers guidance and kept a record of the individual guidance given to each pupil.

In about half the schools we visited, we found evidence that they were personalising careers guidance effectively. These schools adapted careers guidance to the needs and interests of their pupils, for instance by tailoring work experience placements or implementing more frequent one-to-one support. Pupils also had the opportunity to attend a range of events and visits tailored to their interests. This set them up to be well informed about future decisions.

Personalised guidance helped pupils understand how their knowledge and career aspirations had developed over time. It also helped them reflect on the one-to-one guidance they had received, for example by discussing targets they had set during guidance meetings. Pupils we spoke to valued careers guidance being personalised. For example, one pupil said:

> " I think the one-to-one interview was the best [form of advice] as it was personally tailored rather than trying to engage everyone. My form teacher also has been really helpful."

Schools also ran specific careers sessions for pupils with SEND, focused on developing life skills, such as managing a home and travel training (helping pupils to travel independently). In one school, pupils were given a 'fake' bank account and credit card and had to role play visiting a bank and carrying out a transaction. Three schools noted a lack of support and input from the local authority for support with transition. They said that the efforts to make sure pupils with SEND received high-quality, tailored careers provision came solely from the school itself.

Many schools located in more deprived areas told us they worked to raise the careers expectations and awareness of pupils and parents. Schools exposed pupils to the range of options available to them, which included broadening their horizons beyond the local area. They arranged for former pupils to come in and give talks during assemblies to demonstrate the range of destinations pupils had moved on to. Schools were also working closely with universities in the local areas to improve access to higher education. One university had specific funding to increase awareness of higher education in areas of high deprivation. Pupils from schools in

this area were funded to visit universities to get a better understanding of what higher education entailed.

Parental engagement

In three quarters of schools, pupils cited their parents and other family members as having a significant influence on their career choices. Most pupils described this positively, for example parents wanting better opportunities for them. However, a few pupils said they felt pressure from their parents to follow a certain pathway. Many schools told us that parents' limited awareness or understanding of different pathways could be a barrier.

Most schools included information on careers as part of parents' evenings. Eight schools had made a conscious effort to engage parents with careers. They had sent out newsletters, run specific careers events for parents and engaged with parents through social media channels. These schools had observed a gradual improvement in overall levels of parental engagement in the careers programme. A further 9 schools were trying to increase parental engagement with careers, while admitting that this was difficult to do. Most of these schools were in more deprived areas and told us they found engaging parents to be challenging.

FE and skills providers findings

In FE and skills providers, careers guidance can be part of a separate careers programme and/or through individual appointments with careers advisers. It is also built into the curriculum in many courses, which are often designed with employability in mind. Apprentices may receive careers advice at work and might also receive broader careers guidance through the apprenticeship provider or their employer. Learners who experience industry placements as part of their course are also likely to learn a great deal about work while on placement. The distinction between careers guidance and the vocational curriculum is, therefore, often blurred. In this review, we have considered a range of important elements of standalone and integrated careers guidance.

Leadership of careers

The DfE's statutory guidance states that careers provision in sixth-form and general

further education colleges should have the backing of senior leaders. The statutory guidance does not cover ILPs, but the DfE does encourage them to follow it as good practice. In all providers visited, the leadership and management of careers involved staff at a senior level. Typically, senior leaders had appointed a careers leader who was responsible for the careers strategy and was accountable to senior leaders.

In 6 general further education colleges and 2 sixth-form colleges, the careers leader was trained to at least level 6 in a careers guidance subject. In a few of these providers, the careers leader was also one of the careers advisers. In one general further education college and one sixth-form college, the careers leader was working towards a level 6 qualification. Leaders understood they needed to ensure that their careers programme was led and delivered by individuals with the right knowledge, skills and experience to help learners to make informed choices about their next destination and future careers. Many leaders had increased the time their careers leader was allocated to spend on careers. For instance, one sixth-form college had recently increased its careers leader's allocated time from 3 days a week to full time.

Generally, subject staff were positive about the approach to careers in their provider. Their understanding of the careers strategy matched what we heard from leaders. They told us that they felt well supported by leaders and had sufficient training opportunities and support from the careers team.

In around two thirds of providers visited, careers guidance was clearly given a high priority by senior leaders. In these providers, careers guidance tended to be embedded in quality improvement plans and self-assessment reports. For example, in one provider the careers leader met regularly with curriculum managers to review their performance against the Gatsby benchmarks and agree specific careers-related targets. This helped develop a culture where the wider staff team bought into the importance of a high-quality careers programme for their learners. In the remaining providers, it was unclear whether leaders gave careers a high priority.

Careers guidance could be included in the curriculum in different ways, for instance:

- as a standalone subject, for example timetabled sessions as part of the tutorial curriculum
- as part of the subject curriculum or vocational programme delivered by teachers/tutors
- through extra-curricular activities, events and other encounters with the world of work or further study

The way that providers delivered careers guidance varied between the types of

provider. For instance, sixth-form colleges delivered the majority of careers guidance through the tutorial programme and supplemented this with additional visits, events and talks. In general further education colleges, the approach varied depending on the learners' programme, but typically followed a similar pattern with more support from the central careers team.

We primarily asked leaders and staff about careers guidance delivered outside of the subject curriculum. However, we have also included some findings about how careers guidance was integrated into the curriculum.

In providers that delivered careers guidance as a standalone subject (excluding employability programmes), this included:

- giving learners up-to-date advice about the courses and pathways for different careers, and the qualifications needed
- helping learners develop their understanding of job applications, CV writing and job interviews to prepare them for applying for jobs at the end of their course
- giving learners up-to-date information about local, regional and national LMI skills gaps
- giving learners information about the professional behaviours required for specific careers

In around three quarters of sixth-form and general further education colleges, leaders had ensured that the staff delivering careers guidance as a standalone subject had received some training in careers. This was most commonly continuous professional development delivered by the careers lead or adviser. The careers team also frequently helped staff create resources and plan the programme of learning. In general, staff we spoke to were happy with the training they had been given and felt confident delivering careers guidance. They also valued the help from the careers leader and other staff with expertise. However, a few tutors and teachers said they would value more information and training on different pathways, for instance degree apprenticeships and T levels. One tutor told us:

> " [I] would like training to get advice on what to give those who are potentially going to be NEET. In tutorial programme, [we] focus on UCAS. [I] want to talk more about degree apprenticeships and want to split students into different pathways e.g. 'non-uni' group to give them more information through tutorials. Would be helpful for tutors to get specific training."

