

# The Gatsby Benchmarks and Social Mobility: Impacts to date

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## Abstract

Young people face a lengthening transition from education to the world of work. The average age that young people leave full-time education has been rising for over a century. Within the education system they are frequently asked to make choices about subject, institution and qualifications that will exert a profound influence on their future lives. This is an issue for all young people and is particularly concerning because social capital is a significant influence on careers. Some young people can lack the social capital to develop an awareness of careers and labour markets, decision making around careers and progression routes available to them through education and training. They can then be at risk of being outperformed by their more advantaged peers when building their careers. This paper discusses recent developments in policy and career strategy in England for young people and the extent to which career strategy is moving away from being a marginalised policy area. It examines a recent pilot which has operationalised elements of the recent career strategy for young people and an evaluation which explores how career guidance, as an all-inclusive measure, is being used to impact positively on learners in the short, medium and long term.

**Keywords:** Career strategy, Gatsby Benchmarks, Impact

## Introduction

Young people face a lengthening transition from education to the world of work, the navigation of which can be challenging due to the complexity of progression pathways and options. Learners in England are now being asked to make decisions about subjects at school at the age of 13 and these decisions could have significant and long lasting consequences for them. This is an issue for all young people, but it is particularly concerning because social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is a significant influence on careers (e.g. Greenbank, 2009) and some young people can lack the social capital to develop an awareness of careers and labour markets and engage in effective decision making around careers and progression routes. This can leave them disadvantaged when building their careers. In England there have been several recent developments in policy and career strategy for young people, which is becoming less of a marginalised policy area and has an increased focus on building social capital to facilitate social mobility. This paper discusses these recent shifts in policy, focussing on the development and implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks for providing good

career guidance in schools and colleges. The paper presents data collected from an interim evaluation (conducted 2016-2017) of the implementation of these Benchmarks in a group of pilot schools and colleges . This data is used to highlight the initial impacts on learners, focusing on short term changes in learning, medium term changes in behaviour, and the possible long term changes in results such as educational attainment, attendance and destinations.

## **Policy context**

In 2017 the government launched several strategies focusing on the need to build an infrastructure that would contribute to social mobility, productivity and skills development. The Industrial Strategy (2017) aims to create an economy in which good jobs and greater earning power are a central component. It recognises the need for young people and adults to have access to careers information and guidance and to plan for a longer working life. This will be achieved through a closer alignment between local employers, education, vocational training and career guidance. The provision of career guidance in England has experienced significant challenges resulting from the introduction of the Education Act 2011. This saw the transfer of responsibility for the provision of career guidance from the Secretary of State for Education to schools. This, combined with the decommissioning of the Connexions service (the national service providing career guidance to young people), resulted in a vacuum in provision. To all intents and purposes, schools were given responsibility without funding, support and in many cases with only a very limited knowledge of career guidance. As a response to this, the Gatsby Foundation, a charitable organisation with a particular interest in schools and science careers, commissioned Sir John Holman to undertake research to identify from international best practice what good careers guidance looks like. The research, in partnership with iCeGS, resulted in Good Guidance (Holman, 2014) presenting eight principles or benchmarks that support young people to make informed career decisions.

To address much of the concern raised about the lack of careers guidance for young people, the government introduced a new organisation - the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) - in 2014. Their role was specifically to support schools to build better relationships with employers who were perceived as being an important source of careers advice for young people (e.g. Mann, 2012) The CEC took the lead in supporting schools and colleges to meet the benchmarks which focused on working with employers and employees.

The Government's careers strategy: Making the most of everyone's skills and talents (DfE, 2017) set out a plan to build a world class careers system for young people and adults and focussed on supporting social mobility. Central to this was the expectation for schools and colleges to meet the requirements of the Gatsby Benchmarks. The strategy was supported by statutory guidance for schools and colleges (DfE 2018a; 2018b) outlining an expectation that schools and colleges meet all eight benchmarks by the end of 2020. To achieve this, schools/colleges are expected to appoint a Careers Leader who will have strategic responsibility for careers generally within the institution, and specifically, the attainment of all eight Benchmarks. Through publishing and implementing the careers strategy a sea change in terms of government policy for careers support has occurred. As a result of the Strategy, the Careers and Enterprise Company's role has been extended to supporting schools to achieve all eight Benchmarks.

