

School Careers Education:

How to reset and strengthen
your provision post-pandemic





Introduction

Delivering an effective careers programme to students is an increasingly difficult task for schools.

Disruption wrought by the pandemic has compounded the challenge of helping students make the right decisions at a time when the range of study and career paths has increased, while limited money and time available to support careers programmes has been restricted.

Although we know what an effective class careers programme looks like, **only 39%** of schools meet at least two of the Gatsby benchmarks and **only 2%** of schools meet five to eight.

This can only have a detrimental effect on the career and study choices that individual students make.

Pressure for schools to change is on the horizon.

New national guidance will soon compel every school to start careers provision earlier and ensure there is high quality guidance for non-university pathways. At the same time, both students and parents will expect the post-pandemic recovery to extend to meaningful careers advice.

Now is the time for every school to consider how it can reset and strengthen its careers education.

We've written this guide to help schools and colleges understand the pressure points that get in the way of delivering the Gatsby benchmarks and how to overcome them.

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Careers programmes aren't helping students link study and careers



7% of students in years 8-9 learn about apprenticeships compared with 26% in year 13.

Similarly, 2% in years 8-9 visit a university versus 42% of year 13's.^[1]

State secondary schools tend to focus the bulk of career education activity on older year groups, reasoning they have a more urgent need for it than students in lower years.

Focusing support in the run up to exam years, when students are preoccupied with studying for and passing their exams doesn't allow sufficient time and headspace for students to fully explore their options. Evidence shows that starting earlier results in the student making better informed decisions.^[5]

The need isn't simply to start earlier but to help the student make explicit links between the career areas they are interested in, and the subjects they need to study at exam level to keep specific career pathways open.

A study by UCAS found that one in five university students were blocked from studying a degree subject that interested them because they didn't receive good advice from their school on which A-levels and GCSEs to pick.^[2]

By contrast those students that started to think about their university choices before choosing GCSE's, were least likely to regret their decisions. Schools will soon be compelled to start careers provision from Year 7. This move is supported by clear evidence from the OECD that students achieve better outcomes when career guidance starts early and where learning builds year-on-year through a structured programme that takes into account key transition points.^[3]



Start at Year 7 and create a new roadmap to support career-planning before they make exam choices.

At Marlborough College we teach students aged 13-18. We start thinking about university choices early, in year 9. We support students in identifying career areas that best fit their interests and strengths and from there work out the implications for subject choices.

This helps them to identify the best subjects to study at GCSE and 'A' level in order to keep as many doors open as possible.

What we want to avoid is a situation where a student finds they have missed the boat to get onto a specific degree course because they don't have 'A' levels in required subjects.

Guy Nobes, Head of Department, Guidance, Marlborough College



MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE



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The careers landscape has changed but our advice has not



46% of 17-18 year olds receive a large amount of information on university routes.

Only **10%** say the same for apprenticeships.^[1]

The growth of high quality apprenticeships in recent years along with changes to post-16 technical and vocational learning routes means that students can consider a wider range of options as they finish Year 12.

However, it's not only the case that many apprenticeships remain unfilled – a missed opportunity for both students and employers – but these new pathways are not as well understood as they could be by students and their parents.^[4]

New government guidance will compel schools to put greater emphasis on informing students about technical and vocational paths.^[3]

This presents a challenge for schools. Unlike degrees which have a centralised and uniform application process that is well understood, the application process for apprenticeships has been described by careers advisors as “the wild west”. Schools cannot be expected to know everything about these new and emerging opportunities.



Establish strong external networks and equip students to engage effectively with them

Our students will apply for jobs that don't exist today and we need to keep alive to new and emerging opportunities.

The school can't possibly keep abreast of all these opportunities. Instead, a key part of my role is to build powerful networks with our alumni and local employers.

Together these provide students with a rich source of up to date, inside knowledge, and open doors to work experience and employment opportunities.