In vocational programmes in particular, leaders and staff told us the majority of careers guidance happened within the subject curriculum and was 'threaded through everything a learner does'. The ILPs we visited did initial work with apprentices to

check they were on the right course, and signposted to other options if they could not meet their training needs. They delivered ongoing careers guidance through the curriculum and discussed it in reviews with tutors or managers. There appeared to be a mixed picture as to whether the careers guidance that apprentices received was relevant beyond their role with their current employer. For instance, in one ILP, there was effective guidance for apprentices that wanted to stay with their organisation after they had finished their training plan. However, guidance for alternative options, such as self-employment, was an area for development. ILP leaders told us it could sometimes be difficult to balance giving apprentices impartial guidance and maintaining a good relationship with the apprentice's current employer.

The industry expertise of staff delivering vocational programmes and apprenticeships was important. Staff knew the training needs for their sectors well and were knowledgeable about future skills needs. There was a clear connection to future employment. Apprentices were well informed about the skills required to meet local, regional and national needs. When we asked learners on vocational courses or work-based learning what they found most useful about the careers guidance they had received, many told us it was the industry expertise of their teacher or trainer, the links they had with the sector and the detailed and up-to-date careers guidance they gave them.

In a few general further education colleges, leaders made sure staff attended regular courses related to their industry or were given time to go on industry days. This kept their industry knowledge up to date, and helped staff understand emerging technologies and new jobs within their industry. For example, a member of teaching staff in one college told us how they were:

> " …encouraged to stay current – go back into industry for a day each year, supported [by leaders]. For example, links with a dairy to go and talk to [its] research and development department [or] transplant labs seeing how they match up patients, see the scale and roles of the labs and to experience different career progressions."

In most general further education and sixth-form colleges, careers guidance was embedded into wider subjects, such as maths or chemistry. Teachers made links to future careers, explaining the range of jobs available and pathways into further study or employment. Generally, teachers were highly knowledgeable about the options related to their subject, but some wanted more information on vocational pathways.

Learners in 12 of the 14 providers visited said they were strongly influenced by their tutors, trainers or teachers. Learners valued their industry expertise and the personalised advice they gave. One learner said:

> " There are a lot of teachers who have had a job in the industry. One was a holiday rep, one was ex cabin crew – so they have given us good prep in order to help with a job interview."

All general further education and sixth-form colleges ran specific careers events and visits, such as careers or industry weeks, careers fairs or other encounters with employers such as talks. Examples were wide reaching, and providers engaged with employers, training providers and universities to deliver these initiatives. In colleges where these worked well, HMI noted that learners were able to access a wide range of events across the year that covered academic and vocational pathways. Events were tailored to sectors that learners were interested in. Learners were able to engage with employers meaningfully and ask them questions. The events were not standalone: the colleges followed them up with trips to employers or further work in lessons and discussions with tutors/teachers. Additionally, the careers team monitored engagement and followed up with specific learners who were not engaged.

Monitoring and evaluation

Almost all FE and skills providers were evaluating their careers programme against the Gatsby benchmarks. Just over three quarters were using Compass to do this. [footnote 84] Three of the colleges regularly analysed Compass data with an enterprise adviser to give external feedback. ILPs do not currently have access to Compass and are not covered in the DfE's statutory guidance. Encouragingly, though, the ILPs in the review were engaging with the Gatsby benchmarks to structure their careers programme. An inspector noted that in one ILP:

> " [senior] leaders decided to strengthen careers guidance by using Gatsby benchmarking to identify how this works as an ILP and to identify how to achieve these."

In general, providers found the Gatsby benchmarks and Compass useful. Leaders told us how they helped to embed a consistent approach to careers. However, a few providers told us Compass was too 'schools-focused' and did not always capture the different approaches in the FE and skills remit. This meant that the usefulness of Compass could be limited.

In around half of the providers, leaders asked each department to review their careers provision against the Gatsby benchmarks. In some cases, this took the form of a red, amber, green (RAG) rating system and departments provided the data to

senior leaders for scrutiny. This allowed leaders to have oversight of the progress being made to embed careers into different departments and facilitated discussions between the careers team and subject leads on where improvements could be made. For instance, one leader told us that:

> " We review once per year with each curriculum lead and go through Gatsby benchmarks and the Compass review. The careers lead prompts with questions i.e. how do they support and tailor for [learners with] SEND and what type of activity works best? The careers lead also looks at how they can support curriculum leads with activities."

However, in general, leaders' wider monitoring and evaluation of careers guidance was mixed. For instance, around a quarter of providers did not systematically record the careers guidance given to learners. The benefits of such tracking are that leaders can have oversight of what is working and what adjustments might be needed. Leaders told us though that this could be difficult and time consuming to achieve. In some cases, this was because data was in multiple systems and was difficult to pull together.

Leaders did not routinely seek feedback from parents and learners on their careers programme. When they did, it was unclear how they used this feedback. Many learners told us they had completed surveys that asked about careers or had given feedback on individual careers guidance meetings. However, when we asked leaders how they reviewed and monitored their careers programme, few mentioned using feedback from learners.

Involving parents in careers guidance

There was a mixed picture on how well FE and skills providers were engaging parents in their careers programme. This matched what we saw in schools. In providers where parental engagement was working well, they communicated regularly throughout the whole learner journey. Typically, FE and skills providers do not routinely involve parents more widely in the same way as schools.

Learners told us they were strongly influenced by their parents. Some spoke positively about events their college had put on for parents. They said they 'helped parents understand' what a particular route, such as university, would involve. For instance, a learner in one college told us of the benefits that came from their parents attending an open evening. Their parents were pushing them to do A levels but after attending a parents' evening with the college, their parents supported them with pursuing a BTEC.