## **Rationale for career guidance: associated impacts and outcomes**

There are several positive and desirable outcomes and impacts that have been associated with good career guidance. These range from individual level shifts in learning, attitudes, aspirations and motivation (e.g. Hanson & Clark, 2019; Hughes et al, 2002; Watts, 1994) to behavioural shifts in classroom engagement and intended destinations (e.g. Orthner et al, 2010) to longer term outcomes such as improved attainment (e.g. te Wierik et al, 2015), improved destinations (e.g. Plank & Jordan, 2001) and an improved economy (e.g. Hooley & Dodd, 2015).

Changes in attitudes, knowledge, motivation and aspiration might be considered the most immediate outcome from participating in good careers guidance. Hughes et al. (2002) describe several programmes which have evidenced these outcomes, Killeen & Kidd (1991) reviewed 40 such students and concluded there were several positive changes in attitudes, motivation, knowledge and aspiration for learners. Several American meta-analyses concluded there were significant and positive changes in a number of career related knowledge and skills (Spokane & Oliver, 1983; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998). In our own research we found that participation in a 12-week career coaching programme by fifteen or sixteen year old students led to increased career readiness and improved indicators of successful transitions, compared to a control group of students (Hanson & Clark, 2019).

The evidence for engagement in learning is relatively established for adult learners. Hughes et al. (2002) discuss a series of studies which demonstrate that adult learners who voluntarily engage with guidance are more likely to continue with education and training (e.g. work by Killeen (1996) and Killeen & White (2000)). There is less evidence for school age learners, however Hooley (2014) describes a study in Portugal (Veiga, 2013) which compared school learners who had and had not engaged with career guidance on two psychometric measures of engagement. This research concluded that receiving guidance was positively correlated with engagement in learning.

Evidence to support the relationship between engaging in learning, good career guidance and improved attainment can be found but it's robustness can be questionable. Maquire (2004) argues that there is some evidence for positive effects on academic achievement in the work of Evans & Burck (1992) and Lapan, Gysbers & Sun (1997). Carey & Dimmit (2012) reviewed several studies and concluded there was consistent evidence for a relationship between career guidance and improved attainment. A more recent study by te Wierik et al (2014) in The Netherlands demonstrated that student's attainment improved after career guidance was introduced.

Plank & Jordan (2001) used National Educational Longitudinal Study data in the USA to identify whether there was a relationship between careers guidance received and destinations of students. They found that students who had higher levels of career guidance were significantly more likely to enrol on a four year college degree than a two year college degree or not enrol at college at all (whilst controlling for attainment).

Looking at even longer-term outcomes on the economy, these are assumed to occur because 1. Recipients of career guidance have increased human and social capital and 2. Career guidance supports smoother, more rapid transitions (Hooley & Dodd, 2015). In turn, these facilitate increased labour market participation, decreased unemployment, an enhanced knowledge and skills base

in the workforce, and a more flexible and mobile labour market (Hooley & Dodd, 2015). Hooley (2014) describes two studies which have attempted to measure the impact of career guidance on the economy; one in Northern Ireland (Regional Forecasts, 2008) and one in Germany (Weyh & Schanne, 2014, cited in Hooley, 2014). The former estimated that there was a "£9.02 net additional tax revenue for every £1 of public money invested" (Hooley, 2014, pp. 30). The latter demonstrated some economical impacts although these did not reach statistical significance.

In summary there is an increasing evidence base that demonstrates that engaging with career guidance leads to increased knowledge and improved attitudes, motivation and aspiration. There is also evidence to suggest that there is increased engagement with learning, increased attainment and more appropriate destinations for learners. Finally, there is a sound rationale, with some evidence, that this leads to improvements in the economy. This growing evidence base is starting to show there is a clear need, and rationale for, good career guidance that begins at school; it benefits the individual learners and it benefits the economy. The present study sought to develop evidence for the impact on learners.

## **The Gatsby Benchmarks**

The publication of the Gatsby Good Career Guidance (2014) was a watershed moment for career education and guidance in the United Kingdom. The eight Benchmarks for good career guidance based upon international research in best practice has become the core of the government's careers strategy and subsequent statutory guidance for schools and colleges. The eight Benchmarks for good career guidance are:

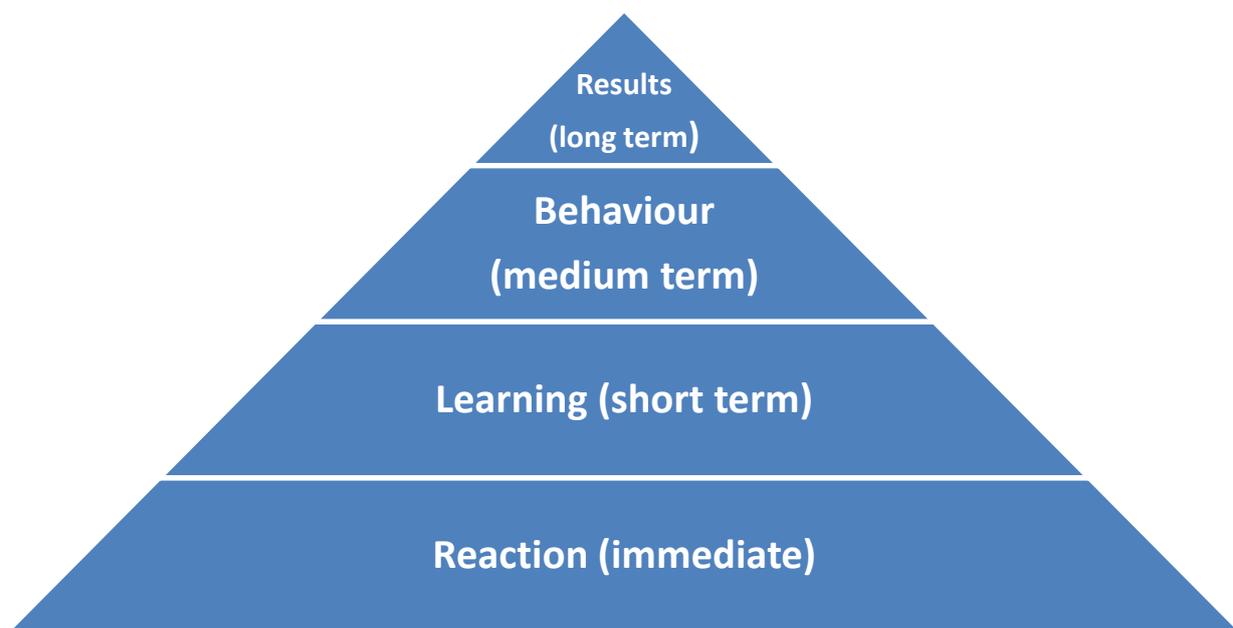
1. A stable careers programme
2. Learning from career and labour market information
3. Addressing the needs of each pupil
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
5. Encounters with employers
6. Experiences of the workplace
7. Encounters with further and higher education
8. Personal guidance

In 2015 The Gatsby Foundation funded a two-year pilot in North East England for sixteen schools and colleges to implement the Gatsby Benchmarks. This included three Further Education (FE) colleges (offering qualifications for sixteen to nineteen year olds) and twelve secondary schools. Of these twelve schools, three provided education to eleven to sixteen year old learners and five provided education for eleven to eighteen year old learners. One pupil referral unit for young people who have been excluded from school was also included in the pilot.

Schools and colleges participating in the pilot were allocated funding of up to £3,000 in the first year and up to £1,500 in the second year. The evaluation of the pilot is currently in its 4<sup>th</sup> and final year of data collection. The overall evaluation is both formative and summative. It aims firstly to explore the implementation of the Benchmarks across all 16 pilot schools and colleges, identifying the processes by which this has occurred along with identification of

those factors which have facilitated and challenged implementation. Secondly, the evaluation aims to identify the impacts of implementing the Benchmarks, using the Kirkpatrick model to guide the levels of impact identified (see Figure 1). This approach to evaluation was chosen as it provides an objective framework for assessing whether a programme can facilitate learning, produce change in behaviours and effect more distal impacts. It considers whether learning takes place in the short term, whether this leads to behaviour change in the medium term and then effects change in longer term outcomes such as attainment and destinations.

*Figure 1: Kirkpatrick model of evaluation*



This paper is focused solely on those impacts associated with the learners at the following levels: learning, behaviour and results. Learner reactions to specific activities and events were captured by the individual schools and colleges, but not in a systematic and standardised way. Consequently, they are not considered further.

## **Methodology Overview**

The methodology for the interim evaluation was longitudinal in nature, employing mixed methods to capture a range of data from several sources in order to establish impact on learners (Hanson et al, 2019). The measures and descriptions of processes for each data type are described in more detail below. Analyses included descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A systematic approach to identifying, organising and providing insight into qualitative data in order to establish patterns of meaning, or themes across the whole data set was also included (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The process involves reading through transcripts carefully, applying codes to data systematically. It permits the researcher to be both inductive and deductive as required and is a flexible method that lends itself to mixed method research designs such as this one.

## School/College Audits

Each year the schools and colleges in the pilot audited their careers provision against the eight Gatsby Benchmarks using a tool developed by the pilot facilitator in 2015. This data allowed the identification of which Benchmarks each education provider had fully, partially or not achieved and considered whether any impacts identified on learners were related to the number of Benchmarks fully achieved by schools and colleges.

## School/College Visits

Each year every school and college were visited to conduct semi-structured interviews with a range of individuals. This included the Careers Leader (CL), a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), curricula staff, members of staff closely involved in the delivery of careers guidance (for example careers advisers, leads for enterprise, lead for raising aspirations or progression, pastoral care staff) the Governor with responsibility for careers, parents, and learners from different years in the education provider. These visits allowed us to capture perceived impacts (at the learning and behaviour level of Kirkpatrick’s model) on learners from their own perspective and from those of parents, teachers and career team staff.

## Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI)

This psychometric tool was developed specifically for the project. The SCRI was designed to be a valid and reliable measure of the learner’s career readiness – career readiness was used as a measure for the learning level of impact in Kirkpatrick’s model and it was hypothesised that career readiness would increase over the course of the evaluation. The SCRI’s development followed a robust process of survey design, including a review of existing and relevant measures, expert review, cognitive interviewing with learners and principal components analysis as a statistical technique to determine validity. This process resulted in a twenty-one item measure. Through principal components analysis, four underlying themes for composite measures of career readiness were determined in addition to a total career readiness measure. The four composite measures and underpinning items are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: The Student Career Readiness Index - composite measures and associated items

Career planning and management skills	Transition skills	Information and help seeking skills	Work readiness
I can choose a career that fits with my interests.	I have considered whether university is right for me.	I can find information online about jobs I am interested in.	I will be successful at job interviews.
I can decide what my ideal job would be.	I have considered whether moving straight to work after school is right for me.	I can seek help and support with my future education and career when I need it.	I will be able to change jobs if I don't like the one I have in the future.
I can choose a career that will allow me to live the life that I want to lead.	I can write a good C.V.	I know what I need to do if I am having trouble with my school work.	
I can assess my strengths and weaknesses	I have considered whether an apprenticeship is right for me.	I can find out information about colleges and universities.	

Career planning and management skills	Transition skills	Information and help seeking skills	Work readiness
I will continue to work for my career goal even when I get frustrated or hit a barrier.		I can learn new skills throughout my life.	
I can decide what is most important to me in my working life.			
I will continue to work at my studies even when I get frustrated.			
I can choose a career that fits with what I am good at.			
I can work well with different sorts of people.			

There are three sections and approximately 50 questions as part of the overall survey. This includes items on learner characteristics and participation in activities associated with the Gatsby Benchmarks. The survey was conducted each year of the pilot at the beginning of the autumn term. Year 8 (age 12), year 11 (age 16) and year 13 (age 18) learners were asked to complete it, and the data was used to establish whether career readiness increased over the course of the evaluation in learners in pilot schools.

### **The National Pupil Database (NPD)**

The evaluation hypothesised that the impacts on learners might include improved attainment and attendance, as has been demonstrated elsewhere (e.g. Hooley, Matheson & Watts, 2014). In order to identify whether learner's attainment and attendance increased over the course of the evaluation, data from the NPD was used. This is a nationwide collection of data by the Department of Education from all mainstream schools and colleges delivering education to learners up to age 19. The NPD includes information, at an individual level, on learner's socio-demographic status (for example gender, ethnicity, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities status, whether they are eligible for Free School Meals), attendance and attainment on General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams (taken in Year 11 when the learners are fifteen-sixteen). The NPD available for analysis at time of writing was for the academic years 2014/2015 and 2015/2016.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

Each year the team identified between eight and ten stakeholders from the North East region to conduct semi-structured interviews with. These individuals worked in a range of organisations that worked with schools and colleges across the region and included the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Business In The Community (BITC), STEM.org, the Local Authorities, local employers and organisations involved in the delivery of career guidance activities. These individuals provided evidence of the impact of implementing the Gatsby

Benchmarks on learners from an external perspective, focusing on the learning and behaviour levels of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation.

## **Analyses**

Interviews with school staff, parents, school Governors, learners and stakeholders were audio recorded and transcribed. These transcripts were then thematically analysed following Braun & Clarke's (2006, 2012) procedure.

Quantitative data from the SCRI was analysed cross-sectionally. Cross-sectional analyses looked at data collected from learners in Years 8, 11 and 13 in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The learners completing these analyses in each year of the evaluation were different or independent from each other (i.e. between subjects).

Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted on these samples to determine if any changes occurring in career readiness over time were statistically significant.

Quantitative data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The NPD provided data on 622,519 individuals in Year 11 (age sixteen) across England. Of these, 2639 individuals were registered as learners at pilot schools and colleges and 2094 were registered at schools or colleges who were used in a proxy for a control group. This comparison group of schools and colleges were derived from non-pilot schools and colleges in the same geographical area and were matched on school/college size, Ofsted rating, % of learners with SEND and % of learners entitled to Free School Meals (FSM). Mixed ANOVA's were used to identify whether changes in attainment at GCSE and attendance in year 11 occurred over time and if so whether these changes were the same for pilot and on-pilot comparison schools and colleges.

## **Findings**

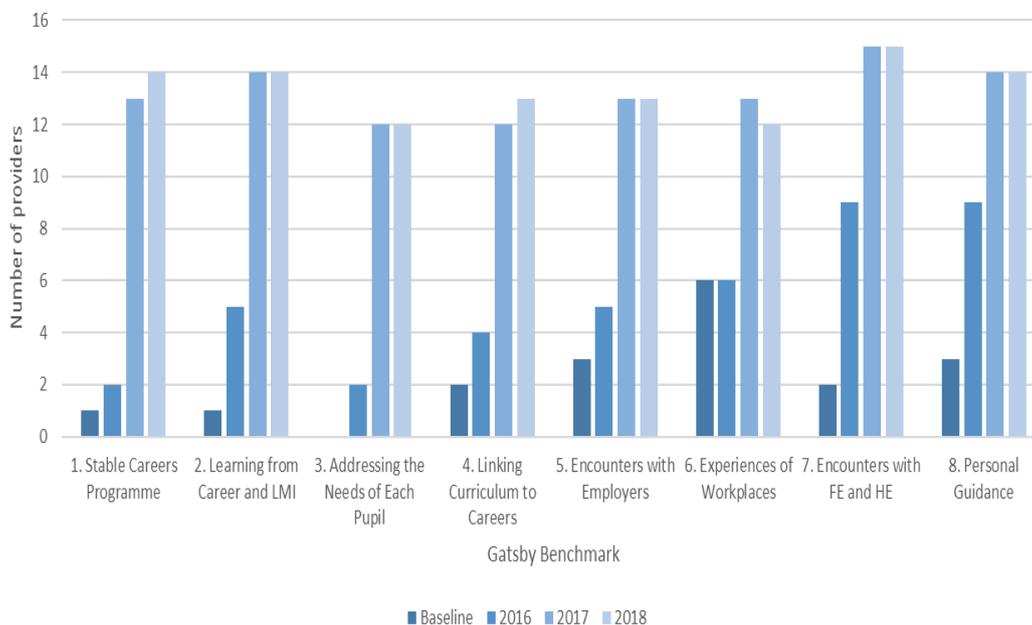
This section firstly outlines the progress made by schools and colleges in achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks up to autumn 2017, before moving on to discuss the impacts observed at the learning, behaviour and results levels of Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation, using relevant data sources as necessary.

### **Benchmark Achievement**

Schools and colleges made significant progress in the number of Benchmarks they had fully achieved within two years. Figure 2 shows the number of schools/colleges fully achieving each of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks in 2015 (the baseline measure before the pilot began), in 2016 (one year into the pilot), in 2017 (at the end of the pilot) and in 2018, one year after the pilot. As Figure 2 shows, at baseline in 2015 very few schools and colleges were fully achieving any of the eight benchmarks. Benchmark 6 (Experiences of workplaces) was the Benchmark that most schools and colleges had fully achieved (six). Only one school/college had fully achieved Benchmark 1 (Stable careers programme) and Benchmark 2 (Learning from career and labour market information). However, as Figure 2 shows, by the end of the pilot in 2017, all Benchmarks were being fully achieved by at least twelve of the sixteen schools/colleges, Benchmarks 1, 2 and 8 (Personal Guidance) had been fully achieved by fourteen of the

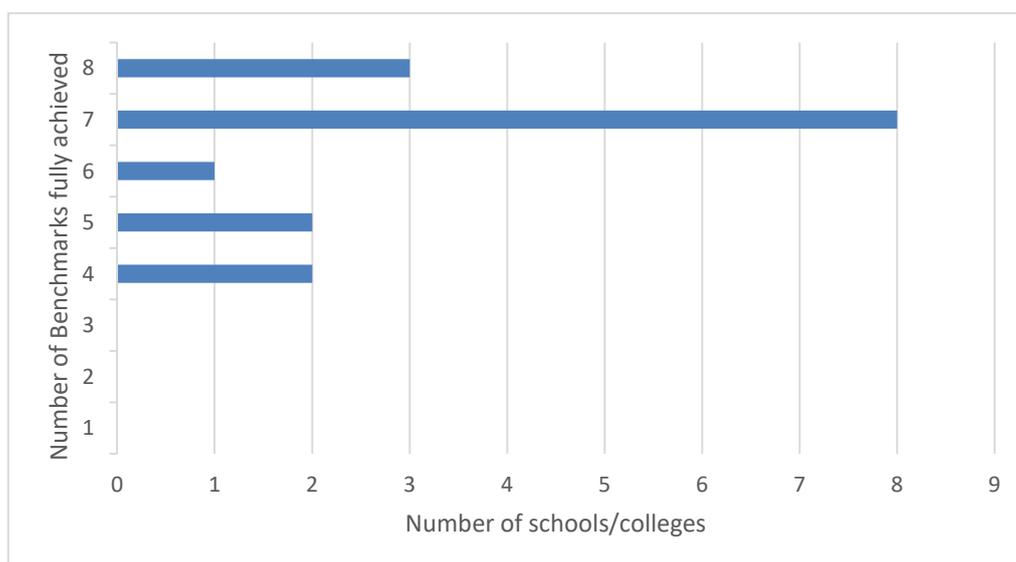
schools/colleges and Benchmark 7 had been fully achieved by fifteen schools/colleges.

Figure 2: Schools and colleges and Benchmark achievement 2015-2018



As Figure 3 shows, by 2018, most schools and colleges had fully achieved at least seven of the eight Benchmarks. Three schools/colleges had fully achieved all eight Benchmarks and eight schools and colleges had fully achieved seven Benchmarks. No school or college had fully achieved less than four of the Benchmarks. This demonstrates that significant progress that can be made in all kinds of schools and colleges, even those with high percentages of learners who are considered to be more vulnerable (looked after children, learners with special educational needs and disabilities, those from deprived backgrounds and those with behavioural issues).

Figure 3: The number of Benchmarks fully achieved in 2018 by the number of schools and colleges



In order to achieve this significant progress, schools and colleges had made some significant changes to staffing structures. Primarily, they needed to ensure that there was strong institutional leadership and distribution of accountability for high quality careers provision throughout the leadership team (this included a Governor). Furthermore, there had to be a skilled Careers Leader in post who had the authority to make changes. Finally, teaching and support staff needed CPD around Gatsby and careers guidance.

## Impact on learners

### Learning

In order to identify the impacts at the learning level we use the analyses of the SCRI data.

#### *i. Career Readiness*

Cross sectional analyses were conducted. In these analyses SCRI data from 2016 was compared to SCRI data from 2017 and 2018 to see if mean SCRI scores increased over the three years. The samples in each of these years were independent from each other. One-way ANOVA's were used to test for significant differences between the three years of data which includes both number of activities engaged with and career readiness scores. Descriptive statistics for mean career readiness are displayed in Table 2. The mean number of activities engaged with in 2016 was 6.3, in 2017 it was 6.8 and in 2018 it was 6.9. A one-way ANOVA revealed this difference to be statistically significant ( $p < .000$ ).

Table 2 Mean Career readiness scores and Standard deviations for 2016-2018

	2016		2017		2018	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Career readiness (total)	56.54	22.96	76.89	21.96	75.19	19.76
Career planning and management skills	26.24	14.73	40.01	12.28	37.44	10.26
Transition skills	9.34	4.96	11.37	5.32	11.78	5.18
Information and help seeking skills	13.45	5.93	19.48	5.12	19.75	4.95
Work readiness	6.79	1.95	5.67	2.83	5.95	2.79

With respect to engagement with career guidance activities, learners who completed the SCRI in 2018, compared to those who completed in 2016, were significantly more likely to report:

- that their provider had a careers programme
- that information about their school/college careers programme was presented online
- that they had accessed information about work and careers
- they could access information that their provider kept
- they had learnt about careers in their science lessons
- they had met someone from the world of work
- that they completed work experience
- that they accessed information about universities
- that they visited a college
- that they accessed information about apprenticeships
- that they have talked to an apprentice
- that they have had an interview with a careers adviser

With respect to career readiness, learners who completed the SCRI in 2018 had significantly:

- higher levels of career planning skills when compared to learners in 2016
- higher levels of transition skills when compared to learners in 2016 and 2017
- higher levels of career readiness when compared to learners in 2016
- higher levels of work readiness when compared to learners in 2017

The analyses also considered the relationship between the number of Benchmarks fully achieved by the education provider attended by the learner and the learner's career readiness. These analyses found that learners from schools and colleges who fully achieved all eight Benchmarks reported significantly higher career readiness scores compared to schools and colleges who fully achieved four Benchmarks. Furthermore, learners from schools and colleges who fully achieved seven Benchmarks reported significantly higher career readiness scores compared to schools and colleges who fully achieved six Benchmarks and four Benchmarks.

## ***Behaviour***

Evidence on the impact of the implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks on learner's behaviour is derived from the thematic analyses of qualitative data captured from school staff, parents, the learners themselves and finally data from external stakeholders.

### *ii. Thematic analyses*

#### Theme 1: Employability

Employers perceived there to be reduced numbers of NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) and stated that there were increased levels of learner engagement with career related learning activities and skills/attribute building. Employers further stated that they had been particularly impressed with the career plans that learners in pilot schools/colleges had for themselves and which were updated after every careers activity or event. Employers reported that learners who had left school or college and were applying or starting in jobs with them had:

- more knowledge about themselves and their career ambitions
- made more informed choices about what they want to do
- a greater knowledge of the skills that businesses need

Staff in schools observed significant increases in employability skills including communication, self-confidence, digital and IT literacy.

#### Theme 2: Engagement in classrooms (schools)

Curriculum staff talked at length on the ways in which classrooms had changed since the pilot began. In all schools, staff talked about learners previously asking questions such as "Why do we have to learn this?" In several schools, staff noted that they would now use questions such as this as an opportunity to link curriculum learning to potential careers and activities undertaken by individuals in specific roles. In two other schools staff noted that learners no longer asked these questions because the career learning was so advanced that learners already knew the answer or recognised that they would be told in the lesson.

Staff in five schools talked about how linking the curriculum to specific aspects of jobs or careers had helped to re-engage those learners who found it difficult to learn in the classroom and this was especially apparent with male learners.

*"I have conversations now with Year 10 foundation students but telling them that sixth form colleges will need them to have higher levels of qualifications [than foundation]. That inspires them to work harder because they know they need to be on the higher paper. So what you see in them is a bit more of a drive because they know they have an end point because we're all talking about the fact that when you leave school it's not the end of your journey it's just the end of the part where you work with us. That's made the students be more engaged and be more active in their learning."*

Staff from most schools strongly believed that the improved career guidance had led to learners having raised aspirations. This served as a very strong motivator for learners to engage in learning in the classroom and work harder to get the qualifications they needed:

*"I have seen a massive change in aspirations. We've always had a lot of boys who want to be engineers and they would naturally be gravitating towards Nissan and Caterpillar, but the big shift that I have seen in their attitudes has been they would want to go into engineering at college and they would be expecting to get a job when they were 18."*

*"And even going into the armed forces – there's a few that do but all of them now want to go in at a level where they will have a degree qualification. They aren't just going in wanting to be squaddies, they want to be much higher up and have the skills associated with that."*

*"There's definitely been a massive aspirational shift for all the students. I am just so impressed that they're all so focussed on what's next...they're all so driven. It's not just the high attaining ones it's all the way through."*

### Theme 3: Increased knowledge of progression pathways and career options

In 2018, learners from Year 8 (aged 12) upwards could talk confidently and knowledgably about what their options were when they left school. They knew the difference between technical and academic routes and between apprenticeships and vocational qualifications at college. Learners as young as twelve could identify potential careers they were interested in and could describe the subjects they would need from school and what pathways they would need to take. Staff reported they were having many more conversations with learners about career options and progression pathways and that there were multiple occasions now where learners had researched routes and given the staff information they did not know about. The learners were teaching the staff:

*"I had a Year 11 last year who needed a little bit more support so you could never really know if he'd understood what he'd been taught. He said he only needed one qualification for university so I took him along to see the careers adviser who said 'he can do that one course, he's perfectly right'. Again, I learned something!"*

An independent careers adviser who worked in both pilot and non-pilot schools noted that before the pilot began, the content of personal guidance interviews was often career education, explaining the difference between various pathways and what different terms meant. He noted that learners in Year 10 and 11 (fifteen and sixteen years of age) now arrived at interviews fully prepared with a good understanding of different routes, terms such as technical and academic and with some clear ideas about what they were interested in.

## **Results**

### ***Year 11 2015/2016 attainment comparisons***

As discussed earlier, pilot school attainment was compared to attainment in a specially constructed comparison group of schools and was also compared to all other schools nationally. Analyses explored variation in GCSE attainment over time using the NPD data from the DfE. Baseline data from 2015 was compared to data from 2016 (one year after the pilot began). Data for the academic year 2016-2017 was not yet available. We ran a series of inferential statistical tests which showed that the number of A and B grades achieved by learners in pilot schools increased significantly from 2015 to 2016 and crucially that this was not the case for learners in the comparison group or for all other learners nationally. That is to say, whilst pilot school learners achieved more A and B grades, learners in the comparison schools and all other schools nationally did not. Rather, these two other groups of learners showed a small decline in the number of A and B grades they achieved.

## **Discussion**

These interim findings show that schools and colleges can, and do, make significant progress in achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks within two years. Learners in these schools and colleges have the opportunity to engage in a wide range of different career guidance activities. The different forms of data collected indicate there may be several impacts from doing so on learners.

Short term outcomes, focussed around learning, are evidenced in the learner's self-report psychometric data. This suggests that career readiness has increased in each year group over the course of the evaluation. Without a control group it is not possible to attribute this increase in career readiness solely to engaging with career guidance, however, the fact that learner's career readiness correlated with the number of activities they recalled doing, and the number of Benchmarks their school/college held, does suggest there is likely to be a causal relationship.

Employer and teacher observations add further evidence that learners have developed their knowledge of careers and progression pathways, have clear action plans and increased employability. These findings are in line with previous research discussed in Hughes et al (2002), Hooley (2014) and elsewhere that career related learning does take place as a consequence of engaging with career guidance activities. In addition to this there was observational evidence from teachers that learners had increased motivation and raised aspirations, also in line with previous findings. In fact, teacher's perceptions of their learner's

indicated that learners were more engaged in class and this held for all learner's, not just those at the high attainment end of the spectrum. It will be interesting to explore in the final evaluation if those performing at the lower end of the attainment spectrum are able to show greater improvements in engagement and attainment than those at the top end.

Teachers perceptions of improvements in grades were supported, tentatively at least, by the attainment data published in the NPD. This indicated small increments in the number of A and B grades achieved in pilot schools that were not seen in the comparison schools. Further analysis of additional years attainment is required to establish whether this increase in attainment is part of a longer trend – if it is, this is further support for the theory that engaging in more career guidance can lead to improved attainment, as was found by te Wierik et al. (2015).The evaluation will be able to verify this observational data when the NPD information on attainment and destinations for subsequent years is released.

The positive short, medium- and long-term outcomes on learners found in this interim evaluation provide a first indication that the Government's strategy, which aims to build a world class careers system for young people, focussed on supporting social mobility, can be realised. Central to this strategy is the expectation for schools and colleges to meet the requirements of the Gatsby Benchmarks and the findings here indicate it is possible to achieve most, if not all Benchmarks in two years. Through publishing and implementing the careers strategy and through the work of the Careers and Enterprise Company to support schools and colleges, a sea change in the profile and value of careers is taking place. The evaluation will continue to capture data pertaining to the longer-term outcomes of attainment and destinations of learners and use this to verify the observations from teachers and other stakeholders.

## **Conclusions**

The interim evaluation has been able to show that schools and colleges, regardless of their location, their size, their Ofsted rating or learner make up, can make significant progress in fully achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks in only two years. The Careers Strategy was published in 2017 and there is evidence here that the new school/college based strategic approach will mean positive outcomes for learners.

In making progress in achieving the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks, schools and colleges have seen their learners engage with a wider range and greater number of career guidance activities. In turn these learners have reported they have increased career readiness, better career action plans and improved employability skills. Their teachers note there is an increase in their student's aspirations and that their attitudes towards their learning and their futures have changed (for the better). There is evidence from teachers that learners at the lower end of the attainment spectrum have improved their grades and data from the NPD is further, albeit tentative, evidence for this. Employers have noted that these young people evidence improved employability and are more able to articulate their career plans.

For the Careers Strategy to continue to have this positive impact on learners, schools and colleges need strong leadership and governance. Head teachers and Governors must understand the importance, and value, of career guidance and

drive this agenda forward. Careers leaders need to be part of networks which both facilitate the development of partnerships for the delivery of activities and encourage professional challenge. Regular auditing is essential and careers leaders and schools need to be encouraged to operate within a cycle continual improvement.

Both time and money are the key barriers to effecting change, schools and colleges do need to be considered about how they make use of the resources they have and the career hubs and the Career and Enterprise Company will have a key role in ensuring that they can sustain and further curate the progress they have made.

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