From Year 11, we use assessment tools followed up with a one to one interview to help each student identify their strengths and interests and, critically, how these match to career areas and study pathways. This equips our students to engage with our rich careers programme in a focused way.

David Egglestone, Deputy Head,
Wakefield Girls' High School



**Wakefield Girls'
High School**



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Our careers programme isn't embedded across the school



88% of state school teachers say teacher training hasn't prepared them to deliver careers information and guidance to students.^[1]

Research shows that schools which embed career guidance into every aspect of school life achieve better outcomes for their students. That requires a whole school plan to build career education systematically across year groups and to weave implementation across class lessons.^[5]

To work, a whole school approach has to be visibly and noisily championed by the head and SLT otherwise it'll become another task that competes with teaching time.

Ideally the plan will be devised by a qualified careers advisor and owned by a member of the SLT who is held accountable for its effectiveness.

It should be reviewed on a termly basis and progress communicated to governors, parents and staff. Bear in mind that teaching staff often feel unqualified to teach careers education in lessons or provide guidance. Consider what training you need to give them and identify where you need to bring in external support from qualified careers advisors.



Adopt a whole-school approach

If you have the in-house resource and expertise, work backwards from each transition point to identify the insight, skills and experience a student will need to make an informed choice at critical junctures. Use this information to create a plan that systematically builds career-readiness year-on-year. Alternatively investigate options to buy-in a whole-school programme.

We buy in a careers programme because it formalises our approach to careers guidance and provides us with a rigorous approach across the whole school. It gives us a structure to build our career events around and focus opportunities across our external network of universities, employers and LEP.

It helps me to communicate our approach to colleagues and parents. They get a clear picture of how the programme builds career readiness from one year to the next.

Paul Meadway, Head of Careers, Hymers College



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We expect students to do all the work without necessarily giving them the tools they need



85% of year 7, 39% of year 9 and 23% of year 11 receive careers support once a year or not at all.[6]

Young people say they want career guidance but are struggling to find it.

Over the past ten year careers counselling has become more important for students, while careers funding and time is shrinking.

As a result, for most schools the careers support that students need and which reflects the changing external environment is not what is in place, with students left to do the hard running without the tools or insight to do a good job.

Many career programmes assume students have the skills and understanding to engage with career

activities. They don't. There's a similar unspoken assumption that parents will step in and fulfil the role of career counsellor despite saying they feel ill equipped to guide their child's career choices.

Before a student can engage in a meaningful way with career activities they need to have a clear understanding of their strengths and career interests. Research shows we make the best study and career choices based on this insight. Without it, parents, peers, and other influences can sway students away from choices best aligned to their interests and strengths.



Build a child-centric programme on a foundation of personalised feedback

Our view is that no student should miss the opportunity to train, study or work in a field they excel in. Our job is to work with them to find out what that might be.

We use an assessment tool that provides personalised feedback to help students understand their own interests and abilities and, critically, how these relate

to specific career areas and study pathways. Putting this self-analysis at the heart of decision-making is very powerful because the students feel they are driving the decisions, knowing that what is being suggested is based on what is unique about them.

Paul Meadway, Head of Careers, Hymers College



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We don't provide the one to one support students need



Despite 43% of students ranking one to one career guidance interviews as the most important career activity, few schools mandate this support for every child or ensure it is delivered by a qualified careers adviser.[6]

Done properly, one to one interviews require schools to set aside a significant chunk of time. This should be seen as an investment not a challenge, because it empowers each student to apply their learning from the full range of career guidance activities to themselves. Without it a school cannot drive value from their investment in careers education.

During the counselling interviewed students make sense of the careers activities they have experienced and reflect on what this means for their career plans. This requires a qualified career adviser to lead the young person to a deeper understanding of themselves, engage with their aspirations, skilfully support them to make a realistic assessment of their options and create an actionable career development plan. All the while navigating the teenage brain, peer pressure and 'noise' from well-meaning family members.[7]



Build guidance into your programme by design

Provide each child with one to one guidance as default rather than inviting parents to purchase as an optional extra.