Working with schools, employers and higher education and training providers

Providers are required to work with employers to develop local skills improvement plans.[footnote 86] It was therefore encouraging to see that all providers were engaging a wide range of employers in their careers programme.

Almost all the providers visited were gathering extensive LMI and demonstrated substantial engagement with employers and other local networks. In many cases, senior leaders sat on a range of external boards and panels, which helped them keep up to date with, and feed into, local skills agendas. Providers used this information to develop curriculum content in response to local, regional and national skills needs. For example, in one general further education college, health and social care tutors had included an option on palliative care and additional tutorials on progressing onto next steps due to feedback from industry and higher education partners.

Many providers were working with employers and higher education providers to identify important sector-specific skills and behaviours to include in the curriculum. This was to ensure that learners were developing these skills and behaviours. For instance, one sixth-form college was working with a local university on an audit to see whether learners were gaining the right skills to gain university medical places. A few other providers had worked with employers to identify wider employability skills, such as communication and customer-service skills, which were important to that sector. They had then planned how to develop these through the curriculum.

In general, providers saw being part of a careers hub as a good opportunity to share information and best practice. Hubs provided links with employers, helped providers understand local skills gaps, provided training opportunities and supplied providers with LMI.

Around two thirds of providers worked with learners at enrolment to check they were applying for the right course. Many leaders and staff told us that they prioritised 'careers not courses' and wanted to make sure learners were on the right course for their career aspirations. This process often started before the learner enrolled at the provider, for instance by offering taster days and assessing career aspirations at interview. Some courses then had an induction period where learners and staff could assess whether they were on the right course, with appropriate advice and guidance input from the careers team, tutor and/or teachers. A couple of colleges cited weaknesses with personalised careers guidance in schools as a reason why learners might not be on the right course. They told us that learners with high needs in particular were not always prepared well for their next step and transition to

college.

Two colleges and one ILP we visited said that accessing schools to deliver provider encounters could be challenging. One college described careers events in schools as 'managed access' and noted that schools with their own sixth forms wanted to keep their pupils. This reflected some of what we saw in schools. However, another college reported that this issue had got better with the updated statutory guidance, and that schools were responding to their legal obligations.

Providers had a mixed view on whether schools promoted technical and vocational routes well enough. For instance, the ILPs we spoke to during the focus groups said that schools lacked understanding of apprenticeships and did not promote them well enough. Two colleges we visited told us that learners arrived from school with a lack of awareness of apprenticeships. A few ILPs said there was still a general bias from schools towards A levels and higher education. For example, a manager of an ILP specialising in engineering told us:

> " One of the problems is that schools don't promote apprenticeships. When we do taster days and experience days, we demonstrate machining and engineering. We're trying to get the message across that you don't need to go to college, you can do apprenticeships. Schools don't know about it or promote it."

There were also challenges around T levels. A few colleges said many parents did not understand them, and schools did not always tell learners about them. Some employers also did not know about T levels and colleges told us they often had to educate employers about this pathway. Because of delays with some of the new T-level courses, a few providers were wary of advising learners about this pathway.

Experiences of the workplace

Many learners and staff cited experiences of the workplace, and in particular work experience placements or industry placements, as one of the most important factors when deciding future career paths. These placements helped learners develop sector-specific skills and knowledge. They also built confidence and developed essential workplace skills such as communication and team-working. For instance, one level 3 learner with high needs said:

> " The work experience placement is most useful [for thinking about what I will do next]… Meeting new people, getting advice and developing social skills…

Working with professional photographer at the work experience placement… Feels social skills [have got better] and better communication and confidence. Has built my confidence."

Across all providers in the review, the most effective work experience placements involved:

- aligning work experience placements to learners' courses and career aspirations
- carefully designing and sequencing work experience placements in the curriculum, so that learners developed knowledge of when to use theoretical and practical curriculum components at work
- working closely with employers so they could align activities to course content
- leaders monitoring the quality of placements, and ensuring that they had clear objectives and were sufficient in their duration and breadth of activities
- leaders setting targets for staff who develop the curriculum to make sure learners had work experience placements
- staff and employers working with learners to prepare them for their work experience placement
- placements offering broad experiences to help learners decide which areas they are most interested in, which helped learners understand more about the field as a whole rather than one specific career
- working closely with employers so they could understand the individual needs of learners (for instance, learners with high needs)
- developing collaborative partnerships with a range of employers and other stakeholders from different sectors

In a small number of providers, there were limited opportunities to experience the workplace. These providers cited long-term impacts of the pandemic as the reason for this. For example, one college was finding it difficult to arrange work experience placements because of changes in working practices, such as more people working remotely. This meant that employers were not able to facilitate in-person work experience.

Many other providers, however, had adapted quickly to these changes. For example, some were implementing hybrid work-experience models that included face-to-face and virtual elements. In general, providers saw the pandemic as having less of an impact now. We saw that there was not an ongoing need, as the pandemic recedes, for employers and providers to limit opportunities for work experience.

Staff and learners also told us that high-quality, broad industry placements were

important to learners' decision-making. A broad range of experiences helped learners identify potential future career options. Staff said that industry placements were when learners really began to understand what a particular career involved. One course leader said:

" Industry placement is the golden ticket to careers – this makes their mind up. For example, in early years they might like children, but when they actually go into a nursery, they don't like it."

However, we heard that some providers were finding it difficult to find suitable industry placements. This was similar to what we found in our T-levels report.[footnote 87]

Case study: how work experience was important for one learner to secure employment (details have been changed to protect their identity)

This learner was enrolled on a hospitality course at a general further education college. During college, the learner undertook extended work experience with a local business in the hospitality sector. They did a project related to their work experience and had mock interviews with the employer. As a result of their work experience, the employer offered the learner part-time employment.

Subject teachers told us how they sequenced the curriculum carefully to prepare learners for their work experience and worked with employers to do this. They ensured that placements were 'tailored to the study programme', and helped learners develop important sector-specific skills and knowledge. Leaders regularly monitored the quality of work experience with help from the careers team.

