APPENDIX 3

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of 11 informational semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders exploring their experience of Good Career Guidance[1]. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight on the implementation and impacts of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Consistently, participants said the benchmarks had provided a clear and concise framework for career provision in schools and colleges. They had made it easier to give guidance and increased the number of young people in positive career destinations. Participants noted that the strength of the benchmarks was their coherence and applicability as a national framework that can be applied and implemented in a local context, providing schools and colleges with a valuable tool to ensure students receive effective career guidance. The terminology of the framework was highlighted as a key benefit – clearly defining what needs to be done – and setting an aspirational standard for schools and colleges to follow to integrate career guidance throughout the young person's learning journey. The participants said another important feature of the benchmarks was the measurement of progress, which they said had been instrumental in improving career provision in schools and colleges. Educators were provided with a focused and targeted approach to career guidance that meant they had to measure progress and continually assess the effectiveness of their career guidance programmes.

The interviews highlighted that the impact of the benchmarks could be enhanced by encouraging schools and colleges to consider more deeply the needs of vulnerable students, especially those with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They also emphasised the importance of continuing to develop an understanding of the framework that is shared by employers and schools/colleges. While the benchmarks created a shared terminology for the sector, there is still work to be done to ensure that the framework and its implementation is well understood by all stakeholders. Interviewees recognised that Gatsby's work, Good Career Guidance: The Next Ten Years,[2] provides an opportunity to re-emphasise important elements of the existing framework while also considering potential clarifications or adaptions to benchmarks.

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[1] Holman, J. (2014) *Good career guidance* or for more information https://www.goodcareerguidance.org.uk/
[2] Gatsby Foundation (2023) *Programmes – Good career guidance: the next ten years*.

There was widespread agreement that the benchmarks have proven to be a valuable tool in guiding career provision in schools and colleges. Interviewees said the benchmarks had helped increase the number of young people who secured positive career destinations by enabling them to make more informed decisions about their future and set achievable career goals. Because of this impact, many said that any changes to the framework should not be extensive, but should instead aim to build on the existing strengths of the benchmarks. Below is a synthesis of the recommendations made in the informational interviews:

- Include specific consideration of the needs of SEND and disadvantaged pupils and more purposefully integrate these needs into the whole framework. This should also apply to pupils in home education and pupil referral units (PRUs) who have been left out of mainstream career guidance programmes.

- The framework needs to better address the changing world of work and it needs appropriate guidance to be given in a timely manner. It was recommended to include specific elements focused on emerging trends and changes in the labour market as part of the guidance.

- Although parents and carers have already benefited from the benchmark requirement for parents and carers to be informed about their child's careers programme, participants recommended motivating them to take a more active role by emphasising the importance of their involvement.

- Ensure the benchmarks are connected to the wider national careers ecosystem to establish a more effective and comprehensive career guidance and support structure in England. The Gatsby Benchmarks, the Career Development Institute's (CDI) Career Development Framework,[3] and the Quality in Careers Standard[4] are all important components of a comprehensive career development system. Each of these frameworks has a unique focus and purpose, but they can be effectively linked to create a robust and holistic approach to career guidance and development.

- Consider how the benchmarks can more closely align schools/colleges and employer needs. For there to be successful outcomes from implementing the benchmarks, various stakeholders must contribute unique roles and responsibilities. Clear understanding of these roles can support collaboration and enhance the effectiveness of the process.

- Address the challenges schools and colleges experience trying to access destination tracking data. This will ensure that institutions can effectively monitor and evaluate their programmes and student outcomes.

- Interviewees recommended a comprehensive examination was needed to address the various challenges identified in the implementation and delivery of Benchmark 8 (personal guidance). Many schools and colleges have limited budgets and staff, which can make it difficult to provide personalised career guidance for every student.

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[3] CDI (accessed 2024) *Careers development framework*.
[4] Quality in Careers (accessed 2024) *Quality in careers standard*.

BACKGROUND

The Gatsby Foundation (Gatsby) has a long-standing interest in career guidance and their ongoing work has led to the largest improvement of career guidance for young people in a generation. In April 2014, the Good Career Guidance report[5] was published, which identified what 'good' career guidance looked like and set out a framework of eight benchmarks for secondary schools and colleges. Following a successful pilot in the north-east of England, the Gatsby Benchmarks became the bedrock of the government's career guidance strategy for schools and colleges. They now form part of Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework,[6] and their success enabled the publishing of enhanced provider access legislation in 2023.[7] There is growing evidence that implementing the Gatsby Benchmarks:

- improves destination outcomes

- reduces the likelihood of students – particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances – becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training)

- increases career readiness

- has a positive impact on academic performance[8]

In 2023 Gatsby embarked on a significant programme of research and consultation to capture innovation, unpick challenges and assess what, if any, refinement might be needed to the benchmarks. Gatsby is also reviewing evidence that has emerged since its original report, including engaging with overseas organisations who have chosen to adopt and adapt the benchmarks for their own national contexts. The publication of a report detailing the findings is planned for Autumn 2024. The research programme includes six stages to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings:

1. **Stakeholder interviews** and round tables to gain insights into the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders.

2. **Open consultation survey** to obtain the opinions and feedback of the wider community of practitioners and stakeholders.

3. **In-depth literature review** to gather all relevant academic and grey literature that can support the evaluation of the benchmarks.

4. **Analysis** of the data collected from the survey, interviews and Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) data to derive insights and draw conclusions.

[5] Holman, J. (2014) *Good career guidance*. London: Gatsby Foundation.
[6] Ofsted (updated July 2023) *Education inspection framework*.
[7] Department for Education (2023) *Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*.
[8] Percy, C. and Tanner, E. (2021) *The benefits of Gatsby Benchmark achievement for post-16 destinations*. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

5. **International case studies** through which we will engage with practitioners from other countries that have implemented Gatsby inspired benchmarks to see how they have been adapted and used in different national contexts.

