

The Gatsby Benchmarks - Appendix 1

The Gatsby Benchmarks provide the nationally recognised framework for high quality careers education, information, advice and guidance across England. They form a central component of the Department for Education’s statutory guidance for careers education and underpin effective practice across schools, colleges and independent training providers. The benchmarks support organisations to design and deliver structured, progressive and impactful careers programmes which enable learners to make informed decisions and move successfully into sustained education, employment or training outcomes.

The Gatsby Benchmarks were refined and updated in 2024 to ensure continued relevance within a changing educational and economic landscape. The updated framework retains the original structure while strengthening expectations around leadership, inclusion, and the quality and impact of provision. It places greater emphasis on ensuring that careers education is coherent, embedded throughout the learner journey and responsive to individual need, with a clear focus on the difference it makes to learners’ progression and longer term outcomes.

At Oakwood, the Gatsby Benchmarks are embedded within a specialist model of careers education that is both inclusive and highly personalised. Provision is designed to recognise and value the individuality of every learner, ensuring that careers education is strengths based and aligned to Education, Health and Care Plan outcomes and Preparation for Adulthood pathways. Careers learning is integrated across the curriculum and forms a continuous part of each learner’s journey, supporting progression into employment where appropriate, alongside wider outcomes such as independence, community participation and long-term wellbeing. Through this approach, learners are supported to develop the knowledge, skills, confidence and self-advocacy skills required to make informed decisions and move towards destinations that are meaningful and sustainable for them.

Read the updated Gatsby Benchmarks recommended by Government guidance, and associated appendices online at <https://www.gatsbybenchmarks.org.uk/>

The Gatsby Benchmark	As Gatsby defines: The Benchmarks for Colleges listed here outline the important elements of a robust career guidance programme.
1. A stable careers programme	Every provider should have an embedded programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by learners, parents and carers, staff, those in governance roles, employers and other agencies. • Every provider should have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of those in governance roles, leadership and the senior management team, and has an identified and appropriately trained careers leader responsible for it. • The careers programme should be tailored to the needs of learners, sequenced appropriately, underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to the whole institution development plan. It should also set out how parents and carers will be engaged throughout. • The careers programme should be published on the provider’s website and communicated in ways that enable learners, parents and carers, staff and employers to access and understand it. • The programme should be regularly evaluated using feedback from learners, parents and carers, subject staff and other staff who support learners, careers advisers and employers to increase its impact.
Oakwood’s Stance on Gatsby Benchmark 1 At Oakwood Specialist College, we have a stable, embedded and aspirational careers programme that is understood across the organisation and supported by senior leadership, ensuring it is consistently implemented and continuously developed. Our approach is centred on delivering a highly individualised careers programme that equips learners with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make informed decisions about their future, including pathways into paid employment where appropriate. We recognise that learners are working towards a wide range of outcomes, and our curriculum is intentionally flexible to reflect this, enabling all learners to work towards personalised targets that	

support their development and future aspirations. We view careers education not solely as preparation for work, but as a broader vehicle for personal development, using work-related learning to support the development of independence, communication, resilience and self-understanding. This ensures that learners are able to explore and define their own aspirations in a way that is meaningful to them.

The careers programme is designed to support progression beyond education in the widest sense. Alongside exploring employment pathways, learners are supported to develop social inclusion, community participation and a strong sense of belonging, recognising that successful outcomes may include a range of destinations aligned to Preparation for Adulthood outcomes. This enables learners to build the skills and experiences needed to participate confidently in their communities and move towards sustainable and fulfilling adult lives.

A structured programme of experiences underpins this approach, including encounters with employers, workplace visits, work experience placements and access to high-quality careers information. Learners are further supported through personalised 1:1 careers guidance and a wraparound approach involving staff, families and external professionals, ensuring that decision-making is well-informed and supported at every stage.

The programme is regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure it remains responsive to learner need and continues to deliver meaningful and positive outcomes.

2. Learning from career and labour market information

- All learners, parents and carers, subject staff and other staff who support learners should have access to good-quality, up-to-date information about future pathways, study options and labour market opportunities. Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents and carers may require different or additional information. All learners will need the support of an informed adviser to make the best use of available information.
- During their programme of study, all learners should access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their own decisions on study options or next steps.
 - Parents and carers should be encouraged and supported to access and use information about careers, pathways and the labour market to inform their support for the learners in their care.

Oakwood’s Stance on Gatsby Benchmark 2

At Oakwood Specialist College, access to careers and labour market information is embedded within our wider careers programme and supported through a collaborative, multi-agency approach. We ensure that learners, families and staff have access to up-to-date and relevant information, alongside the guidance and support needed to interpret this effectively and use it to inform future decisions.

Our approach recognises that information alone is not sufficient; learners require structured support to understand how opportunities relate to their own strengths, aspirations and circumstances. Through the curriculum and wider careers programme, learners are supported to explore a broad range of pathways, including paid employment where appropriate, alongside options such as supported internships, further education, community engagement and supported living. This ensures that learners are able to consider pathways that are both aspirational and realistic, and that reflect their individual goals.

Labour market information is introduced and developed over time through a combination of classroom learning, employer engagement and real-world experiences. This allows learners to build a meaningful understanding of different roles, environments and expectations, and to begin to make connections between their developing skills and potential future pathways. The curriculum provides sufficient flexibility to ensure that this learning is personalised, enabling each learner to engage with information at a level and pace that is appropriate to them.

Families and carers are key partners in this process and are actively involved through the Education, Health and Care Plan review process and ongoing communication. We work closely with families, social care professionals and allied health specialists to ensure that information is shared, understood and used to support informed and coordinated decision-making. Learners and families are further supported through personalised careers guidance and a wider wraparound approach, ensuring that next steps are carefully considered and aligned to long-term outcomes.

Through this approach, learners are supported not only to access information, but to develop the confidence and understanding required to use it effectively, enabling them to make informed choices and progress towards outcomes that are meaningful and sustainable.

3. Addressing the needs of each young person

Learners have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Careers programmes should help learners navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression. In addition, opportunities should be tailored to the needs of each learner, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, young people with SEND and those who are absent.

	• A provider’s careers programme should actively seek to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical thinking, showcase a diverse range of role models and raise aspirations. • Providers should keep systematic records of the participation of learners in all aspects of their careers programme, including the individual advice given to each learner, and any subsequent agreed decisions. • The records of participation and advice given should be integrated with those given at the previous stage of the learner’s education (including their secondary school), where these are made available. Records should begin to be kept from the first point of contact or from the point of transition. • All learners should have access to these records and use them ahead of key transition points to support their next steps and career development. • Providers should collect, maintain and use accurate data for each learner on their aspirations, intended and immediate education, and training or employment destinations to inform personalised support. • Providers should use sustained and longer-term destination data as part of their evaluation process and use alumni to support their careers programme.
Oakwood’s Stance on Gatsby Benchmark 3 At Oakwood Specialist College, our careers programme is built around a highly personalised approach that recognises each learner as an individual, with their own strengths, aspirations, preferences and support needs. We ensure that careers education is tailored to reflect these differences, enabling all learners to engage meaningfully with their future planning and to progress towards outcomes that are appropriate, aspirational and sustainable. We are committed to raising aspirations and challenging assumptions about what learners can achieve. Through our curriculum and wider provision, learners are supported to explore a broad and diverse range of pathways and role models, helping them to develop an understanding of the opportunities available and to see themselves within them. This includes careful, supported exploration of employment and community-based opportunities, ensuring that learners can make informed choices that are both ambitious and realistic. Careers education at Oakwood is underpinned by robust tracking and recording systems which capture each learner’s participation, experiences, aspirations and the guidance they receive over time. This information is used to inform personalised planning, ensuring that next steps are clear, coherent and responsive to the learner’s development. Where available, we incorporate information from previous settings at the point of transition, enabling continuity and a joined-up approach to progression. Learners are supported to access and understand their own information, enabling them to take an active role in their future planning, particularly at key transition points. We maintain accurate and up-to-date data on learners’ intended and actual destinations, which is used both to support individual progression and to inform ongoing development of the careers programme. We also review sustained destination outcomes over time to ensure that provision remains focused on long-term impact and meaningful progression beyond college. This personalised and evidence-informed approach is strengthened through close collaboration with families, staff and external professionals, ensuring that learners are supported holistically to navigate potential barriers and move forward with confidence.	
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers	As part of the providers programme of careers education, all subject staff should link curriculum learning with careers, even on courses which are not specifically occupation led. Subject staff should highlight the progression routes for their subject and the relevance of knowledge and skills developed in their subject for a wide range of future career paths. • Throughout their programme of study (and by the end of their course) every learner should have opportunities to experience how knowledge and skills developed in their subjects help people gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of occupations. • Careers should form part of the provider’s ongoing staff development programme for subject staff and all staff who support learners.