The learner told us they really valued their subject tutor's expertise. Towards the end of their course, the learner identified that they wanted to apply to a specific company. Their teacher and pathway leader helped them to prepare for the interview. The learner said that the high-profile, high-quality work experience they had was key to getting the job, and they were able to give examples from their work experience during the interview.

Half of the providers talked to us about supported internships and work experience

for learners with high needs. Many of these involved placements within the provider but could also involve external placements if suitable for the learner. Some external placements had resulted in either permanent placements or employment.

We have carried out separately a more detailed review of careers guidance for pupils and learners in special schools, pupil referral units and independent specialist colleges. We will publish our findings in a further report.

Decision-making and impartial guidance

The DfE's statutory guidance states that learners should have access to a careers adviser, trained to level 6, when needed.[footnote 88] The statutory guidance does not cover ILPs, but the DfE encourages them to follow it as good practice. Two thirds of providers visited had at least one careers team member qualified to level 6 who was responsible for holding personal guidance interviews. This was either the careers leader or careers adviser. In a further 2 providers, the careers leader was working towards the level 6 qualification. A few providers said they were having difficulties recruiting qualified advisers, and some were training existing staff to level 6. This reflects what we saw in schools. The ILPs did not typically have a distinct careers team or careers advisers. In ILPs, trainers tended to deliver formal careers guidance.

In some providers, especially larger ones, not all learners had one-to-one guidance interviews with a careers adviser. Some providers had prioritised guidance for those who needed it most. Tutors and teachers had an important role identifying learners who would benefit most from one-to-one guidance. Most staff we spoke to understood when they would need to refer a learner to the careers team and how they would do this. In one college, the careers team had created a flow chart for subject leaders that explained how and when to refer to the careers team. Regular communication with the careers team was also important. For example, tutors in one provider reviewed intended destinations with their learners 3 times a year. The careers team then worked with each tutor to identify any learners without a plan, or those whose destination had changed, so they could give them targeted guidance.

A few learners in general FE and sixth-form colleges said that meeting a careers adviser was most useful if they were not sure what pathway to pursue or were thinking about changing courses. This was because careers advisers were knowledgeable about different academic and technical pathways. In all providers, learners could refer themselves to an adviser. However, they were not always

proactive about doing this. For instance, in one general further education college we visited, all learners were aware that they could meet the careers adviser, but none of them had taken this opportunity.

Across all providers, the careers guidance learners received depended on their current pathway. For instance, in the sixth-form colleges we visited, the careers programme was organised around progression to university. This could also include specialist careers programmes for learners aiming to progress to Oxbridge or into medical careers. Many leaders had allocated additional time to the coordinators of these programmes and ensured that programmes were led by staff with specialist knowledge. In one sixth-form college, learners were only referred to the careers team to explore other options when they had decided they did not want to go to university. However, although higher education was the destination for many, some learners we spoke to in sixth-form colleges wanted more information on apprenticeships or vocational options. One Year 13 business student said:

> " There are a lot of apprenticeships but [I] don't know how to get in touch. Feel uni is the big thing. Could be more about apprenticeships."

In general, the careers provision for apprentices was more variable, including for apprentices in ILPs and colleges. This was also reflected in our inspection evidence review. Some apprentices told us they found it hard to engage with the provider's careers programme or did not know what was available. Some in colleges had not had one-to-one interviews with a qualified careers adviser. Many were unaware of options outside their current pathway. One inspector noted:

> " In apprenticeships, the level 3 installation electricians do not have formal careers guidance. The college runs apprenticeship week, but apprentices are unaware of this. Apprentices do not have sufficient formal careers guidance. A significant minority do not progress to paid employment."

Annex

Limitations

It was sometimes challenging to recruit participants for this review. In many cases, this was because of the additional workload of a research visit and challenges with

arranging visits around potential industrial action. The sample of FE and skills providers we visited was most affected, and we were therefore only able to visit good or outstanding FE and skills providers. However, we did include requires improvement and inadequate FE and skills providers in our inspection evidence review.

We did not observe any teaching or careers guidance sessions during the visits. This was primarily because we felt our research questions could be answered through interviewing staff and pupils or learners, and triangulating what we were told between participant groups. We also used other sources of data, such as a sample of inspection evidence, to increase the validity of what we found. We wanted to gather enough data to answer our research questions in a way that minimised the impact of the research on staff and reduced any potential harm to participants, in line with our research ethics policy.[footnote 89] However, arguably observing teaching and/or careers guidance sessions during the visits would have given us a more rounded picture of the overall quality of careers guidance in the school or FE and skills provider.

Six school visits and 2 FE and skills visits were led by a senior member of the research team rather than an HMI. This was because it was not always possible to do a research visit when both the HMI lead and school or provider were available. We carefully cross-checked any insights used in the report that were made solely by researchers with HMIs involved in the project to make sure they were accurate.

Across our overall sample of visits and inspection evidence, we found considerable repetition of the same themes, especially for our key findings and areas of recommendations. We can therefore be confident that a level of saturation was reached.

Detailed methods

Research questions

- How well do leaders:
  - fulfil their statutory duties to provide independent careers guidance? [footnote 90]
  - ensure that careers education is of high quality?
- To what extent do schools and FE and skills providers:
  - engage with stakeholders (such as employers, careers networks and other

providers)?

- ensure that careers education contributes to local, regional and national opportunities and skills needs?

- How does the curriculum help learners make informed choices about their future education, employment and training?

Secondary research questions

Leadership:

- Is careers guidance seen as a purposeful activity across the whole school or FE and skills provider, integrating leadership, whole-curriculum planning, employers and parents?

- Does the careers leader have the explicit and visible backing of school leaders?

Engagement:

- Is the school or FE and skills provider an active member of local careers networks such as the local careers hub and enterprise adviser networks, where available?

- To what extent are schools and FE and skills providers involving parents and carers in the careers guidance process?

Provision and the curriculum:

- Are schools giving equal prominence to both technical and academic routes when informing young people and their parents about future options?

- How do learners perceive the quality of the careers guidance/provision they receive?