One to one guidance interviews are the bedrock of an effective careers programme. Outsource this service if you don't have a sufficient number of in-house, professionally qualified careers advisors to deliver one to one interviews at key decision points. The CDI website has an up to date list of advisers by location.

Make your investment go further by training staff to supplement support from qualified careers advisors. They can respond to questions as they arise on a day to day basis. A reputable careers programme provider will deliver this training free of charge.



Sasha Wellings,
Career Development
and Education Consultant

Most parents I speak with are happy to make a donation to the school specifically to support the provision of one to one guidance interviews.



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The students who can benefit most from careers advice typically don't get what they need



36% of UK students had not taken part in any careers related activities. That figure is higher for state schools (**38%**) than private (**23%**).^[1]

A national study of 13,000 year 11 students at 296 state schools concludes, “Careers education is currently patterned in ways that work to promote inequalities relating to gender, ethnicity and social class”.^[8]

That's a far cry from our desire as educators to do a better job for those most in need of career advice but least likely to get it.

From an equality and inclusion perspective our most disadvantaged students are being let down by the careers guidance they receive.

The picture is even bleaker for children with SEN or a disability in mainstream schools where career development lacks prominence.



Rethink how careers education can help drive your equity, inclusion and SEN agenda

Review your career guidance policy. Does it effectively support our most marginalised pupils as well as promote equity across gender, ethnic and socio-economic groups?

students? Do we have links to employers that can support SEN in the workplace? Are there opportunities to link up with SEN schools that offer a strong programme of careers education and work experience?

Do we understand how a child's SEN profile or disability impacts their ability to engage with our current offer? What do we need to do differently for these



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“Covid-keepers” have become core to careers programmes



75% of state and **59%** of private school teachers think the pandemic has negatively impacted their school’s ability to deliver careers education.^[1]

The pandemic is gifting a mixed legacy. Drift has occurred as schools prioritise curriculum recovery and teacher assessments. Students have missed out on in person events and workplace experience.

At the same time the pivot to online careers events means students have the potential to access a wider range of employers, work experience and professional bodies. A change that schools welcome and wish to keep.^[9]

Yet few schools have taken the opportunity to review whether their programme can deliver an effective hybrid mix.



Review whether your programme delivers an effective hybrid mix

The schools I work with that have incorporated virtual experiences most effectively into their careers programme are those that have actively thought about how they can get the best from both worlds.

It’s great that students have access to a wider range of experiences online but what are schools doing to equip them with the skills to access and navigate information, guidance and events for both virtual and in-person environments?

The university application process and first round employer interviews have moved online. Schools that have thought about this are providing training to increase student personal effectiveness in person and online.



Sasha Wellings,
Career Development
and Education Consultant





In conclusion and further support

As we emerge from the pandemic, matching the aspirations and strengths of individual students to the right academic path to support their career choices is a critical task for every school.

It is clear from multiple research projects that many school career services are currently not delivering the service to students that we as educators want them to have.

For too long, state schools in particular have struggled to deliver a service on a shoestring budget. This has now been recognised by all political parties and we welcome the recommendations of the Education (School Careers Guidance) Bill 2021 to improve careers services. We do hope the government will match the bill's ambitions with adequate funding.

Our founding mission and driving force at MyFutureChoice is to equip every child to make informed study and career choices.

Good choices that are right for them. Over the past 35 years we've helped over a million students at 3,000 schools and colleges achieve this goal.

If you'd like to further explore any of the points raised in this guide please do contact us directly or connect with us on social media where we frequently discuss the latest careers topics.

Please visit the website or give our team a call if you would like to learn more about the range of MyFutureChoice programmes.

We wish you every success in your endeavour to strengthen your careers service after the pandemic.

MyFutureChoice Team





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