

PERSONAL CAREER GUIDANCE

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLES: NOVEMBER 2019 – JUNE 2020

RYAN GIBSON

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The Gatsby Charitable Foundation
The Peak, 5 Wilton Road, London SW1V 1AP
T +44 (0)20 7410 0330 F +44 (0)20 7410 0332

www.gatsby.org.uk

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DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation but serve to reflect the discussions that were had with the author.

INTRODUCTION

The Gatsby Benchmarks for good career guidance¹ were adopted as part of the Government's statutory guidance for secondary schools and colleges in England in 2017. The Gatsby Foundation (Gatsby) has been investigating how practice in personal guidance (Gatsby Benchmark 8) is developing, what enablers lead to success, and what significant barriers remain to be overcome. As part of a programme of qualitative and quantitative research, Gatsby sought to gain a snapshot of current personal guidance practice through a series of roundtable discussions with Careers Leaders.

A total of 33 Careers Leaders from mainstream schools, colleges and special schools attended three roundtables between November 2019 and June 2020. The first of these roundtables was held as part of a Careers Leader regional meeting convened by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) on 29 November 2019, with the majority of attendees from mainstream schools, along with representatives from Further Education (FE) colleges and a special school. Insights from Careers Leaders at this roundtable indicate specific trends in practice in FE colleges and special schools which merited further investigation. Additional roundtables specifically for Careers Leaders in FE and special schools were organised and took place online in June 2020. These later roundtables also examined how the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting personal guidance provision.

All three roundtables were convened and are summarised below on behalf of Gatsby by Ryan Gibson, National System Leader: Careers at the Academies Enterprise Trust and former facilitator of the Gatsby Benchmark pilot for the North East LEP.

¹ <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following key themes emerged from the three roundtables.

- Across all types of institution, there was a fairly even split between those who employed careers advisers internally and externally to deliver personal guidance.
- There were varying approaches to the time given for personal guidance interviews – most commonly 30 minutes in length – and to how the quality of provision was assessed – including through student feedback, observing interviews, and sampling of meeting notes and student action plans.
- Mainstream schools and colleges were in principle overwhelmingly in favour of securing universal access to 1:1 interviews with a Level 6-qualified careers adviser. But this was often difficult to achieve in practice due to funding pressures and other practicalities (such as when an external adviser is only present in school for a limited number of days per year).
- Funding pressures on FE colleges are particularly acute and this, coupled with the logistical challenges of a large student body, led FE Careers Leaders to report that securing every student a 1:1 interview with a Level 6-qualified careers adviser was financially very challenging. As such, the vast majority of colleges consulted used a 'triage' system, using staff without a Level 6 qualification as the first source of information and support, with those in particular need referred to Level 6 staff.
- Special schools frequently cited a shortage of careers advisers with the experience to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). In response, some employed careers advisers internally with this expertise; others relied on a mixture of internal staff without formal career guidance qualifications to work together to support young people and their families. Special schools also cited the importance of careers advisers having the time to form a strong relationship with young people with SEND as particularly important for achieving positive outcomes.
- Making the case for personal guidance to school and college leaders was seen as critical. Evidence of impact, and of the need for specially qualified staff, is key to ensure institutional buy-in and to reduce difficulties with securing sufficient funding. Some Careers Leaders described this as an annual 'battle'.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted provision of personal guidance, although in the FE colleges and schools consulted there had been a widespread adoption of digital delivery methods as part of the transition to remote learning. FE colleges and schools anticipated retaining some of their digital delivery in a blended model in the 2020/21 academic year, even if all COVID-19 restrictions were removed. Special schools favoured a return to face-to-face delivery as quickly as practicable, as their students tended to respond best to this method.

ROUNDTABLE I – CROSS-SECTOR

Held at the North East Careers Leaders' regional meeting, 29 November 2019

Attendees

Careers Leaders from three FE Colleges, twelve mainstream secondary schools / academies, and one special school; plus two school Careers Hub Coordinators and one college Careers Hub Coordinator.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS: ROUNDTABLE I

Internal v external delivery

There was approximately a 50/50 split between those schools / colleges who employ their own career guidance professionals and those who commission externally.

Using Level 6 qualified careers advisers

It was widely agreed that access to a Level 6 trained careers adviser is very important for all students. However, attendees stressed the importance of a Careers Leader's professional discretion to determine the rationale for their approach to personal guidance and the subsequent model they develop for implementation in their context. This could include group interviews, trained tutors, curriculum staff and Level 2-4 trained guidance professionals in giving guidance, rather than one approach.

The following examples were given by Careers Leaders, to demonstrate that many different professionals can add value in terms of guidance:

- All three colleges used their tutorial programme for tutors to deliver a first level of personal guidance. Tutors have received training, with other guidance staff available who are qualified up to Level 4. A Level 6+ guidance professional was still available for referrals or targeted interviews with particular students.
- All the colleges mentioned that highly qualified vocational and technical staff in their curriculum faculties are often working with businesses on a daily basis, and are very well-placed to provide guidance on progression pathways.
- Schools with relatively high proportions of students with SEND commented that good practice in relation to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) highlights that many professionals can feed into a career plan that guides students' progression.

Some attendees acknowledged that 'meaningful' guidance could be different for different students. For example, one school commented that student feedback about 1:1 interviews had encouraged them to develop a model where students were seen in groups (such as those who are sure about sixth form; those who are planning to go to university; and those who are interested in apprenticeships). 1:1 guidance with a Level 6 adviser is still available, but this is done on a targeted or referral basis, rather than through universal interviews.

The special school Careers Leader highlighted that Careers Leaders and teachers in special schools usually had established, positive relationships with students, which was difficult for external careers advisers to replicate. Prior knowledge and understanding of students' interests and aspirations and the local context meant that internal staff were often able to offer more personalised, relevant guidance

than external agencies. It was recommended that specific training around SEND as part of, or supplementary to, the Level 6 qualification, could help with this.

Timing / Duration of Interviews

Timing and duration of interviews varied. Most interviews in schools were 30-60 minutes in duration. Most interviews in secondary schools took place either towards the end of year 10 or the first half of year 11, with most students receiving an action plan.

With additional resource, all attendees reported they would like to start career guidance interviews when students are younger and to ensure coverage at all key transition points, including Key Stage 4 (KS4) options, rather than the current focus on KS5 options and post-18 options. A number of Careers Leaders reported increasing pressure to ensure year 11 did not miss lessons for any careers provision.

Financial pressures

If unlimited funding was available, all Careers Leaders reported that they would have as many Level 6+ qualified advisers as possible to meet the needs of their students. However, this was not the reality: lack of understanding about the benefits of personal guidance and competing funding pressures meant that school and college leaders often regarded guidance provision as costly. Many schools in particular commented that they had to 'battle' each year with leadership teams to secure funding and time for personal guidance.

Some Careers Leaders also cited anxieties around future funding streams, as in many cases provision for personal guidance in the region was underpinned or supplemented by funding from Uni Connect (previously the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)) or a Careers Hub. Where this was the case, Careers Leaders anticipated problems delivering sustained high-quality guidance if this funding were to be disrupted. However, many schools had already had to think about how they sustain their personal guidance provision. Some schools and colleges were moving towards (or planning to move towards) training a staff member internally to deliver guidance. This was due to the model offering them greater flexibility of implementation; more consistency of approach; better understanding of students; the opportunity to build ongoing relationships with students; and the opportunity to quality-assure guidance in line with school standards.

In some cases, financial pressures when using external careers advisers lead to practical difficulties. Some Careers Leaders commented that they concentrated student interviews at the end of year 10 or the beginning of year 11, not because it was necessarily best for students, but because limited funding meant they had to arrange all interviews for a narrow time period (such as contracting with a provider for 25 days of careers adviser time). Several schools with sixth forms commented that they had moved to a system of referrals, or interviews taking place on request, because of financial constraints, with one school adopting group interviews.

Furthermore, college Careers Leaders reported that the scale of the number of students they had made it financially very challenging for every student to have a 1:1 interview with a Level 6 adviser. This is explored further in the FE college roundtable – see Roundtable 2.

The special school also highlighted how restrictions and implications around funding could affect impartiality. For example, even if a student chose the 'best' college for their aspiration and to meet their needs following impartial guidance, funding for

their college place would often not be granted if this college were outside the student's Local Authority area. In this Careers Leader's view, it brought the value of personal guidance into question if certain destinations for young people could not always be supported by local funding arrangements.