Literature review

In autumn 2022, we carried out a narrative review of the national and international academic, policy and grey literature, focusing on relevant reviews and reports on careers guidance in England.[footnote 91] We searched and filtered for relevant literature based on our stated aims for the project.[footnote 92] We created a list of literature items and then populated a literature matrix for each item, including relevant research aim, methods, key findings and significance. We then used this matrix as the basis for developing a long-form literature analysis, which we used to develop our detailed research questions and research design.

Inspector focus groups

During October 2022, we held 4 focus groups with 16 schools and FE and skills HMI and Senior His Majesty's Inspectors (SHMI). The purpose of the focus groups was to use inspectors' expertise to inform the methodology for our research visits, and to identify themes to explore further on the research visits.

We held the focus groups virtually and did not audio record them, but a researcher took notes. We analysed the data thematically and drew themes from it inductively. We analysed the schools and FE and skills notes separately in Microsoft Word. We produced a summary of the main themes for each remit, which included the number of times each theme was mentioned across the focus groups.

Analysis of inspection evidence

We did this analysis in 2 phases. For the first phase, we looked at 5 schools and 5 FE and skills providers across 6 Ofsted regions.[footnote 93] We only looked at outstanding and inadequate settings to get an understanding of strong practice and challenges. A researcher analysed the data thematically in MaxQDA. We used this phase to generate an initial coding framework and to identify initial findings.

We then analysed a sample of schools and FE and skills providers inspected since the EIF. We included 26 schools, 2 UTCs and 8 FE and skills providers in this part of the analysis.

Table 1: Schools in both phases of our inspection evidence analysis, including contextual data

Attribute	Range	Number of schools	% of sample
Type	With sixth form	15	48
Type	Without sixth form	14	45
Type	UTCs	2	6
Region	South West	4	13
Region	East Midlands	4	13
Region	West Midlands	3	10
Region	London	4	13

Region	East of England	3	10
Region	South East	4	13
Region	North East, Yorkshire and Humberside	5	16
Region	North West	4	13
Rural/urban	Urban	26	84
Rural/urban	Rural	5	16
Personal development judgement	Outstanding	6	19
Personal development judgement	Good	13	42
Personal development judgement	Requires improvement	4	13
Personal development judgement	Inadequate	0	0
Personal development judgement	[x]	8	26
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	5	16
Overall effectiveness	Good	16	52
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement	5	16
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate	5	16
IDACI quintile	1 (most deprived)	6	19
IDACI quintile	2 (second most deprived)	5	16
IDACI quintile	3 (middle quintile)	8	26
IDACI quintile	4 (second least deprived)	8	26

| IDACI quintile | 5 (least deprived) | 3 | 10 |
| IDACI quintile | [x] | 1 | 3 |

Note: Percentages are rounded so may not total 100.

(IDACI) income deprivation affecting children index

[x] = not available

Table 2: FE and skills providers in both phases our inspection evidence analysis, including contextual data

Attribute	Range	Number of FE and skills providers	% of sample
Type	Sixth-form colleges	4	30
Type	General further education colleges	4	30
Type	ILPs	5	38
Region	South West	1	8
Region	East Midlands	2	15
Region	West Midlands	3	28
Region	London	1	8
Region	East of England	1	8
Region	South East	3	23
Region	North East, Yorkshire and Humberside	1	8
Region	North West	1	8
Personal development judgement	Outstanding	5	38
Personal development	Good	4	30

judgement			
Personal development judgement	Requires improvement	2	15
Personal development judgement	Inadequate	2	15
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	5	38
Overall effectiveness	Good	3	28
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement	3	23
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate	2	15
Deprivation quintile – education and training	1 (most deprived)	4	30
Deprivation quintile – education and training	2 (second most deprived)	3	23
Deprivation quintile – education and training	3 (middle quintile)	1	8
Deprivation quintile – education and training	4 (second least deprived)	1	8
Deprivation quintile – education and training	5 (least deprived)	0	0
Deprivation quintile – education and training	[x]	4	30
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	1 (most deprived)	1	8
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	2 (second most deprived)	3	23
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	3 (middle quintile)	3	23

Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	4 (second least deprived)	0	0
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	5 (least deprived)	1	8
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	Does not provide apprenticeships	5	38

Note: Percentages are rounded so may not total 100.

[x] = not available

We used the draft coding frameworks from the first phase to code the data in the second phase. We adapted the definitions and wording of existing codes in response to new data. We also added new codes if the data presented a new idea that was not in the coding framework.

Two researchers coded the same inspection evidence data and met to discuss the coding framework and resolve any areas of disagreement. They kept a record of the meeting.

We reviewed code frequencies and retrieved coded segments in MaxQDA. A researcher summarised the main themes. We then analysed these summaries alongside the data from the research visits to triangulate findings.

Research visits

During the spring term 2023, we carried out research visits to schools, sixth-form colleges, general further education colleges and ILPs. We constructed a varied but balanced sample of schools and FE and skills providers to invite to participate. This included the following criteria:

- Ofsted region
- rural/ urban locations
- latest overall effectiveness judgement (excluding schools or FE and skills providers that were judged as inadequate)
- level of deprivation in the school's or FE and skills provider's local authority using the income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI)

The exact balance of the schools and FE and skills providers we visited was affected by recruitment challenges, and we acknowledge this is a limitation of the

study.

Table 3: Schools visited, including contextual data

Attribute	Range	Number of schools	% of sample
Type	With sixth form	16	53
Type	Without sixth form	14	47
Region	South West	6	20
Region	East Midlands	4	13
Region	West Midlands	5	17
Region	London	4	13
Region	East of England	3	10
Region	South East	3	10
Region	North East, Yorkshire and Humberside	3	10
Region	North West	2	7
Rural/urban	Urban	26	87
Rural/urban	Rural	4	13
Personal development judgement	Outstanding	4	13
Personal development judgement	Good	22	73
Personal development judgement	Requires improvement	2	7
Personal development judgement	Inadequate	1	3

Personal development judgement	[x]	1	3
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	3	10
Overall effectiveness	Good	19	63
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement	7	23
Overall effectiveness	[x]	1	3
IDACI quintile	1 (most deprived)	5	17
IDACI quintile	2 (second most deprived)	4	13
IDACI quintile	3 (middle quintile)	7	23
IDACI quintile	4 (second least deprived)	6	20
IDACI quintile	5 (least deprived)	8	27
Careers hub	Wave 1	7	23
Careers hub	Wave 2	4	13
Careers hub	Wave 3	7	23
Careers hub	Wave 4	4	13
Careers hub	Wave 5	4	13
Careers hub	Not in a hub	4	13

Note: Percentages are rounded so may not total 100.

