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Gatsby careers benchmark north east implementation pilot: interim evaluation (2015-2017)

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Gatsby Careers Benchmark North East Implementation Pilot: Interim Evaluation (2015-2017)

RESEARCH DIGEST

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ABSTRACT

This report presents interim evaluation findings on the implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks (herewith referred to as the Benchmarks) for good career guidance with a sample of 16 pilot schools and colleges (herewith referred to as education providers) in the North East of England. These interim findings report progress made against the Benchmarks during the course of the pilot (autumn 2015 to autumn 2017), the enablers and barriers faced, and the impact of the Benchmarks on learners' career readiness and attainment.

The interim findings suggest the following:

- **Timescale - Schools and colleges involved were able to make significant strides towards fully meeting most, if not all, Benchmarks within two years.** To date Benchmark 2 (**Learning from career and labour market information**) and Benchmark 7 (**Encounters with FE and HE**) have seen the largest increase in the number of pilot education providers fully achieving them. Benchmark 3 (**Addressing the needs of every pupil**) and Benchmark 4 (**Linking curriculum to careers**) have the least number of pilot education providers fully achieving them.
- **Positive impact on learners.** Learners show an increase in some aspects of career readiness and tentative increases in some aspects of GCSE attainment.
- **Effective implementation of the Benchmarks.** This was enabled by the existence of a regional facilitator to support pilot education providers and strong provider leadership and robust organisational infrastructures. Key barriers were a lack of time and space (in the curriculum), a lack of funding and a lack of commitment at senior leadership level, which impacted on achieving a cultural shift in some education providers.
- **Regional impact.** The implementation of the Benchmarks is impacting more widely in the region with non-pilot education providers forming links with pilot providers to seek support on developing good career guidance in their settings. Furthermore, wider stakeholders such as local employers and providers of careers education were also using the Benchmarks to review and develop their services to schools/colleges.
- **Emerging challenges.** A noticeable challenge was how the term 'meaningful', in relation to encounters with employers and employees, was interpreted and how education providers monitor provision of such encounters.

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INTRODUCTION

PROJECT CONTEXT

As young people transition from school into the world of work, they encounter a complex labour market which can be difficult to decode. However, 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. Career guidance seeks to support young people as they embark on these transitions and to provide them with the skills to decode the range of options available. In 2013, the then government had introduced a systemic change in educational policy which gave responsibility for providing careers guidance to schools and colleges. Schools and colleges required help to do this effectively. In 2014, the Gatsby Charitable Foundation published a report "*Good Career Guidance*". This report drew together existing research, explored good practice overseas and examined the current state of career guidance practice in both independent schools and the state sector in England. It details eight Benchmarks for schools and colleges to use which describe high quality school-based careers programmes:

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 and employees
6. Experiences of workplaces
7. Encounters with further education (FE) and higher education (HE)
8. Personal guidance

The importance of good career guidance in England has been recognised by the Government with the creation of the Careers & Enterprise Company, in the adoption of the Gatsby Benchmarks of good career guidance in the Government's new careers strategy in 2017, and in the provision of funding for Careers Leaders and Career Hubs across England.

The implementation of these eight Benchmarks was tested in a pilot, funded by the Gatsby Foundation, over two academic years (2015/2016 – 2016/2017) in a mixed sample of schools and colleges in the North East of England. This report presents the interim findings of an evaluation of this pilot in those schools and colleges (herewith referred to as education providers).

AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation aims to document a systematic attempt by education providers to implement all eight Benchmarks and establish what impacts might result from the implementation of the Benchmarks. The aims of this interim report are to:

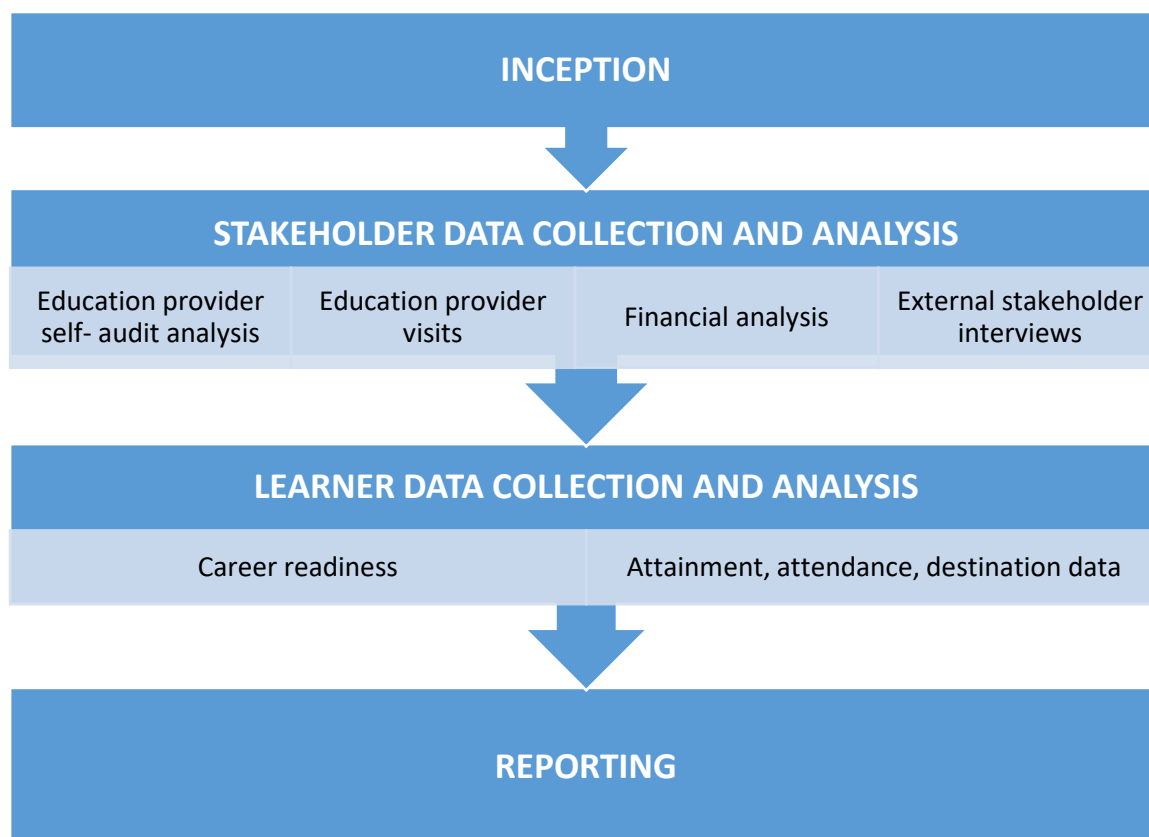
1. Document the progress made by education providers in achieving the eight Benchmarks between autumn 2015 and autumn 2017.
2. Describe the impact of this progress on the learners.
3. Explore the perceptions of education providers and wider stakeholders regarding enablers and barriers to the implementation of the Benchmarks.

METHODOLOGY

DESIGN

The report uses data collected in autumn 2015 (start of the pilot), autumn 2016 (relating to the end of first year of pilot) and autumn 2017 (relating to the end of the second, and final, year of the pilot). There will be two further data collection points (autumn 2018 and autumn 2019) presented in the final evaluation. A mixed methods approach has been adopted using multiple data types and sources to examine process, progress and impact (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 METHODOLOGY



THE PILOT EDUCATION PROVIDERS

A varied sample of providers were selected to take part in the pilot:

- 3 further education colleges
- 13 secondary schools
 - One geographically isolated school
 - One Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)
 - Nine academies
 - Two foundation schools
 - One community school
 - Three 11-16 and five 11-18 providers
- Schools also varied in size and in their Ofsted ratings.

MEASURES

At each education provider data was collected using a range of measures:

- Education provider self-assessment audit of Benchmark achievement (this assesses whether the provider is meeting each of the underpinning criteria for each of the eight Benchmarks)
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus groups
- Psychometrics (Student Career Readiness Index)
- Attainment, learner destinations, and attendance data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individualised Learner Records (ILR)
- Financial data

Data was collected from members of the senior leadership team, Careers Leaders, curriculum teachers and learners from Year 8 upwards; where possible data was also collected from parents and governors. In the wider community data was collected from the pilot project team, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Enterprise Advisers, and external stakeholders such as local employers as shown in the table below:

TABLE 1 MEASURES AND PARTICIPANTS

| Participants | Semi-structured interviews | Focus groups | Psychometrics (Student Career Readiness Index) | Benchmark self-audit | National Pupil Data base/DfE data | Financial Analysis |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|--|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| School/college leadership | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| Bursars | | | | | | ✓ |
| Careers Leaders | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| Teachers | ✓ | | | | | |
| Learners | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Parents | ✓ | | | | | |
| Governors | ✓ | | | | | |
| Pilot facilitator | ✓ | | | | | |
| LEP representatives | ✓ | | | | | |
| Other external stakeholders | ✓ | | | | | |

KEY FINDINGS

ACHIEVING THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS

By the end of the pilot all 16 education providers had made progress against all 8 Benchmarks

The pilot demonstrated the significant progress that can be made in **all** kinds of education providers (including schools, colleges, PRU's, academies and Local Authority maintained) when implementing the Benchmarks in just two years. At the beginning of the pilot not one of the education providers was achieving more than three of the Benchmarks. However, by the end of the pilot, fourteen of the education providers were achieving 6-8 of the Benchmarks and three were achieving all eight. Progress was also therefore made

in the PRU and by students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, SEND, in mainstream providers.

The Benchmarks which were most and least fully achieved in autumn 2015, autumn 2016 and autumn 2017 (Figure 2)

At the start of the pilot in autumn 2015:

- Benchmark 3 (**Addressing the needs of each pupil**) was the Benchmark that the fewest number of education providers (n=0) were achieving.
- Benchmark 6 (**Experiences of Workplaces**) was the Benchmark that most education providers (n=6) were fully achieving.

By the end of the first year of the pilot in autumn 2016:

- Benchmark 3 (**Addressing the needs of each pupil**) was still the Benchmark that fewest education providers (n=2) were achieving.
- Benchmark 7 (**Experiences of HE and FE**) became the Benchmark that most education providers (n=10) were achieving.

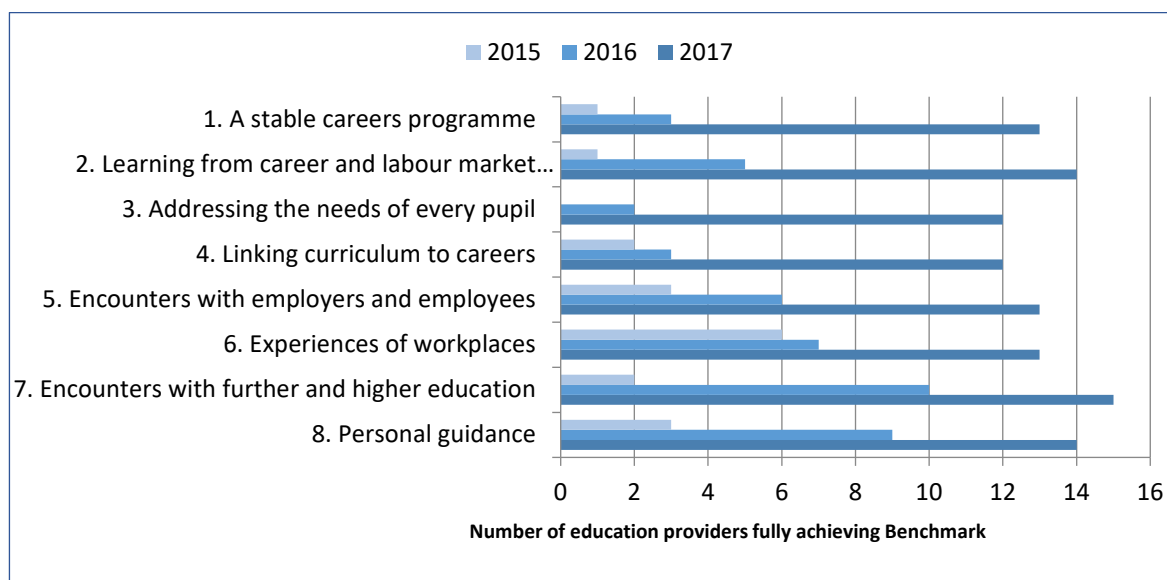
By the end of the second year of the pilot in autumn 2017:

- Every Benchmark was fully achieved by at least 12 education providers by the end of the pilot
- Benchmarks 3 and 4 (**Addressing the needs of each pupil** and **Linking curriculum to careers**) were the Benchmarks achieved by fewest providers (n=12 each).
- Benchmark 7 was fully achieved by the highest number of providers (n=15).

The Benchmarks which saw the biggest improvements by the end of the pilot

The numbers of education providers fully achieving each Benchmark at the start (autumn 2015), middle (autumn 2016) and end of the pilot (autumn 2017) are shown in Figure 2. Benchmark 2 (**Learning from career and labour market information**) and Benchmark 7 (**Encounters with HE and FE**) have seen the greatest increase in the number of education providers fully achieving them. They were fully achieved by only 1 and 2 providers respectively at the very start of the pilot but a further 13 providers had fully achieved each by the end of the pilot.

FIGURE 2 NUMBER OF EDUCATION PROVIDERS FULLY ACHIEVING EACH BENCHMARK IN AUTUMN 2015, AUTUMN 2016 AND AUTUMN 2017



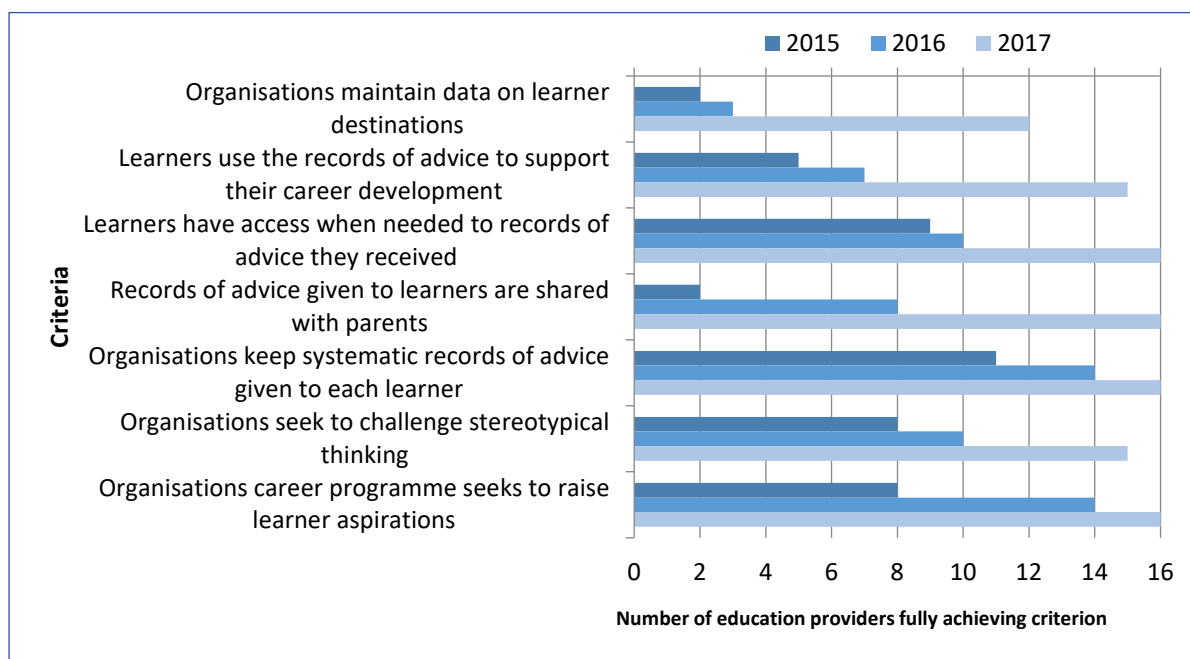
Benchmarks not being met by the end of the pilot

Each Benchmark has a number of underlying criteria which providers audited themselves against. The criteria for Benchmark 3 (**Addressing the needs of each pupil**) can be broken down into the criterion below:

- Organisations maintain data on learner destinations
- Learners use the records of advice to support their career development
- Learners have access when needed to records of advice they received
- Records of advice given to learners are shared with parents
- Organisations keep systematic records of advice given to each learner
- Organisations seek to challenge stereotypical thinking
- Organisations career programme seeks to raise learner aspirations

Figure 3 shows all the underpinning criteria for Benchmark 3 and the number of providers fully achieving them at each data collection point.

FIGURE 3 NUMBER OF PROVIDERS FULLY MEETING EACH CRITERION FOR BENCHMARK 3 IN 2015, 2016 AND 2017



As Figure 3 shows, the underlying criterion which was most challenging to achieve for Benchmark 3 (**Addressing the needs of each pupil**) was the collection of destination data; four education providers were still not fully meeting this criterion by 2017.

The underlying criteria for Benchmark 4 (**Linking curriculum to careers**) in the self-audit assessment used in this study (NB these do not map directly onto the new Compass tool as Compass was developed after the pilot audit) are as follows:

- All teachers link curriculum learning with careers (subject teachers highlight careers links within their subject).
- Science subject teachers highlight the relevance of science for a wide range of future careers
- Maths subject teachers highlight the relevance of their subjects for a wide range of future careers
- Non-science and maths subject's teachers highlight the relevance of their subjects for a wide range of future career paths.
- By the end of Y9 every pupil has had the opportunity to learn how different Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects help people gain entry to (and be more effective workers within) a range of careers.

The criteria for this Benchmark appeared to be more difficult to achieve than criteria for other Benchmarks. By 2017 not one criterion had been fully achieved by all providers. In fact for each criterion at least 2 providers had been unable to fully achieve it by 2017.

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING THE BENCHMARKS

Education providers described a number of **enablers** which have supported them in achieving the Benchmarks:

- **The very existence and structure of the Benchmarks**
 - The Benchmarks provide a clear framework which facilitates systematic review and development in career guidance provision.
- **The fundamental role of a regional facilitator**
 - The facilitator of the pilot has a regional role (this model was also adopted by the Careers and Enterprise Company Enterprise Advisor Network and is also used for its Careers Hubs) co-ordinating and brokering relationships and networks between education providers, employers and third party providers, allowing a wide range of organisations and parties to work effectively and efficiently together.
 - The creation of a formal support network for education providers and sharing of good practice.
 - Making use of regional schemes, projects and networks including the North East Collaborative Outreach Programme and STEM Inspiration programme.
- **Institutional leadership and infrastructure**
 - A skilled Careers Leader with the authority to make changes in the education provider was critical for improvement.
 - Explicit commitment from senior leadership and the distribution of accountability for careers provision throughout the leadership and governance structures. Governors and senior leaders request updates and reports on progress against the Benchmarks, which fosters regular strategic conversations about careers education.
- **Training staff to increase their knowledge**
 - Increased knowledge of provision and routes particularly apprenticeships, including higher and degree apprenticeships, was disseminated to all staff.

The **barriers** were identified as:

- **Multiple and competing initiatives**
 - In the first year of the pilot working towards the Benchmarks was being seen as 'another initiative' rather than a whole school priority. Staff involved in the 'implementing the Benchmarks pilot' were therefore having to manage conflicting priorities as there were other external projects – such as local initiatives and outreach schemes – that they were being asked to be involved with. Staff were therefore having to prioritise, and this sometimes had a detrimental impact on time available for implementing the Benchmarks. This barrier has become less problematic over time as the provision of career guidance has shifted from a new initiative to being integrated and embedded within the education provider.
- **Leadership and management decisions**
 - Some providers lacked institutional leadership and commitment toward achieving the Benchmarks; appropriate commitment at the strategic and resourcing levels was required particularly for Benchmark 6 (**Experiences of workplaces**).

- **Curriculum issues**
 - Some subjects can be perceived to lack a relevance to issues of work and employment by education providers, for example history – this can impact negatively on their capacity to fully achieve Benchmark 4 (**Linking curriculum to careers**).
 - Whole staff buy in and expertise (particularly around Benchmark 4 **Linking curriculum to careers**) is difficult and absolutely requires strong leadership, support and a cultural shift.
- **Time and funding**
 - Finding time in the curriculum to carry out visits to employers and to HE and FE is difficult.
 - Funding for these visits (transport costs) can be challenging, particularly for education providers who are geographically isolated.
 - Education providers with large cohorts found experiences of work particularly difficult to manage in terms of both time and funding.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS' CAREER READINESS SKILLS

A psychometric scale was developed to assess learner's career readiness (the Student Career Readiness Index, SCRI). This has been operationalised as the knowledge, skills and attitudes to map and plan for their futures and is assessed through four sub scales; career management skills, transition skills, work readiness and information and help seeking. SCRI data was collected from year 8, 11 and year 13 learners giving 1673 responses in 2016 and 2299 in 2017 (see Table 2). The responses are not matched at an individual level over data collection points.

TABLE 2 NUMBER OF RESPONSES FROM YEAR GROUPS IN 2016 AND 2017

| Data collection year | Year Group | | | |
|----------------------|------------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Year 8 | Year 11 | Year 13 | Total |
| 2016 | 682 | 616 | 375 | 1673 |
| 2017 | 897 | 883 | 519 | 2299 |
| Total | 1579 | 1499 | 894 | 3972 |

- The key findings were at the end of the pilot (autumn 2017):
 - Learners sampled in autumn 2017 reported significantly higher total career readiness scores than those sampled in autumn 2016 (in non-matched samples). This holds for each of the year groups.
 - Learners from FE colleges reported higher career readiness scores than learners in academies or local authority maintained schools - this was due to them

having greater scores on the transition skills sub-scale of career readiness. However, learners from further education colleges were *less* likely than learners from schools, when controlling for age, to have done career development activities (this does not include the activity 'visiting a college or accessing information about them'). This may be a combination of increased organisational complexity and learner discretion in FE colleges.

- As expected, Year 8 learners reported doing significantly fewer activities associated with the Gatsby Benchmarks compared to Year 13 learners who reported doing significantly more activities. Year 8 learners also reported significantly lower career readiness scores than any other year group at the end of pilot in autumn 2017. This indicates that for learners attending schools career readiness is acquired through career guidance.
- Learners from education providers with an Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement reported doing significantly fewer activities than those from education providers with a Good or Outstanding Ofsted rating.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS' ATTAINMENT

Data from the National Pupil Database (NPD, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016) was used in a number of analyses to explore changes in attainment at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. A 'control' comparison group of schools and colleges was constructed which was matched to the pilot sample on a number of characteristics including school type, local authority, Ofsted rating, number of learners and % of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Free School Meals (FSM) learners. The key finding was:

- In 2016, the pilot education providers showed an increase in the number of A, B and C grades achieved at GCSE compared to the NE comparator education providers and other education providers nationally.

At this point so early in the study it is impossible to determine whether the changes noted here form part of a longer trend or are within the 'normal' amount of variation typically found over time. Results from the next two years of the evaluation will help clarify whether these findings are a consistently observable trend or random fluctuation within normal boundaries.

IMPACT OF THE BENCHMARKS ACROSS THE REGION

The Benchmarks as a useful framework for developing career guidance policy and practice

The pilot project was located within the NE Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) who placed the Benchmarks at the centre of the regional Strategic Economic Plan. This provided a platform from which to develop shared values and approaches with a wide range of individual and organisational stakeholders in the region. The Benchmarks introduced a set of concepts and language that, by the end of the pilot, were being used across a range of sectors and settings in the region. There appeared to be both consistency and coherence in how different stakeholders referred to the Benchmarks, which suggests that shared understanding was embedded by the end of the pilot.

Both the pilot education providers and the external partners agree that the Benchmarks provide a clear framework that has allowed them to systematically review and develop their approach to different aspects of career guidance and personal guidance practice. External partners have explicitly shaped their support offers using the language and content of particular Benchmarks. This enables education providers to better see how external support activities align with specific Benchmarks and therefore which to use in achieving each Benchmark.

The value of the Benchmarks as a framework for careers education has spread beyond the pilot providers to non-pilot providers, with other education providers in the region forming relationships and networks to help guide their developing provision. Interest has also spread to primary schools who were keen to have their own version of the Benchmarks. The North East LEP will be piloting this idea in 2019.

The significant role of provider leadership and regional leadership for effective delivery and outcomes

By the end of the pilot, the project facilitator, the Enterprise Coordinators and the Enterprise Adviser Network had created a network of individuals and organisations that provide various forms of career guidance (mapped against the Benchmarks) within the NE LEP. This allowed the LEP and the facilitator to signpost education providers to these providers against specific Benchmarks (and vice versa). The education providers commented that the implementation of the Benchmarks, including working with external partners at a regional level, had impacted positively on their strategic understanding, thinking and planning around careers education. Where senior leadership and Governors strongly supported the Careers Leads, strategy was more effectively operationalised.

The education providers were positive and highly complimentary about the support received from the project facilitator. They felt this role was central to the success of the pilot. The facilitator had helped them to interpret the Benchmarks and to recognise the positive careers work that they were already achieving. The LEP, the Careers & Enterprise Company and the Enterprise Advisers have all supported the facilitator in this role and have added a second layer of support by:

- Creating a community of shared knowledge, networks and practice
- Facilitating activities which fulfil specific Benchmarks

Careers leadership within education providers has played an essential role in moving careers guidance from a peripheral activity to a central role in learner development. A Careers Leader which oversees provision has facilitated more cohesive and comprehensive provision and the support of senior leadership has helped develop the importance of careers guidance for all staff.

EMERGENT CHALLENGES

- **The definition of 'meaningful' encounters with employers and employees**
 - There are some indicators that education providers interpret the word 'meaningful' differently. Increased clarity about what constitutes a 'meaningful' encounter may be required to ensure that learners can obtain as much as possible from encounters with employers, employees, further and higher education.
- **Effective monitoring of learners' career activities**
 - At the end of the pilot many providers were planning to improve systems for monitoring, tracking, reviewing and evaluating progress against the Benchmarks. The monitoring and evaluation of most Benchmarks was at best challenging and at worst led to providers only partially achieving criteria and Benchmarks. This was particularly the case for monitoring/tracking destinations and for monitoring the curriculum-careers linkages across the whole provider.
- **Resourcing**
 - It was common for larger education providers to find it more difficult to meet the requirements of certain Benchmarks, for example large numbers of learners limited the extent to which education providers felt they could provide work experience or specialist personal career guidance to each individual due to the perceived costs associated with this provision.
 - The resources required (both financial and curriculum time) present a challenge for some leadership teams when it comes to implementing the Benchmarks, particularly Benchmark 6 (**Experiences of workplaces**) and to some extent Benchmark 7 (**Encounters with FE and HE**). Time for trips out and funding for transport, particularly for more remote providers, continues to be challenging.
- **Some Benchmarks were harder to make progress against than others**
 - Benchmark 4 (**Linking curriculum to careers**) remains challenging for all schools because to fully achieve it requires an organisational culture shift. Many teaching staff are still reluctant, under-confident or lack the required knowledge when it comes to incorporating careers into their curriculum subjects. Having strong leadership and CPD opportunities has helped. One criterion in Benchmark 3 (**Addressing the needs of each pupil**), that of collecting destination data for all learners, was still only partially met by several providers.
- **Some education providers are more challenged than others in meeting Benchmark 6 (Experiences of workplaces)**
 - Rural and isolated education providers have logistic and opportunity challenges when attempting to meet Benchmark 6 because there are fewer businesses and employers and they are more geographically disparate. Learners from all providers frequently showed concern about travelling outside of their immediate locale but often needed to in order to secure relevant work experience. Some providers had made arrangements with local universities so learners could complete work experience in departments with suitable vocational areas, for example several providers used the Life Centre in Newcastle University which has laboratories.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings so far indicate a significant shift in education provider's knowledge, understanding and attitudes towards careers provision. Using the Benchmarks has resulted in all the pilot education providers making a substantial improvement in their provision, although there is variation in the extent to which each Benchmark has been fully met by all providers.

Learners at pilot education providers show some increases to career readiness and attainment. However, these findings need to be interpreted with caution until shown to be part of a longer term trend.

The progress made so far is the result of the inherent usefulness of the Benchmarks as a framework for review and development. The other aspects required for successful implementation appear to be having a regional facilitator, the coming together of education providers to share good practice, and strong institutional leadership and infrastructures, including Careers Leaders, within education providers. The challenges faced by providers in attempting to achieve the Benchmarks have been linked to a lack of strong leadership, commitment and an availability of curriculum time.

The implementation of the Benchmarks is impacting more widely across the whole region through the LEP's 'North East Ambition' programme which commits to supporting all education providers to reach the Benchmarks. Non-pilot education providers are also forming links to pilot providers to seek help and guidance. Further external stakeholders such as local employers and providers of careers education, information, advice and guidance are also using the Benchmarks to review and develop their offerings. The model used in the North East has now been adopted as part of the government's Careers Strategy, published in December 2017. Along with training Careers Leaders the Careers & Enterprise Company have also been tasked with establishing forty Careers Hubs across the country which will adopt the regional coordinator model developed in the North East.

There are emerging challenges for education providers and for the successful implementation of the Benchmarks nationally. Effective monitoring and tracking was a common issue across all the Benchmarks and providers varied in how easy or challenging they found meeting some Benchmarks. Resources were key here and the sustainability of fully delivering all eight Benchmarks is an area which will be considered in further phases of the evaluation.