6. **Reporting** the findings in a clear and concise manner, making recommendations for action and disseminating the results to relevant stakeholders will be the final stage.

As the first component of the programme, this report presents the results of one-to-one informational and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in the career guidance sector.

INTRODUCTION

Before the consultation survey and literature review, we conducted 11 informational interviews with key stakeholders in the career education and career guidance sectors in order to better understand the implementation and impacts of the Gatsby Benchmarks. This approach is commonly used to gain insights and perspectives from individuals with direct experience or expertise in a particular area. The interviews took place between 3 February 2023 and 28 February 2023 and each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

Participants were selected based on their expertise and experience, including knowledge of the benchmarks, experience of using the benchmarks in their jobs, experience of training careers leaders and managing career education in secondary schools and colleges. The group included:

- Careers expert

- Chief executive of a careers company (a)

- Chief executive of a careers company (b)

- Strategic careers hub lead (a)

- Strategic careers hub lead (b)

- Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT)

- Director of a careers company

- Executive headteacher of a foundation school

- Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school

- Trainer of careers leader programmes

- Governmental team leader in careers guidance

With Gatsby's input, we developed a topic guide which we used in the interviews (see Appendix A) to find out how schools and colleges have been implementing the benchmarks, the challenges they have faced, and the benefits of implementing the benchmarks for their career guidance practices. The data from these interviews enabled us to design the consultation survey and helped us identify the areas we need to focus on in future phases of the research.

This report presents the findings of the interviews, outlining the key themes that emerged and providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of those providing career guidance to young people.

THE IMPACT OF THE BENCHMARKS

All the participants unanimously agreed that the benchmarks had transformed careers provision in schools and colleges.

The benchmarks have had a significant impact on careers leaders by providing them with an evidence-based framework to follow that has transformed their approach to career guidance. By introducing consistent language and clearly articulated requirements, schools and colleges have been able to concentrate on what their students need, what is working and what is not working. Some participants said the benchmarks had made them aware of students' career journeys and not necessarily "just the end point". For example, a principal of a secondary school and sixth form special school mentioned:

> **Having the benchmarks going through school, it just enables us to keep thinking about what's next in a student's careers journey and the sustainability of careers guidance … With our sixth form, the school asks themselves how do we enable more young people to access more internship approach[es] to their programmes of learning? Because we know that [internship approaches] works. And then, what's their next steps [after the internships]? So, in terms of our thinking, it [the benchmarks] just enables it [career guidance] that to be more of a process [for our students] than just a thought.**

(Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school)

A careers leader illustrated this transformational impact by comparing her time as a secondary school student with years later when she started working as a careers leader, during the creation of the benchmarks, and finally when she started her current role as director of the trust, when the benchmarks were well-known, and when career guidance was easier to provide because of the framework.

> **It is hard to quantify [the impact] because we normally receive qualitative feedback, but you know when we do our end of year 11 survey, we find out that their opinion of their 5-year journey is getting increasingly more positive. Now they understand the different pathways, they understand different sectors … And again, it is not like, for example 2017, we didn't have these opportunities in school. We were still sort of [the] blind leading the blind, which was like when we were in school.**

(director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

By defining and establishing the requirements of career guidance, the visibility and importance of careers provision has noticeably increased. Students in schools and colleges know who their careers leaders are, and they have the opportunity to benefit from the services they provide. Careers programmes feature on school and college websites and provider access policies provide a process for engagement.

The requirement for schools and colleges to tell parents and carers about their child's careers programme and to make information available on school websites has positively impacted parents and carers.

The requirement to use labour market information in careers guidance has also been impactful. Some schools and colleges have started to use it in the classroom, and local partnerships have been formed.

Employers have also benefited from increased engagement with schools. This improved engagement with employers has given schools and colleges insight into the skills and knowledge needed by the local workforce. This information can help schools and colleges to develop and refine their curricula to better prepare students for the job market.

As quoted by a director of a careers company, participants believed that the benchmarks as the "blueprint for career guidance" have resurrected the sector by putting careers back in the spotlight and establishing a shared definition of what constitutes good career guidance for young people. As a result of implementing the benchmarks, the sector is more vibrant and responsive to the needs of young people. The recognition and appreciation of this impact has led to a rise in the amount of research being conducted in the careers sector, which in turn positively influences policy.

During the discussions, interviewees said the effective implementation of the benchmarks in schools and colleges, with adequate resources, engagement with external stakeholders, and appropriate expertise, can have a positive, long-term impact on the lives of young people by raising their aspirations and providing them with a broader range of career options to pursue in the future. As quoted by a director of a careers company, the benchmarks have provided careers leaders with an "entry-level understanding of delivering careers guidance" and helped answer questions about how to target and prioritise careers provision for young people. A trainer of careers leader programmes highlighted how the they have established the role of careers leaders and moved the careers sector "out of the dark ages" by providing a tool to assess the careers provision that is being given to young people.

THE STRENGTHS OF THE FRAMEWORK/SPECIFIC BENCHMARKS

When discussing the strengths of the benchmarks, participants repeatedly mentioned the coherence of the framework and the clear language used, which help to make it a useful tool for schools and colleges to ensure every young person receives the best possible careers guidance.

The measurability and high aspiration of the framework were also considered strengths – setting a measurable standard for schools and colleges to follow, while encouraging them to make careers part of a whole school/college approach and part of each student's well sequenced and progressive learning journey. The benchmarks have encouraged schools and colleges to think more deeply about their approach and how they respond to the challenges of implementing each benchmark.