[x] = not available

Table 4: FE and skills providers visited, including contextual data

Attribute	Range	Number of FE and skills providers	% of sample
Type	Sixth-form colleges	5	36

Type	General further education colleges	7	50
Type	ILPs	2	14
Region	South West	1	7
Region	East Midlands	0	0
Region	West Midlands	2	14
Region	London	2	14
Region	East of England	1	7
Region	South East	3	21
Region	North East, Yorkshire and Humberside	2	14
Region	North West	3	21
Personal development judgement	Outstanding	3	21
Personal development judgement	Good	10	71
Personal development judgement	N/A	1	7
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	3	21
Overall effectiveness	Good	11	79
Deprivation quintile – education and training	1 (most deprived)	3	21
Deprivation quintile – education and training	2 (second most deprived)	4	29
Deprivation quintile – education and training	3 (middle quintile)	1	7

Deprivation quintile – education and training	4 (second least deprived)	4	29
Deprivation quintile – education and training	5 (least deprived)	1	7
Deprivation quintile – education and training	Under 10 aims	1	7
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	1 (most deprived)	1	7
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	2 (second most deprived)	0	0
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	3 (middle quintile)	4	29
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	4 (second least deprived)	4	29
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	5 (least deprived)	0	0
Deprivation quintile – apprenticeships	Does not provide apprenticeships	5	36
Careers hub	Wave 1	1	7
Careers hub	Wave 2	1	7
Careers hub	Wave 3	3	21
Careers hub	Wave 4	3	21
Careers hub	Wave 5	2	14
Careers hub	Not in a hub	4	29

Note: Percentages are rounded so may not total 100.

Research visits were led either by an experienced member of the research team or a single HMI who had received research training. A senior researcher led 6 school

visits and 2 FE and skills visits. The remainder of the visits were led by an HMI. A researcher shadowed an HMI for 5 school visits and 2 FE and skills visits.

Research visits took place over 1 day for schools and over 1 or 2 days for FE and skills providers, depending on the size of the provider and practical arrangements.

We gave schools and FE and skills providers the flexibility to develop a timetable for the visit that minimised burden on staff, while ensuring that we spoke to all participant groups wherever possible as this was important for triangulation. For 2-day visits to general further education colleges, we spoke to additional specialist staff, subject lead staff and learners (up to a maximum of 5 learner focus groups). This was to capture the range of these larger settings.

Table 5: An example timetable for schools

Activity	Typical participants	Time (mins)
Interview with senior leaders/focus group with senior leaders	Careers lead/governor/headteacher/deputy headteacher	30
Interview (including case study) with specialist staff	Careers staff/careers advisers/careers coach/careers lead	30
Interview with PSHE staff	PSHE lead/form tutors/class teachers	30
Examination of careers strategy	HMI/ researcher	[z]
Focus group with pupils in Years 7–9	Pupils	30
Focus group with pupils in Years 10–11	Pupils	30
Pupil interview (case study)	Pupil	30
Interview with SENCo	SENCo	30

[z] = not applicable

We spoke to similar groups of participants in FE and skills providers, excluding the SENCo. During the visits, we also interviewed 4 employers that worked with the FE and skills providers we visited.

We wanted to speak to pupils and learners who reflected the diversity of the setting we were visiting. In total, we spoke to 330 pupils in schools and 246 learners in FE and skills providers.

Table 6: The total pupils we spoke to in schools broken down by year group

Year	With SEND	Who speak English as an additional language (EAL)	Total
Year 7	11	9	43
Year 8	12	9	56
Year 9	11	11	69
Year 10	14	10	57
Year 11	23	12	68
Year 12	2	2	18
Year 13	3	1	19

Table 7: The total learners we spoke to in FE and skills providers broken down by age

Age	Total learners
16	28
17	79
18	47

Note: Total numbers are approximate as we collected a mixture of age and year group data. 53 learners are not included in the table as we were not able to collect data on their age or year group.

Participating in the research was voluntary for all participants. We asked schools and FE and skills providers to distribute an information sheet to all participants and parents before the visit. We also sought verbal consent at the start of each research activity. Parents were given the opportunity to opt their young person out of the research. We did not speak to pupils or learners whose parents had opted them out.

For each activity, we developed an interview guide. These were used as a framework to guide the conversation, and researchers or HMI had the flexibility to ask additional questions and follow new lines of enquiry. We used findings from our literature review and HMI focus groups to inform the interview guides.

We asked about:

- the overall approach to careers
- the approach to evaluating and monitoring careers
- how schools or FE and skills providers engaged with employers, careers networks, other providers and parents
- how schools or FE and skills providers ensured that pupils or learners understood the range of technical and academic routes available
- how careers guidance was integrated into the curriculum
- what training staff had received to deliver careers

HMI and/or researchers took notes throughout each activity. This is in line with inspection practice and inspectors and researchers are experienced at capturing data in this way. We did not audio record the activities. Activities were not transcribed verbatim. We gave visit leads time to finalise the evidence collection documents and to write a visit summary. In the visit summary, we asked visit leads to identify any strong practice and challenges, and to provide a summary of the leadership, engagement with stakeholders and curriculum integration they saw on the visits.

We also asked HMI to review evidence from other visits to identify strong practice and emerging themes. We used this alongside our literature review and expectations of quality in the EIF to determine examples of good practice.