Oakwood’s Stance on Gatsby Benchmark 4

At Oakwood Specialist College, careers education is fully integrated within the curriculum, ensuring that learning is purposeful and connected to each learner’s future. We maintain high aspirations for all learners and ensure that curriculum delivery supports learners to understand how the knowledge and skills they are developing contribute to their progression into adulthood, including pathways into paid employment where appropriate.

Our specialist and flexible curriculum is designed to reflect the diverse needs and outcomes of our learners. Learning is structured to support the development of transferable skills such as communication, independence, problem-solving and teamwork, which are essential for success across a wide range of environments. Staff make explicit and meaningful links between curriculum content and future pathways where appropriate, helping learners to understand how their learning can be applied in real-life contexts and across different settings.

This approach is strengthened through the integration of work-related learning and workplace experiences, ensuring that learners are able to connect classroom learning with practical application. Experiences such as work placements, employer encounters and community-based activities reinforce learning and enable learners to develop and apply their skills in meaningful contexts. This creates a coherent learning journey where knowledge, skills and experience build progressively over time.

Careers education is also supported through ongoing staff development, ensuring that all staff understand their role in preparing learners for adulthood and are equipped to make relevant links between learning and future pathways. This whole-college approach ensures consistency and reinforces the importance of careers education as a shared responsibility.

5. Encounters with employers and employees	Every learner should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment activities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and could include learners’ own part-time employment where it exists. • Every year, alongside their programme of study, learners should participate in at least two meaningful encounters with an employer. At least one encounter should be delivered through their curriculum area.
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Oakwood’s Stance on Benchmark 5

At Oakwood Specialist College, learners are provided with regular and meaningful opportunities to engage with employers and employees as a core part of their careers programme. These encounters are carefully planned to ensure that learners are not only exposed to the world of work, but are supported to understand the skills, behaviours and expectations associated with different roles and environments.

Our approach is focused on ensuring that encounters are purposeful, aligned to clear learning outcomes and appropriate to the needs of each learner. Activities are structured to enable learners to actively engage with employers, ask questions, and develop their understanding of what work involves in practice. This includes a combination of visiting speakers, workshops, employer-led sessions and visits to workplaces, alongside opportunities to explore community and social care settings where these reflect individual progression pathways.

Encounters are prepared for in advance and followed up through reflective learning, allowing learners to build on their experiences over time and make connections to their own aspirations and development. This ensures that engagement with employers contributes meaningfully to learners’ understanding and forms part of a progressive programme, rather than being a standalone experience.

We recognise that learners are working towards a range of outcomes, and for some, engagement with employers is part of a broader journey towards independence, community participation and personal development. For others, these encounters support progression towards employment and work-related pathways. Our programme is designed to reflect this range, ensuring that all learners are able to access experiences that are relevant, supportive and developmentally appropriate.

Through this structured and individualised approach, learners develop increased confidence, awareness and understanding of the world of work, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future pathways.

6. Experiences of workplaces	Every learner should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks. By the end of their programme of study, every learner should have had at least one meaningful experience of a workplace, in addition to any part-time jobs they may have.
Oakwood’s Stance on Benchmark 6 At Oakwood Specialist College, learners are supported to access meaningful experiences of workplaces as a key component of a progressive and personalised careers programme. These experiences are carefully designed to ensure they are purposeful, appropriately sequenced and aligned to each learner’s stage of development, enabling all learners to engage with the world of work in ways that are relevant and achievable. Our approach provides a range of experiences, including workplace visits, work experience placements, volunteering and internal work-related activity. These are planned to provide opportunities for learners to develop an understanding of workplace expectations, explore different environments and build the skills valued in the workplace. Wherever possible, experiences are matched to learners’ interests and aspirations, while also reflecting local opportunities and potential next steps. We recognise that meaningful experiences require preparation and follow-up to maximise their impact. Learners are supported in advance to understand the purpose of their experience and are given opportunities to reflect on what they have learned, helping them to make connections between their experiences, their developing skills and their future pathways. This ensures that workplace experiences contribute to sustained learning over time, rather than being isolated activities. For some learners, experiences of workplaces include engagement with community settings and services, recognising that progression pathways may include a combination of employment, community participation and supported living outcomes. Internal work-related learning is used where appropriate as a supported step towards external experiences, ensuring that all learners can participate and progress within a structured and inclusive model. Learners’ development is tracked and supported through ongoing assessment and feedback, using a structured framework to monitor progress in skills, knowledge and readiness for next steps. This ensures that workplace experiences are closely linked to curriculum learning and individual targets, forming part of a coherent and progressive journey. Through this approach, learners gain meaningful insight into the world of work and develop the confidence, understanding and skills required to move towards destinations that are appropriate, aspirational and sustainable.	
7. Encounters with further and higher education	All learners should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and vocational routes, and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace. By the end of their programme of study, every learner should have had a meaningful encounter with a range of providers of learning and training that may form the next stage of their career. This should include as appropriate, further education colleges, higher education and apprenticeship and training providers. This should include the opportunity to meet both staff and learners.
Oakwood’s Stance on Benchmark 7 At Oakwood Specialist College, learners are supported to understand the full range of progression opportunities available to them through a programme of meaningful encounters with education and training providers. These encounters are designed to enable learners to explore different environments, understand what learning or training in those settings involves, and consider how these relate to their own aspirations and next steps. Encounters are carefully planned to ensure they are purposeful, appropriately sequenced and relevant to individual learner pathways. Learners are provided with opportunities to engage with a range of providers, including further education colleges, independent training providers and apprenticeship organisations, alongside other appropriate provision that may form part of their transition into adult life. Opportunities include visiting providers, provider-led sessions within college and engagement with both staff and current learners, enabling learners to gain realistic insight into different settings. We recognise that meaningful encounters require preparation and follow-up to maximise their impact. Learners are supported in advance to understand the purpose of each encounter and are given structured opportunities to reflect on their experiences, enabling them to develop a clearer understanding of what different pathways involve and how they align to their own goals. This supports informed decision-making and builds confidence in navigating transition.	

Transition planning is a key component of our approach, and we begin this process early to ensure that learners, families and professionals have sufficient time to explore options and make well-informed decisions. Encounters with providers are closely aligned to this process, ensuring that next steps are considered in a coordinated and personalised way.

Through this structured and individualised approach, learners develop a realistic understanding of post-college opportunities and are supported to progress towards destinations that are appropriate, aspirational and sustainable.

8. Personal guidance

Every learner should have opportunities for guidance meetings with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of provider staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These meetings should be available for all learners whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all learners but should be scheduled to meet individual needs. The careers leader should work closely with the careers adviser, SEND coordinator (SENDCO) and other key staff to ensure personal guidance is effective and embedded in the careers programme.

- Every learner should have at least one personal guidance meeting with a careers adviser. Meetings should be scheduled in the careers programme to meet the needs of learners.
- Information about personal guidance support and how to access it should be communicated to learners, parents and carers, and other stakeholders, including through the provider website.

Oakwood’s Stance on Benchmark 8

At Oakwood Specialist College, all learners are supported to access high-quality, independent and impartial careers guidance as an integral part of the wider careers programme. This provision is designed to support learners at key points of decision-making and to ensure that they are able to make informed, realistic and aspirational choices about their future.

We work in partnership with Future Smart Careers to provide professional careers guidance delivered by Level 6 qualified advisers. Learners are offered personal guidance interviews, scheduled in line with individual need and progression points, ensuring that guidance is timely, relevant and responsive to each learner’s stage of development. Where appropriate, learners receive ongoing guidance to support evolving aspirations and decision-making across their time at college.

Guidance is highly personalised and aligned to each learner’s Education, Health and Care Plan outcomes and Preparation for Adulthood pathways. It forms part of a coordinated approach involving the careers team, teaching staff, families and external professionals, ensuring that learners are supported holistically and that advice is consistent with wider planning.

Parents and carers are actively encouraged to be involved in the guidance process, supporting shared understanding and informed decision-making. Information about careers guidance and how it can be accessed is clearly communicated to learners, families and stakeholders through multiple channels, including the college website.

Through this structured and inclusive approach, learners are supported to develop greater clarity about their future pathways, increased confidence in decision-making and a stronger sense of ownership over their next steps. This ensures that personal guidance contributes meaningfully to positive and sustained outcomes beyond college.

Date of Last Review	To be reviewed/updated	Owner
01/07/2026	01/07/2027	Dan Miliffe, Head of Careers and futures