The applicability of the benchmarks was also highlighted. It is a national framework, but it allows flexibility in how the benchmarks are applied to the local context. Schools and colleges can tailor their approach to reflect the needs of their students and the local labour market, while still ensuring that they meet the minimum standards set out in the benchmarks. This local customisation can help to ensure that young people receive careers education, information, advice and guidance that is relevant and useful to their specific circumstances.

Some participants identified Benchmark 4 (linking curriculum learning to careers) as having been particularly impactful because it shifted the mindset of who delivers careers work and who is responsible for it, particularly in a school or college. As the nature of education changes, Benchmark 4 serves as a valuable resource by emphasising the ongoing significance of career guidance and providing consistency for educators.

> **I would say Benchmark 4 has been particularly impactful, because that is the only benchmark that needs [the] whole school's involvement … you've got everybody talking about it. You've got staff talking about it, post-16, post-18 pathways related to their subject. You've got them linking [the curriculum] to the career opportunities.**
>
> (Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

A point mentioned by several respondents was the benchmarks' focus on the careers journey – how the outcomes will be achieved – not just on the end point. The benchmarks require schools and colleges to think strategically about career guidance as an ongoing continuous improvement process.

> **I think we [schools] need to pave the way so that we can smooth those humps and bumps in the road for young people. And I think, the whole Gatsby Benchmarks streamlines the whole careers process … it [students' careers journeys] has to be something that you lay out in a strategic way. That you understand the journey the young person will go on, and you take them through that journey. And when they can fly, they can go and fly. And when you need to leave them, you can leave them.**

(Executive headteacher of a foundation school)

Many of the interviewees said the benchmarks provide a stable framework for developing careers programmes, but their effectiveness sometimes depends on schools and colleges having the resources and finances to implement them. Time constraints, limited resources, and high competition between schools for work experience opportunities were mentioned as some of the challenges that schools encounter when attempting to provide work experience for students. One of the participants mentioned the financial aspect in relation to specific benchmarks:

> **In terms of employer encounters [Benchmark 5] that's an external challenge, but we find that really easy to do, because of the opportunities we have. The challenge is the workplace experience [Benchmark 6], [be]cause of the limited opportunities, and the cost. And, if you want to go external and get your risk assessments etc, you're looking at about £30 per student, which some of our academies cannot afford.**

(Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

Benchmark 1 (a stable careers programme) was considered the most crucial – and sometimes the most challenging – of the benchmarks because it is the foundation of the framework. It is an essential part of the framework, so changing it could impact schools' ability to create effective careers programmes. Several respondents mentioned that Benchmark 1 had prompted them to provide a "clear strategy and vision" that young people in their schools and colleges "respond well to".

Benchmark 7 (encounters with further and higher education) was appreciated for being explicit about the range of qualifications available to students. This has ensured young people are aware of the full range of options available to them, and has been instrumental in promoting university access to young people. This has had a particularly positive impact on young people from backgrounds that are under-represented in higher education, who may not have considered university as a viable option before being given access to appropriate information and guidance. By promoting a more inclusive and diverse education system, Benchmark 7 has empowered all young people to raise their aspirations and reach their full potential.

It was widely stated that every benchmark was an effective tool for providing high-quality career guidance and support. So, it is necessary to maintain all the benchmarks and retain the current structure and its component parts. There was unanimous agreement among the participants that the benchmarks have had a positive impact on students, educators, and employers alike, and any significant changes had the potential to undermine this accomplishment.

Overall, the key strengths of the benchmarks highlighted by the interview participants are that they provide an evidence-based approach for schools and colleges to follow when developing their careers programmes. The framework provides stability, measurability and a terminology for the careers sector.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

VULNERABLE GROUPS

Several interview participants highlighted the importance of the benchmarks meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups here means students with SEND and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Meeting the needs of SEND students can be challenging and employers providing work experience for students do not always have staff with sufficient training to support SEND students. Employers must be supported so they can provide suitable work experience placements for SEND students, because these placements are as important as those for students who are not SEND:

> **Benchmark 3 (addressing the needs of each pupil), but also addressing the needs of vulnerable groups [is important]. It's moved further than addressing the needs now [since the benchmarks inception], it's that more detailed analysis of what's going on in your school [that needs to be refined for Benchmark 3]. We're data heavy, we're not doing enough with the data to identify groups and do something about it. There's definitely a gap in SEN [special educational needs] provision, in terms of careers. People [employers] say that they're doing it [SEN provision] but there's not many employers out there who actually can work with these [SEN] students.**

(Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

> **I'd say that from an employer perspective, there's a real nervousness around working with SEND pupils. I think that everyone [employers] has good intentions, but I feel like they [employers] need training or they need support to do that [support SEND pupils]. What we're trying to do is explain [to employers] that, you know, some of these young people [SEND pupils] need to see new faces [by having work experience with employers].**

(Strategic careers hub lead (a))

It was highlighted that Compass[9] does not currently pick up data on SEND students or special schools. It was suggested that Compass should be adapted to include data on SEND students:

> **There's such a wide variety of SEND institutions and some of our SEND institutions, those young people are never going to work. They have life-limiting illnesses, and I don't think Compass is able to pick up on that. So, sometimes schools can be put in a category or a light [on Compass] that isn't reflective [of the school] or genuine.**

(Strategic careers hub lead (a))

Refining Benchmark 3 (addressing the needs of each pupil) to encourage schools and colleges to consider more deeply the needs of vulnerable groups could benefit SEND students' experiences of the benchmarks. One of the participants suggested this would not only improve the benchmarks but also impact wider society "in terms of employment":

> **If there was something in the benchmarks that pointed at inclusion [of SEND students] … And if it wasn't just experiences of workplaces, but also experiences with other people who are of a different socio-economic [background] or [who have a] disability. I think something around inclusion would be really beneficial, because that sets us up to be a more inclusive society in the future, which automatically would lend itself to having impact in terms of employment.**

(Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school)

The benchmarks have a greater impact on students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, but it is often challenging to achieve the benchmarks for these students because of the wide range of needs, limited financial resources and lack of specialised expertise.

Schools and colleges with higher proportions of disadvantaged students can struggle to achieve Benchmark 6 (experiences of workplaces). disadvantaged students can face a range of barriers to accessing work experience opportunities. For example, if they come from families with limited social networks, it can be more difficult for them to find work placements or gain exposure to different careers. They may also face financial constraints, such as the cost of transportation to and from work placements or the need to earn income to support themselves or their families.

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[9] *Compass* is the careers benchmark tool for schools and colleges that helps users evaluate their practice against the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Parents with contacts in relevant industries or organisations may be able to give their children an advantage when it comes to securing high-quality work experience opportunities. Advantages can include better access to job openings, being given personal recommendations or referrals, or being supported through the application and placement process. This creates a disadvantage for students whose parents do not have these contacts or who are less familiar with the process of securing work experience opportunities. These students may miss out on the chance to gain valuable skills and experiences that can be critical for future career success. As a result, despite the challenges of Benchmark 6, participants agreed that this benchmark is an important and effective part of the framework. They suggested that focusing on schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged students could help inform Gatsby of any enhancements they might need to make.

EMPLOYERS AND COLLEGES

Several participants discussed the role of employers and colleges. While significant progress has been made in engaging employers in work experience programmes, there is still room for improvement. More work needs to be done to improve employers' awareness and understanding of the benchmarks and of the role they can play in supporting young people. Employers are a key part of Benchmark 6 (experiences of workplaces), but they may not always be clear about their responsibilities and how they can provide meaningful work experience opportunities for students. Some employers may be hesitant to engage with schools and colleges because they are not aware of the benefits of doing so, they may have concerns about liability or safety issues, or have a lack of time or resources to dedicate to the programme. To address these challenges, it was suggested that the aspirations of employers, schools and colleges for the benchmarks needed to be more closely aligned:

> **I don't think that they [the benchmarks] have been quite so impactful for employers …
> We do try and make sure that whatever that is [the impact], it is aligned to the benchmarks.
> I think for employers, what we've really had to work on, and continue to work on, is that
> they're [schools and colleges] having strategic conversations [with employers].**

(Strategic careers hub lead (b))

Therefore, although employers and work experience play a significant role in the benchmark framework, for these aspects to be effective, their importance needs to be better established and communicated. In doing this, employers will understand the role they play in the benchmarks (specifically Benchmark 6: experiences of workplaces) and students will be able to gain the most they can from their work experience and wider employer engagement activities.

Employers did not think students were work ready or had relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills for the working environment. It was suggested this could be tackled by schools and colleges working with students on their attitudes to work experience before they start their placements – educating students about what they can gain by taking part, such as transferable skills:

> **Employers are still saying that young people do not have the appropriate [skills]. They're not work ready, essentially, is what employers are saying. And that [research] project that I just did [about the appropriateness of young peoples' knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the workplace], that was the evidence that was coming through from the research [that young people do not have the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the workplace].**

> (Director of a careers company)

Colleges have experienced some difficulty implementing the benchmarks, often because of the size of colleges and the broad provision they offer. A benchmark framework was specifically designed for colleges, but it was understood at that time that colleges were already successfully delivering career guidance. The requirements of the benchmarks have created challenges. Given the number of students attending a college, this is particularly true for those aspects that ask for universal application, such as Benchmark 8 (personal guidance) which requires that every learner has the opportunity for guidance interviews. However, colleges have strengths in other areas, particularly integrating careers in curriculum areas. These strengths and the challenges were highlighted by participants:

> **What they're [colleges] strong at, is careers in the curriculum […] And that's great, and schools could learn a lot from that as well.**

> (Chief executive of a careers company (a))

> **The sort of breadth and depth of what they [colleges] do around careers education, they already are quite sophisticated around this. But certainly, when we've had conversations with those [college] careers leaders and worked with them, it [the benchmarks] doesn't always seem to get the traction as quickly as it does with schools**

> (Strategic careers hub lead (b))

For the benchmark framework designed for colleges to be adopted, it was suggested that creating a forum just for colleges would enable them to collaborate, ask questions and better consider how they could implement the framework into their existing provision. Having stronger policy that encouraged the use of benchmarks in colleges would boost the likelihood of them using the framework, however, this is arguably outside the control of the benchmarks.

Another suggestion to encourage colleges to adopt the benchmarks was to align the terminology used in the benchmarks with what colleges are trying to achieve with their existing career guidance and provision. Participants suggested it would be useful for Gatsby and colleges to establish a shared terminology for, and understanding of, the benchmarks, so they could work together to successfully deliver the benchmarks. Examples given included clarifying the qualifications careers advisers providing personal guidance needed to have, and aligning the terminology used in the benchmarks with that used in the government career guidance policy:

> **[Gatsby] have to acknowledge how challenging it is for large multi-campus FE colleges, for example, to deliver on the sort of blanket second interview [Benchmark 8: personal guidance]. We quite often get asked what is meant from Gatsby, in terms of the person who should deliver the personal guidance. Do you use the word "appropriately trained"? [Interviewer confirms this word is used in the benchmarks]. We talk about "qualified" in the statutory guidance, and maybe we could align [a] bit more clearly on that, so we're all on the same page'.**
>
> (Governmental team leader in careers guidance)

Ultimately, colleges expressed an interest in the benchmarks, despite needing clarification on how the framework can fit into their existing career guidance provision. As explained by a participant below, colleges need more targeted support in order to adopt the benchmarks:

> **It's not that they [colleges] are, you know, disinterested [in the benchmarks]. I think it is that they feel like they need more sort of signposting or narrative around that [the benchmarks].**
>
> (Strategic careers hub lead (a))

IMPLEMENTATION

Benchmark 3 (addressing the needs of each student) and Benchmark 8 (personal guidance) were highlighted as being the most challenging to implement. Benchmark 3 requires that schools and colleges collect and maintain accurate data about each student's education, training or employment destinations for at least three years after they leave school or college. This data should then be used to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the school or college's careers provision, and to identify areas for development and continuous improvement. Participants from schools and colleges mentioned challenges with tracking students' education, training or employment destinations after they leave. Collecting and maintaining destination data can be time consuming and resource intensive, particularly for schools and colleges with limited staff and funding. They mentioned the challenge of tracking students who move or change their contact information after leaving, making it difficult to maintain accurate and up-to-date destination data. In addition, some of the career destinations, such as self-employment, entrepreneurship, creative or artistic pursuits, or volunteering and community services, can be difficult to track or categorise, making it challenging to accurately represent some students' career destinations.

Several participants explained that lack of resources makes it challenging to implement Benchmark 8 (personal guidance). Providing guidance interviews to every student requires significant resources, including funding for careers advisers and the necessary training, materials and equipment to deliver effective guidance. In many schools and colleges, the ratio of students to careers advisers is high, which can make it difficult to provide personalised guidance and support to every student. Coordinating personal guidance interviews can also be challenging, particularly when students have busy schedules or when there is limited availability of careers advisers.

> **Benchmark 8, we know there's an issue with resources. I think that's really hard for schools, because they feel like they are letting down the students, because it [Benchmark 8] is such as pivotal part [of the framework].**

(Strategic careers hub lead (a))

> **[The challenge with] Benchmark 8, is the cost and implication of that [benchmark] as well, of actually having [career] guidance practitioners coming in. Some people say, well, I don't have the budget for it.**

(Trainer of careers leader programmes)

Despite these challenges, some experiences of implementing Benchmark 8 (personal guidance) suggest that, although challenging, with the right resources (such as "a suitable careers adviser"), the benchmark can be effective and an important part of successful careers provision in schools and colleges.

> **We were on zero for that [when we started using the benchmarks], and we're now at 87% on that as well. Last year, we were on 57%. So, we are making strides around that. But it took us ages to find a suitable careers adviser, that's the problem. So, we just had nothing [a suitable careers adviser] for a number of years, because there wasn't anyone available.**

(Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school)

The mention of a "suitable careers adviser" could refer to an adviser with expertise in supporting young people with SEND, or it could refer to an adviser with general expertise in careers education and guidance. Regardless, it is clear that having access to a skilled careers adviser and suitable resources can be an important factor in the successful implementation of Benchmark 8 (personal guidance) and can contribute to the overall success of schools and colleges in supporting young people with SEND in their career aspirations. By further investigating the challenges involved in implementing Benchmark 8, we can help schools and colleges take a proactive approach to addressing these challenges and ensure that every student has access to personalised guidance and support to achieve their career goals

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19

According to the 2023 report published by CEC, some schools and colleges have managed to bounce back from the adverse effects the pandemic had on career guidance. However, some of the interview participants said they had struggled to get back to pre-Covid levels of work experience. Some participants had seen a reduction in the number of students in work experience placements, suggesting that a number of young people are missing out on Benchmark 6 (experiences of workplaces). The pandemic changed working practices for many employers, which has meant competition for opportunities with employers has increased, with students across England needing placements, often at similar times of the year. Despite these challenges, there was a consensus among participants that work experience is an important element of the benchmarks:

> **That element of a work experience opportunity is going to be incredibly difficult [post-Covid]. You know, pre-Covid, we'd have 180 children out on work experience in a week. You know, that's fine, we could do that. I'm down to 130 placements now. You know, we're having to reconsider and try and redefine what that [work experience] would look like. Because I, again, think that is a really, really important exposure [for students].**
>
> (Executive headteacher of a foundation school)

There has been an increase in hybrid working in the workplace and labour market, which has made it more challenging to implement Benchmark 6 (experiences of workplaces). Strategies that interviewees suggested to address these changes included the benchmarks recognising that the world of world is increasingly becoming more digital and incorporating a focus on preparing young people for this. Experiences of workplaces should not be removed from the framework, but they should be adapted to include hybrid working. A careers leader described the post-Covid landscape of providing experiences in the workplace as challenging, however they have implemented alternative options, such as inviting employers into their MAT and having 'insight days':

> **Because of [the] post-Covid [landscape, and] the limited offers [of work experience placements] … We've got to think differently about experiences of workplaces. We've got our college at the moment who are 100% across every benchmark, and they're sort of leading on best practice. But they're doing their work experience now where they've linked every subject to an employer, and the employers are coming in and delivering a full week of workshops related to their subject. So, yes, they're not getting out into the actual [working] environment, but the employees [of the employers] are coming into the school. And they're [the students] getting a really valuable and insightful day. So, it's probably not the perfect offer, but it's an offer where a child is engaged in it [work experience] … It's one of my priorities to look at different ways [of delivering work experience], hybrid methods of delivery, careers safaris, insight days.**

(Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

Since Covid-19, schools and colleges have experienced employers expressing concern about costs and the safeguarding of students. For example, employers have explained to schools and colleges that paying for external organisations to conduct risk assessments can be expensive and have highlighted the potential health and safety risks of students in the workplace. However, the benchmark framework does not cause these challenges, but these extrinsic challenges make it difficult to implement Benchmark 6 successfully.

Overall, the consensus of the interviewees is that Covid-19 had a negative impact on their ability to implement Benchmark 6 (experiences of workplaces). However, this could be solved by adapting and refining the framework to recognise how workplaces have changed since Covid-19.

SUGGESTED REVISIONS

CAREERS GUIDANCE PROVIDER

A key topic of discussion during the interviews was about who is responsible for implementing the benchmarks. There was consensus that the benchmarks established the role of careers leaders and that they work to provide effective career guidance to young people. This role has become highly valued in schools and colleges. It was suggested that careers leaders valued being able to access specialist training to provide them with the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out their role to the highest standard. For careers leaders to be able to deliver high-quality guidance, they also need more time. It was also suggested across the interviews that round tables or other networking activities should be organised to give careers leaders the opportunity to collaborate. This could be useful for careers leaders who find their role isolating. One interviewee explained that they reach out to career guidance staff in external organisations to create a supportive network of careers professionals. Also, one of the strategic leads of a careers hub explained that they have days when careers leaders can visit to complete Compass in a supportive environment with enterprise coordinators:

> **We offer a day for careers leaders to come in with our enterprise coordinators and complete the Compass in an environment where they have support. For some of our newer careers leads, they'll come along, go through the Compass, then go back to their SLT [senior leadership team] and say this is what I've done, this is where I think where at, I'd like your perspective on it.**

(Strategic careers hub lead (a))

Overall, the benchmarks requirement for schools and colleges to have a dedicated careers leader had been positive for the careers leaders' own careers, as well as for the young people they support. However, more training and collaborative support in this sometimes isolating role would improve their role even further.

One of the participants explained that subject teachers do not see it as their responsibility to teach career guidance to students. They said providing them with appropriate training would help this to change:

> **If I was an English teacher in my school, do I think I have any responsibility for careers? Probably not … If a [subject] teacher even understood post-16 pathways, which is a sort of fundamental [to career guidance], you're just triaging the [careers] support [that careers leaders will follow up on]. You've got 200 people in the school, who understands that [career guidance], rather than 1 or 2 [careers leaders] … [Speaking as a school] If I'm going to dedicate an hour or half an hour to training every year … I'm [subject teachers] going to have proper curriculum time used for it [career guidance].**

(Chief executive of a careers company (a))

Continuing professional development (CPD) for subject teachers on career guidance can be an effective way to help them develop the skills and knowledge necessary to incorporate effective career guidance in their teaching practice. Training sessions or workshops on career guidance can provide subject teachers with up-to-date information on career trends, job market demands and the skills and qualifications required for different careers. This can help teachers provide students with accurate and relevant information about different career paths and how they should prepare for them. By improving the knowledge of subject teachers in this area, students can benefit from a more comprehensive and integrated approach to career guidance.

Several participants suggested that parents and carers should be more involved in the implementation of the benchmarks, suggesting they could have significant impact on what students gain from the benchmarks. This suggests that the benchmarks should be refined to encourage schools and colleges to educate parents on career guidance and provision, thus encouraging parents and carers to participate in students' careers journey. An accessible way of achieving this is to develop digital resources for parents to use. However, the danger of depersonalising parents' experiences should be considered. Although digital resources have proven benefits, they could take away the traditional face-to-face personal interactions and conversations that teachers have with parents. This can impact on the rapport schools and colleges build with parents, which are important relationships for schools and colleges to have for the benefit of students.

LANGUAGE AND INCLUSION

The interviewees suggested the language of the benchmarks should be more specific, to establish what 'vulnerable groups' are (including SEND). They should also potentially clarify what 'inclusion' means, what 'meaningful' means, and what the expectations are for careers staff. So, the benchmarks should continue to establish their place in the "broader ecosystem" (the wider community of career guidance) but be clearer about the scope of the benchmarks:

> **The strength of it [the benchmarks] is clarity and its stability. And it's about a common language and it's internationally recognised. In many ways, it's kind of like, keep doing what you're doing [with the benchmarks] [be]cause it works. But do it in a sense where it's clear to everybody about what they are and what they're not. What they do, what they don't do, the scope of the benchmarks and the limitations of the benchmarks. I think if that was clear, as well as this linking into the broader ecosystem, then I think we'd have a truly excellent system [of career guidance and provision].**

(Director of a careers company)

Participants emphasised that the framework of the benchmarks should stay the same, but said Gatsby should consider how the language will be understood for each sector or group of people. For example, how the benchmarks can be applied to career guidance for profound and multiple learning difficulties (PLMD) students and schools, colleges, or independent training providers (ITPs). The interviews also suggested revising Benchmark 4 (linking curriculum learning to careers) to be more inclusive. Several participants suggested the link between curriculum and careers should include all subject areas, not just focus on STEM.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance of the benchmarks was discussed during the interviews. It was suggested that schools and colleges implementing the benchmarks should be encouraged to carefully consider their approach to quality assurance. This could involve collaborating with quality assurance organisations to ensure that there is a shared understanding or a validation of the level of quality. Quality assurance reviews of schools and colleges could be conducted by peers, experts or internal and/or external bodies, to make sure that they are achieving the benchmarks to a high standard.

One of the participants suggested that Gatsby's review of the benchmarks needed to consider "the wider ecosystem", which is the wider community of career guidance, when making revisions. They also wanted Gatsby to explore aligning the benchmarks more closely with other standards guidance, including the CDI Career Development Framework and the Quality in Careers Standard. Such alignment would contribute to a more holistic approach to the delivery and career guidance.

The other part of that ecosystem is about the quality, and that external validation, and I think that's really important … there's this new careers impact review that's coming onboard, and there's a need to make sure that, you know, we've got peer and expert review [to ensure quality in the benchmarks] … it's about utilising existing ecosystems that are tried and tested, and using that as part of the [quality assurance] process.

(Director of a careers company)

So overall, the participants made suggestions for some revisions to the benchmarks, including who implements the benchmarks, the refinement of the language of the benchmarks and the quality of delivery.

CONCLUSION

The interviews found that the benchmarks are transformative, accessible, creative, and impactful. They provide a clear and easily understood set of requirements and a shared terminology for schools and colleges to use in their career guidance programmes. As education evolves, the benchmarks offer a consistent approach that can adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring that students receive the best possible guidance in their career journeys.

Although the participants faced some challenges in implementing aspects of the benchmarks, their determination to overcome those challenges means they have made significant progress and achieved many positive outcomes. Their approaches have included adjusting their interpretation of the benchmarks and sometimes adapting them to fulfil the needs of vulnerable students, particularly those who are SEND and from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The role employers play in the benchmarks, and their relationships with schools and colleges, were highlighted as areas that need more work to establish a shared understanding of how employers can engage with education.

Interviewees particularly mentioned Benchmark 3 (addressing the needs of each pupil) and Benchmark 8 (personal guidance) as being challenging to implement. The Covid-19 pandemic was raised as another challenge, but also as something that had both positive and negative effects on the implementation of the framework. Interviewees shared a common belief that the challenges were not insurmountable and welcomed a meticulous and thoughtful approach to making any revisions and refinements to the framework of the benchmarks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The consensus was that any changes made to the framework needed to be carefully considered to ensure they do not affect the existing quality which has been successful in providing significant improvements to the career guidance provided for young people in England for nearly yen years. Overall, the participants believed that with careful and thoughtful implementation, the framework could continue to adapt to the changing needs of young people and provide them with the best possible guidance for their career journeys.

Below is a synthesis of the recommendations made during the informational interviews:

- Include specific consideration of the needs of SEND and disadvantaged pupils. The review needs to work out how these needs can be integrated more purposefully into the whole framework. This should also apply to pupils in home education and PRUs who have been left out of the mainstream career guidance programmes. Tailored guidance and additional support specifically designed to cater to the needs of these groups can ensure they have opportunities to successfully navigate their career paths, which will lead to a more diverse and inclusive workforce. This change is particularly important in relation to employers and work experience. Employers can be encouraged to provide a variety of work experience opportunities to accommodate various skill levels and interests. Schools and colleges should also establish partnerships with employers who are committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace and who can provide individualised opportunities for marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

- For the Gatsby framework to better address the changing world of work and for appropriate guidance to be given in a timely manner, it was recommended including specific elements focused on emerging trends and changes in the labour market as part of the guidance. A number of areas of focus were suggested, including hybrid working and digital skills, self-employment and entrepreneurship, and sustainability. There was also thought to be some merit in exploring how young people could be better prepared for work experience with the aim of maximising the benefits of the experience.

- Parents and carers have already benefited from the benchmark requirement for parents and carers to be informed about their child's careers programme. But participants recommended motivating them to take a more active role in the benchmark implementation by emphasising the importance of their involvement. The better informed parents and caregivers are about the career guidance available to their children, the better equipped they will be to advocate for their children's needs and interests. As a result, they can ensure their child receives the support and resources necessary to achieve their career goals. This enhanced involvement will also help them better understand the relevance of specific courses and extracurricular activities to their child's career goals, enabling them to make informed decisions and provide valuable support.

- Ensure the benchmarks are connected to the wider national careers ecosystem to establish a more effective and comprehensive career guidance and support structure in England. The Gatsby Benchmarks, The CDI Career Development Framework, and the Quality in Careers Standard are all important components of a comprehensive career development system. Each of these frameworks has a unique focus and purpose, but they can be effectively linked to create a robust and holistic approach to career guidance and development. Strong partnerships between the government, educational institutions, employers, industry associations and other stakeholders can establish a network of support and a more effective and comprehensive career guidance structure for school and colleges.

- Consider how the benchmarks can more closely align schools/colleges and employer needs. For there to be successful outcomes from implementing the benchmarks, various stakeholders must contribute unique roles and responsibilities. Clear understanding of these roles can support collaboration and enhance the effectiveness of the process.

- Address the challenges schools and colleges experience when trying to access destination tracking data. This will ensure that institutions can effectively monitor and evaluate their programmes and student outcomes. Developing a standardised framework for collecting, reporting and analysing destination tracking data across schools and colleges could help ensure consistency in data collection, making it easier to compare and analyse outcomes across different institutions. Collaboration with other stakeholders in tracking destination data, a centralised data repository, capacity building and data protection are some of the areas that need to be considered.

- Various challenges were identified in the implementation and delivery of Benchmark 8 (personal guidance). Interviewees recommended a comprehensive examination was needed to understand how they can be addressed so that institutions can move beyond the simplistic check box approach many currently have to take to Benchmark 8 (personal guidance). Many schools and colleges have limited budgets and staff, which can make it difficult to provide personalised career guidance to every student. Providing effective personal guidance requires well-trained and qualified career advisers. Ensuring that staff members have these skills and knowledge can be challenging, particularly when there are numerous competing priorities and limited resources. Demanding curriculums also make finding adequate time for one-on-one personal guidance sessions difficult. The recommended comprehensive review will provide deeper insight into the difficulties faced by educational institutions, and will highlight any strategies and solutions implemented by schools and colleges to overcome them.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

Introduction: explain context of the work, purpose of interview, confirm verbal consent and explain how the data will be used. (Interviewer: check name and role)

1. Please share your experience/knowledge of the Gatsby Benchmarks and where you interact with/use them.

2. How do you feel the benchmarks have contributed to improving careers provision for young people?

3. How would you describe the impact of the benchmarks since their introduction?
   What have been the impacts for a) young people? b) careers leaders?
   c) school/college leaders d) employers? e) any other groups?

4. What is your experience of using the Gatsby Benchmarks (if appropriate)?

   a. How long have you used the benchmarks?

   b. Are there any benchmarks which are easier to implement than others and why?

   c. Are there benchmarks which are more of a challenge?
      Please provide examples and any strategies you have adopted to address this?

5. What do you perceive as the strengths of the benchmarks as a whole framework?

6. Which of the benchmarks (or sub-criteria of particular benchmarks) do you feel are specifically impactful and why?

7. Are there any revisions you feel might ensure the benchmarks continue to have impact over the next 10 years? (Prompts below)

   a. Which, if any, benchmarks or sub-benchmarks might benefit from refinement i.e., removal, rephrasing etc. (Collect all examples). Why?

   b. Is there anything you would add to the benchmarks or sub-benchmarks? Why?

   c. Is there anything that needs reinforcing/clarifying within the benchmarks.

   d. To ensure continued impact of the benchmarks, is there anything that you think must absolutely **not** be changed? (Interviewer to note the benchmark number or themes of benchmarks – to try to capture what people value the most)

APPENDIX B:
SELECTED QUOTES

STRENGTHS AND IMPACT

I was following the research with interest in that period … it provided a great amount of hope, great amount of evidence-based research about the impact of good career guidance and also a blueprint essentially helping schools to structure what good career guidance looks like.

(Director of a careers company)

If you [had] just spoken to staff three years ago about positive destinations a lot would not know what you are talking about. The whole vocabulary around careers is becoming more prominent and transparent, which is fantastic but [there's] still a long way to go with that in terms of staff understanding and getting [to] grips with it and actually having an impact on teaching and learning as well.

(Strategic careers hub lead (b))

… when we do our end of year 11 survey, we find out that their opinion of their 5-year journey is getting increasingly more positive. Now they understand the different pathways, they understand different sectors … And again, it is not like, for example 2017, we didn't have these opportunities in school. We were still sort of [the] blind leading the blind, which was like when we were in school.

(Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

It is simple and well written and helps you get up to speed very quickly. If I have been made the head of year seven tomorrow with no experience, there would be no handbook but if I have been made the head of careers, there is a quite good guideline (the benchmarks), and you can make quick wins out of it. You look at your career programme and say ok, I can achieve Benchmark 1 and 2 very quickly, or do something about Benchmark 7… It is very school-friendly.

(Chief executive of a careers company (a))

I would say Benchmark 4 has been particularly impactful, because that is the only benchmark that needs [the] whole school's involvement … you've got everybody talking about it. You've got staff talking about it, post-16, post-18 pathways related to their subject. You've got them linking [the curriculum] to the career opportunities.

(Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

I think we [schools] need to pave the way so that we can smooth those humps and bumps in the road for young people. And I think, the whole Gatsby Benchmarks streamlines the whole careers process … it [students' careers journeys] has to be something that you lay out in a strategic way. That you understand the journey the young person will go on, and you take them through that journey. And when they can fly, they can go and fly. And when you need to leave them, you can leave them.

(Executive headteacher of a foundation school)

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If there was something in the benchmarks that pointed at inclusion [of SEND students] … And if it wasn't just experiences of workplaces, but also experiences with other people who are of a different socio-economic [background] or [who have a] disability. I think something around inclusion would be really beneficial, because that sets us up to be a more inclusive society in the future, which automatically would lend itself to having impact in terms of employment.

(Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school)

With Benchmark 2 (learning from career and labour market information), our school is good at knowing what the career and labour market is at the time, such as what employers need from employees. However, employers do not know or learn the nature of schools and young peoples' skills at the time, which is important for employers to do.

(Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school)

Benchmark 3 [addressing the needs of each pupil], I would say around that whole tracking piece, [schools have struggled with] destinations data. If there was one thing troubling me at the moment, it's the whole Benchmark 3 piece. Because schools, you know, one year is difficult enough, three years is just extremely challenging. The way that the schools receive data round that, or collect it, it's very fragmented. And it just feels like we could really do with having a sort of, national approach to how this could work.

(Strategic careers hub lead (b))

Benchmark 3 (addressing the needs of each pupil), but also addressing the needs of vulnerable groups [is important]. It's moved further than addressing the needs now [since the benchmarks inception], it's that more detailed analysis of what's going on in your school [that needs to be refined for Benchmark 3]. We're data heavy, we're not doing enough with the data to identify groups and do something about it. There's definitely a gap in SEN provision, in terms of careers. People [employers] say that they're doing it [SEN provision] but there's not many employers out there who actually can work with these [SEN] students.

(Director of careers in a multi-academy trust (MAT))

I'd say that from an employer perspective, there's a real nervousness around working with SEND pupils. I think that everyone [employers] has good intentions, but I feel like they [employers] need training or they need support to do that [support SEND pupils]. What we're trying to do is explain [to employers] that, you know, some of these young people [SEND pupils] need to see new faces [by having work experience with employers].

(Strategic careers hub lead (a))

I think they're quite open anyway, so that's quite good in that respect because it lends itself well to, you know, lots of different establishments, it's not too prescriptive. But potentially if you wanted to refine, just going down the route of sustainability, looking at models of sustainability, and what that would look like. You know, it could be alumni, couldn't it? Simple as that.

(Principal of a secondary and sixth form special school)

**I don't think that they [the benchmarks] have been quite so impactful for employers …
We do try and make sure that whatever that is [the impact], it is aligned to the
benchmarks. I think for employers, what we've really had to work on and continue
to work on is that they're [schools and colleges] having strategic conversations
[with employers].**

(Strategic careers hub lead (b))

**Employers are still saying that young people do not have the appropriate [skills].
They're not work ready, essentially, is what employers are saying. And that [research]
project that I just did [about the appropriateness of young peoples' knowledge, attitudes,
and skills in the workplace], that was the evidence that was coming through from the
research [that young people do not have the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and
skills in the workplace].**

(Director of a careers company)