We used MaxQDA to analyse the visits data. We developed an initial coding

framework from the inspection evidence analysis. We also used the interview guides and initial reading of the data to inform this. Two researchers independently used this framework to code one visit each, and then met to discuss any problematic or missing codes. They kept a record of suggested changes. Following this meeting, the coding framework was finalised, and one researcher coded the schools data.

We developed a separate framework for the FE and skills visit data from the schools visit framework. We added new codes inductively during the coding process. One researcher began coding the FE and skills data, and the research lead finished it.

The researcher, research lead and senior research lead met weekly throughout both the schools and FE and skills coding to discuss coding.

Once coding was complete, we reviewed code frequencies, retrieved coded segments, and re-read and added additional codes where required. The researcher and research lead involved with coding met to discuss emerging themes and key findings. They made a document that organised codes and key findings under theme headings, which we used as the basis to draft the report.

Focus groups with employers and ILPs

We held 2 virtual focus groups in May, one for employers and one for ILPs, lasting one and a half hours each. We spoke to 9 employers and 10 ILPs that varied in size and type. The aim of the focus groups was to understand how employers and ILPs work with schools and FE and skills providers, how schools and FE and skills providers engage with them, and the challenges in this area. Each participant received a topic guide that explored the above areas, together with an information sheet, before the focus groups.

We held the focus groups virtually and recorded them, with participants' consent. A member of the research team chaired them. A second member of the research team monitored the chat function and took notes. We drew themes from these notes and used them to triangulate against our other data sets.

---

1. 'International approaches to careers interventions', Department for Education, March 2021.↩

2. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.

   For more information on the Gatsby benchmarks, see: Good Career Guidance.↩

3. For more information on the role of the careers leader see 'Understanding the role of the Careers Leader: A guide for secondary schools', The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2018.↩

4. 'Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012', Ofsted, September 2013.↩

5. 'Destinations data: Good practice guide for schools', Department for Education, October 2018.↩

6. Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.

    'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↩

7. 'T-level thematic review: final report', Ofsted; July 2023.↩

8. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↩

9. A Mann, V Denis and C Percy, 'Career ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19', OECD, 2020.

    'International approaches to careers interventions: Literature review', Department for Education, March 2021.↩

10. J Hunt, K Atherton, E Collerton and N Wilkinson, 'Effective careers interventions for disadvantaged young people a report by the behavioural insights team', Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021.↩

11. 'Unemployment Rates', OECD, May 2022.↩

12. C Covacevich, A Mann, C Santos and J Champaud, 'Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries', OECD, 2021.↩

13. 'Investing in career guidance', CEDEFOP, 2019.↩

14. 'Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers', OECD, 2004.↩

15. J Holman, 'Good career guidance', Gatsby, April 2014.↩

16. J Holman, 'Good career guidance', Gatsby, April 2014.↩

17. 'International approaches to careers interventions: Literature review', Department for Education, March 2021.

    J Collins and A Barnes, 'Careers in the curriculum. what works?', The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2017.

C Covacevich, A Mann, C Santos and J Champaud, 'Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries', OECD, 2021.↩

18. A Mann, J Rehill and E Kashefpakdel, 'Employer engagement in education: Insights from international evidence for effective practice and future research', Education Endowment Foundation, January 2018.

   E Kashefpakdel and C Percy, 'Career education that works: an economic analysis using the British cohort study', in 'Journal of education and work', volume 30, Issue 3, 2017.↩

19. E Kashefpakdel and C Percy, 'Work experience for all: Exploring the impacts of work experience on young people's outcomes', Speakers for schools, November 2022.

   A Mann, E Kashefpakdel, J Rehill and P Huddleston, 'Contemporary transitions: young Britons reflect on life after secondary school and college', Education and Employers, June 2017.↩

20. 'Trends in careers education 2021', The Careers and Enterprise Company, December 2021.↩

21. D Hughes, A Mann, S Barnes and R McKeown, 'Careers education: international literature review', Education Endowment Foundation, July 2016.↩

22. D Hughes, A Mann, S Barnes and R McKeown, 'Careers education: international literature review', Education Endowment Foundation, July 2016.↩

23. 'Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012', Ofsted, September 2013.↩

24. 'Education (Careers Guidance in Schools) Act 2022', National Archives, 2022.↩

25. 'Report of the independent panel on technical education', Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, July 2016.↩

26. P Musset and S Field, 'A Skills beyond School Review of England, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training', OECD, 2013.↩

27. Education Act 1997, section 42B.↩

28. Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.↩

29. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↩

30. 'Local skills improvement plans', Department for Education, October 2022.↩

31. 'Good career guidance: a handbook for secondary schools', Gatsby, April 2018.

'Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents', Department for Education, December 2017.↩

32. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↩

33. 'Supporting disadvantaged students through higher education outreach', Office for Students, July 2020.↩

34. 'Young people's experiences of careers information, advice and guidance', Department for Education, October 2021.↩

35. 'Trends in careers education 2021', The Careers and Enterprise Company, December 2021.↩

36. 'Insight briefing: Gatsby benchmark results for 2021/22', The Careers & Enterprise Company, October 2022.↩

37. 'Youth voice census report 2022', Youth Employment, September 2022.↩

38. A Powell and B Francis-Devine, 'Youth unemployment statistics June 2023', House of Commons Library, June 2023, pages 1 to 11.↩

39. 'Careers education, information, advice and guidance: fourth report of session 2022–23', House of Commons Education Committee, June 2023.↩

40. 'Statistics: destinations of key stage 4 and 16 to 18 (KS5) students', Department for Education, October 2022.↩

41. 'Statistics: destinations of key stage 4 and 16 to 18 (KS5) students', Department for Education, October 2022.

'Academic year 2020/21: 16-18 destination measures', Department for Education, October 2022.↩

42. S Holman, 'Good career guidance, the next 10 years', Gatsby, January 2023.↩

43. 'Careers education, information, advice and guidance: fourth report of session 2022–23', House of Commons Education Committee, June 2023.↩

44. 'Spring Budget 2023', HM Treasury, March 2023.↩

45. 'Education inspection framework for September 2023', Ofsted, July 2023.↩

46. 'School inspection handbook', Ofsted, August 2023.