Quality assurance

Careers Leaders were invested in developing high quality provision for students – rather than only thinking about 'what counts' to deliver Benchmark 8 – and highlighted the need for consistency across all training programmes, to ensure a shared collective understanding.

Several schools had developed their own bespoke approaches to quality assuring guidance provision. This included student feedback; observing interviews; looking at the updated training record of careers advisers; and sampling meeting notes and individual action plans. The North East LEP had recorded audio from some interviews to highlight the importance of personal guidance from a school and student perspective. These had been shared at network meetings, where they were received very positively.

Some Careers Leaders reported being confused by inconsistent messaging given by different organisations. Some organisations referred to 'going beyond Gatsby' and some organisations seemed to differ in what it meant to achieve Benchmark 8, and therefore what constituted required or good practice was unclear. It was felt that greater clarification would lead to more consistent interpretation and application of the Benchmark.

ROUNDTABLE 2 – FE COLLEGES

22 June 2020

Attendees

Careers Leaders from seven FE Colleges from across England.

Background

Colleges that took part in the roundtable discussion were of varying sizes, and a combination of single colleges on single sites, single colleges on multiple sites, and college groups (where several individual colleges are part of a single collective college group). The largest college group at the roundtable represented six colleges. The largest number of students served by a college group represented at the roundtable was 22,000 learners. The smallest single college had 1,400 learners and the largest single college had 16,000 learners.

All attendees recognised the term Careers Leader – although several held different job titles including Head of Careers, Students Services Team Leader, and Director of Student Experience. All Careers Leaders were either a member of the leadership team or reported to a member of the leadership team with strategic responsibility for careers as part of a portfolio of duties. In all cases, the Careers Leader oversaw a careers team, which included provision for personal guidance (including careers advisers).

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS: ROUNDTABLE 2

Using Level 6 qualified careers advisers

There was full awareness of the Career Development Institute (CDI) recommendation on Benchmark 8 that careers advisers should hold a Level 6 qualification in career guidance; this was cited as ‘the Gatsby requirement’. Colleges valued the Level 6 qualification as an indicator of professionalism and parity of esteem with other qualified colleagues.

Opinion was split regarding whether every adviser needed to be Level 6 qualified. The vast majority of attendees offered a triage system, with tutors, welfare officers and mentors offering guidance and support, Level 3/4 careers advisers in place to support all learners, and access to Level 6 advisers reserved for those with significant needs. This triage model was primarily the consequence of resource and capacity issues, and the scale of colleges.

One college commented that not all students needed a guidance interview, as some were sure about what they want to do and the steps to take to get there. In this college, an interview with a senior leader was all that took place. However, the majority of colleges disagreed with this comment, and felt that ideally every student should have a guidance interview.

Current personal guidance models

Every college commented that due to their size and associated staffing, they did not have the capacity to offer every student a 1:1 guidance interview with a Level 6 trained adviser. As reported above, most colleges offered a triage system.

Colleges primarily employed internal careers advisers. One college exclusively contracted in one external careers adviser, and another college contracted in

two external advisers in addition to their three internal advisers. When recruiting external advisers, attendees cited seeking out advisers with a Level 6 qualification. To provide additional capacity, colleges sometimes contracted in external careers advisers at certain times of the year (for example after results day). Any student who requested a personal guidance interview with a careers adviser or who was referred to the careers team did receive a 1:1 interview.

On average, the colleges attending the discussion estimated that 25% of their students received a 1:1 personal guidance interview with a Level 6 qualified careers adviser (for some the proportion was higher and for some it was lower). The others were supported through methods including workshops; group guidance sessions; career conversations with tutors; careers information in the curriculum; careers events; and external careers platforms.

Preferred delivery models

Every college indicated that whilst they thought their model of personal guidance was good, it could be improved. In that sense, every college reflected that their model was driven partly out of necessity rather than designed wholly by choice. Whilst there was a debate as to whether every learner needed to have a 1:1 interview, there was a consensus that if resource, time, scale, capacity and value were not an issue, then every college would ensure 1:1 interviews with Level 6+ careers advisers took place with all students.

There was a consensus that, ideally, Gatsby Benchmark 8 would represent the minimum standard, with every learner receiving more than one guidance interview with a Level 6+ qualified adviser, so that discussions could have detailed follow-up and support.

Challenges

Attendees reported that the value leaders placed on personal guidance could be improved – in some cases it was seen as an additional expense. Leadership teams did recognise the importance of personal guidance interviews, but often this was often diminished in light of competing priorities (such as teaching and learning outcomes, and financial constraints). Colleges commented that more needed to be done to engage leaders about the value of personal guidance and what 'good' looks like, so that it is not seen as an 'add on' or something which is prioritised ahead of an Ofsted inspection, but embedded permanently.

Many colleges cited that resources were tight – some attendees had been through several restructures in recent years. This had resulted in streamlining of careers provision (sometimes improving effectiveness and sometimes reducing capacity). Colleges commented that resources would always be first directed towards teaching and learning, and a limited resource meant limitation in terms of the personal guidance provision which can be offered.

The quality assurance activities reported by colleges included observation of interviews, scrutiny of action plans, student surveys, and analysis of destination data. All colleges also held the matrix standard. However, there was no standard framework cited in relation to quality assurance of personal guidance, and this had led to variable approaches.

Opportunities

Attendees felt that the new Ofsted framework, and its focus on careers provision, was generally having a positive impact on personal guidance. Leaders were becoming more aware of the importance of personal guidance in whole-college improvement, and were taking greater interest in how the service was structured and the rationale for (and quality of) the offer. This increasing awareness also meant that personal guidance was increasingly seen as a strong driver of students' progression to positive destinations, with one Careers Leader describing destination data as the 'magic bullet' for engaging college leaders with the benefits of personal guidance.

One college commented that any increase in central funding for FE would provide an opportunity to enhance the personal guidance offer, enabling higher-level guidance for more students and increased training for careers advisers. One college was already adapting to add additional capacity to their guidance team by using their apprenticeship levy to train other staff (from lecturing and support roles) to Level 3 in career guidance. The integration of trained guidance professionals into curriculum teams and into wider teams (such as mentoring and brokerage) was expected to strengthen the overall personal guidance offer.

The impact of COVID-19

Online guidance had been offered by all colleges through various online platforms in response to remote learning due to COVID-19. Some students had responded well to this, but the vast majority had not been in contact for guidance.

As part of the wider careers programme, some Careers Leaders had regularly contacted students through 'lockdown surveys', including questions on careers information. Virtual careers events and online platforms had also been used by some careers advisers to support students to conduct careers research, and this was set to continue.

Attendees reflected that delivering telephone and e-guidance was a skill in itself which required specific training. Careers Leaders assumed they would need to develop a blended personal guidance offer in future, meaning careers advisers would need to be upskilled in various delivery methods. Students would also need to be supported to receive personal guidance in different ways.

ROUNDTABLE 3 – SPECIAL SCHOOLS

23 June 2020

Attendees

Careers Leaders (or members of staff with responsibility for careers) from ten special schools across England.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS: ROUNDTABLE 3

Using Level 6 qualified careers advisers

Attendees showed full awareness of the CDI recommendation for Level 6 qualified careers advisers in order to meet Benchmark 8; it was referred to as ‘the national requirement’. However, there was some confusion as to whether a careers adviser had to be external to be impartial – several thought an external adviser was part of the requirement, indicating that clearer messaging to special schools could be needed.

Current personal guidance models

There was a consensus that students with SEND related to ‘primacy’ and ‘recency’ – their first experience and their most recent experience. Therefore, it was considered crucial that personal guidance was not seen as a ‘one-off event’, but delivered as part of an embedded and ongoing whole-school programme in special schools. Attendees used a mixture of internal and external careers advisers, with a minority not accessing support from careers advisers at all.

External advisers – benefits and challenges

Attendees reported that where external advisers were used well, they spent a lot of time in school, were introduced to students and their families very early (even before the student joins the school) and their pictures were displayed around school, so that students and families became familiar with them and benefited from a consistent approach.

However, the challenge cited frequently regarding external advisers was the lack of training that some careers advisers had had in working with students with SEND, which impacted on the quality of the personal guidance. This was often framed as a lack of availability of appropriate careers advisers for special schools. Attendees also reported that the time schools could afford to buy in from a careers adviser was often not enough for the careers advisers to become familiar to students, and students therefore struggled to build a relationship. This lack of time also meant that careers advisers could only rarely be used to engage students’ families, which impacted on the effectiveness of provision – as special schools generally worked closely with parents to raise awareness and aspirations where appropriate. Several special schools were investigating sharing careers advisers between schools in order to reduce costs.

Internal advisers – benefits and challenges

Those who employed an internal careers adviser reported benefits including better opportunities to build a relationship with the student and their family, to understand their needs, and to ensure the student feels comfortable with the adviser. The limitations cited were primarily around ensuring internal staff had up-to-date knowledge of suitable progression opportunities, and a lack of specific career guidance training for SEND practitioners. An internal adviser was also considered likely to have multiple roles, which could restrict their available time for personal guidance.

Four special schools in attendance did not currently employ a careers adviser, either internally or externally, of which two stated that they were actively seeking a solution for this. These schools cited a lack of advisers with sufficient expertise to support students with SEND as the cause of their current arrangement. Those who were not seeking to employ a careers adviser favoured a more informal guidance system of 'internal experts' (such as early career coaches, specialist teachers, work experience coordinators, and transition and progression leads), working together to support each student and their family. In this scenario, personal guidance needs were addressed through discussions around progression and transition. These two schools felt that the guidance needs of their students were sufficiently being met by their existing approach.

The impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 had had a detrimental impact on personal guidance. Attendees reported that their students had struggled to engage with the concept and process of virtual personal guidance, and although telephone calls had worked better, they had not been as impactful as face-to-face support. Most career guidance interviews had been completed before remote learning became necessary. Special schools were uncertain about what the 2020/21 academic year would look like in relation to personal guidance, but the majority indicated they would prefer a return to face-to-face provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CAREERS LEADERS

Careers Leaders had the following recommendations for what would benefit their work to successfully coordinate personal guidance in schools and colleges.

1. Further guidance for Careers Leaders, outlining examples of different approaches to personal guidance which have been successful in different contexts. Any new resources could build on those already published by The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)² to explore approaches to quality assurance in personal guidance, how to support sharing of information between organisations at transition points, and integration between students' personal guidance interviews and the rest of the careers programme.
2. The value of personal guidance needs to be articulated more clearly, using existing evidence and a focus on the positive outcomes which personal guidance can lead to for young people. Examples of suitable evidence given by Careers Leaders included positive destinations; increased attainment; clearer understanding of available progression routes; improved wellbeing; and increased confidence in career management. This work could include the following.
 - a. Strong national messaging to school and college leaders about the importance and value of personal guidance, building on resources from the CEC and CDI,³ to help resist pressures on funding.
 - b. Inclusion of content on career guidance as part of initial teacher training. This would increase awareness of the value of personal guidance and career guidance in general.
 - c. Further research into the specific impact of Level 6 qualified careers advisers providing personal guidance in a SEND context, to generate evidence of impact that directly concerns the value of professional, impartial guidance in special schools.

The following recommendations were specifically raised by special school Careers Leaders:

3. Clear guidance for special schools to ensure that the CDI recommendations on qualification level for careers advisers are widely known, and to encourage awareness of the CDI Register of Career Development Professionals⁴ as a potential source for recruitment. This guidance should also provide recommended models for organising personal guidance in special schools, recognising the roles of other staff and SEND-specific expertise.
4. Specialist training for advisers in relation to SEND: this could be developed as part of the Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development. Additional qualifications or training for other special school staff in relation to personal guidance would be welcomed.

2 CEC. Personal Guidance – What Works? (2018) https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/1146_what_works_-_personal_guidance_digital_15-11-2018.pdf

3 CDI. Understanding the role of the Careers Adviser within 'Personal Guidance' (2019) https://www.the CDI.net/write/CDI_27-Briefing_-_Personal_Guidance_-_FINAL.pdf

4 <https://www.the CDI.net/find-a-professional>

5. Further support and guidance for employers working with students with SEND, building on existing work by the CEC⁵ to generate a greater breadth of opportunities for careers advisers to explore during personal guidance interviews.

5 (CEC / National Grid) Employer Toolkit – 'Fuelling Futures – working with special educational needs and disability (SEND) schools' – https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/national_grid_-_employer_engagement_toolkit.pdf

The Gatsby Charitable Foundation
The Peak, 5 Wilton Road, London SW1V 1AP
T +44 (0)20 7410 0330 www.gatsby.org.uk
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