'Further education and skills handbook', Ofsted, July 2023.↩

47. 'Career development framework: learning areas by key stage', Career Development Institute, April 2021.↩

48. 'International approaches to careers interventions', Department for Education, March 2021.↩

49. Dr D Hughes, Dr A Mann, Dr S Barnes and others, 'Careers education: international literature review', July 2016.↩

50. J Holman, 'Good career guidance', Gatsby, April 2014.↩

51. 'International approaches to careers interventions: literature review', Department for Education, March 2021.↩

52. J Collins and A Barnes, 'Careers in the curriculum. What works?', The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2017.↩

53. P Sadler, G Sonnert, Z Hazari and R Tai, 'Stability and volatility of STEM career interest in hight school: a gender study', in 'Science Education', Volume 96, Issue 3, 2012, pages 411 to 427.↩

54. 'Programme of study for PSHE education, key stages 1–5', PSHE Association.↩

55. 'Career development framework: learning areas by key stage', Career Development Institute, April 2021.↩

56. 'International approaches to careers interventions', Department for Education, March 2021.↩

57. J Holman, 'Good career guidance', Gatsby, April 2014.↩

58. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education; January 2023.↩

59. J Cockett, E Pollard and M Williams, ['The professional careers adviser workforce'], Institute for Employment Studies, March 2021.↩

60. E Kashefpakdel and C Percy, 'Career education that works: an economic analysis using the British cohort study', in 'Journal of education and work', volume 30, Issue 3, April 2016.↩

61. J Holman, 'Good career guidance', Gatsby, April 2014.↩

62. For instance, see 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education; January 2023.↩

63. 'International approaches to careers interventions', Department for Education, March 2021.↩

64. P Musset and L Kureková, 'Working it out', July 2018.↩

65. 'International approaches to careers interventions', Department for Education, March 2021.

J Hunt, K Atherton, E Collerton and N Wilkinson, 'Effective careers interventions for disadvantaged young people: A report by the behavioural and insights team', The Careers and Enterprise Company, November 2021.↩

66. J Hunt, K Atherton, E Collerton and N Wilkinson, 'Effective careers interventions for disadvantaged young people: A report by the behavioural and insights team', The Careers and Enterprise Company, November 2021.↩

67. J Holman, 'Good career guidance', Gatsby, April 2014.↩

68. D Hughes, A Mann, S Barnes and others, 'Careers education: International literature review', July 2016.

S Barnes, J Brimrose, A Brown and J Gough, 'The role of parents and carers in providing careers guidance and how they can be better supported: Evidence report', in 'Warwick Institute for Employment Research', March 2020, pages 1 to 78.↩

69. 'Youth voice census: 2022 report', Youth Employment UK, 2022.↩

70. S Barnes, J Brimrose, A Brown and J Gough, 'The role of parents and carers in providing careers guidance and how they can be better supported: Evidence report', in 'Warwick Institute for Employment Research', March 2020, pages 1 to 78.↩

71. For example: M Brockmann, L Clarke and C Winch, 'Knowledge, skills, competence: European divergences in vocational education and training (VET) – the English, German and Dutch cases, in 'Oxford Review of Education', Volume 34, Issue 5, 2008, pages 547 to 567; H Rainbird, A Fuller and A Munro, 'Workplace learning in context', Routledge, 2004; A Fuller and L Unwin, 'Fostering Workplace Learning: looking through the lens of apprenticeship', in 'European Educational Research Journal', Volume 2, Issue 1, pages 41 to 55.↩

72. A G Watts, 'The relationship of career guidance to VET', National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, September 2009.↩

73. 'Careers leadership in colleges: supporting learners through a "whole-college" approach', The Careers & Enterprise Company, June 2021.↩

74. 'Educational effectiveness research and further education and skills', Ofsted, June 2019.↩

75. T McCrone, R White, K Kettlewell, D Sims and others, 'Evaluation of university technical colleges', National Foundation Educational Research (NFER), 2019.↩

76. R Long and P Bolton, 'University technical colleges', January 2016.↩

77. 'Terms of reference: Ofsted's thematic review of careers guidance', Ofsted,

November 2022.↵

78. 'How we carry out ethical research with people', Ofsted, December 2019.↵

79. Compass and Compass+ are free tools created by the CEC. Compass allows schools and colleges to evaluate their careers provision against the Gatsby benchmarks. Compass+ is a free upgrade for eligible schools and allows them to track careers provision at an individual pupil level. Other tools are also available for schools to manage, track and evaluate their careers provision.↵

80. For instance, see 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↵

81. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↵

82. For further research on this topic, see J Abrahams, 'Option blocks that block options: exploring inequalities in GCSE and A-level options in England', in British Journal of Sociology of Education, Volume 39, 2018, pages 1143 to 1159.↵

83. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education, January 2023.↵

84. Compass is a free tool for FE and skills providers to evaluate their careers provision against the Gatsby benchmarks. Other tools are also available for FE and skills providers to monitor and evaluate their careers provision.↵

85. RAG rating can be used to assess whether actions or targets are off target (red), at risk (amber) or on track (green).↵

86. Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, part 1, chapter 1.↵

87. 'T-level thematic review: final report', Ofsted; July 2023.↵

88. 'Careers guidance and access for education and training providers', Department for Education; January 2023.↵

89. 'How we carry out ethical research with people', Ofsted, December 2019.↵

90. Education Act 1997.↵

91. 'Grey literature' is a term used for literature produced by organisations outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels.↵

92. 'Terms of reference: Ofsted's thematic review of careers guidance', Ofsted, November 2022.↵

93. For Ofsted regions, see: About us: who we are.↵

↑ Back to top

Services and information

Benefits

Births, death, marriages and care

Business and self-employed

Childcare and parenting

Citizenship and living in the UK

Crime, justice and the law

Disabled people

Driving and transport

Education and learning

Employing people

Environment and countryside

Housing and local services

Money and tax

Passports, travel and living abroad

Visas and immigration

Working, jobs and pensions

Government activity

Departments

News

Guidance and regulation

Research and statistics

Policy papers and consultations

Transparency

How government works

Get involved

OGL

All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated