

PERSONAL GUIDANCE IN CAREERS

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH 2019-2020

March 2021



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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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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER	2
3 PERSONAL GUIDANCE RESEARCH CONTEXT	3
4 KEY INSIGHTS	5
5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	8

I INTRODUCTION

The Gatsby Foundation (Gatsby) has a strong interest in every young person receiving high-quality career guidance to make informed decisions about their future. Good career guidance is a necessity for explaining the changing landscape of education and the world of work, and is a vehicle for social justice: young people without high social capital or home support are in most need of strong career guidance. Gatsby commissioned the *Good Career Guidance*¹ report by Professor Sir John Holman, which introduced the eight Gatsby Benchmarks as a framework for improving careers provision. Since the adoption of the benchmarks in the Government's Careers Strategy² and statutory guidance for secondary schools³ and colleges,⁴ Gatsby has been committed to understanding how career guidance practice is changing, and exploring enablers and barriers to improvement through research and partnership working.

This collection of research explores the implementation of Gatsby Benchmark 8 'Personal guidance'. We find that it is difficult to draw conclusions about the overall number of the careers advisers working in schools and colleges, but workforce data indicates some degree of fluctuation in the years since the Careers Strategy, and an opportunity to diversify the sector. A variety of delivery models for personal guidance exist, with neither external nor internal provision strongly favoured. However, providing universal access to a Level 6 trained careers adviser is clearly difficult for FE colleges, and there are calls for advisers to access further training to work with students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Our research emphasises that publicising examples of good practice and existing recommendations, such as work completed to date by The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)⁵ and the Career Development Institute (CDI),⁶ could help to ensure widespread quality in delivery of personal guidance. There is also a significant opportunity to use emerging evidence around the impact of personal guidance to send a strong message to senior leaders of its value.

We thank the CEC and the CDI for their insights and reflections on this work.

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

2 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664319/Careers_strategy.pdf

3 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748474/181008_schools_statutory_guidance_final.pdf

4 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/749151/Careers_guidance-Guide_for_colleges.pdf

5 Everitt, J., Neary, S., Delgado, M.A. and Clark, L. (2008). *Personal Guidance. What Works?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company. https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/1146_what_works_-_personal_guidance_digital_15-11-2018.pdf

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

2 PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper introduces the key findings from three separately published research projects exploring personal guidance for young people in schools and colleges, as articulated in Gatsby Benchmark 8. Gatsby has been working to better understand current practice: what internal and external factors determine how personal guidance is delivered, and how this relates to the national workforce of careers advisers. Gatsby's work in this area has included qualitative research with Careers Leaders in schools and colleges and a quantitative exploration of available workforce data.

The pieces of research summarised are as follows:

- **Institute for Employment Studies (IES) analysis of careers adviser workforce data – completed November 2020**
An exploration of the size and demographics of the careers adviser workforce in England, using government datasets including the Census, Labour Force Survey and School Workforce Census.
- **Qualitative research with Careers Leaders by CareerWave Ltd – completed January 2020**
An exploration of trends in personal guidance practice in schools, based on interviews with 21 Careers Leaders.
- **Qualitative research from roundtables with Careers Leaders – completed November 2019 to June 2020**
Further examination of trends in current practice in personal guidance, based on three roundtables with a total of 33 Careers Leaders – with specific focus on Further Education (FE) and Special Schools.

3 PERSONAL GUIDANCE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Personal guidance is a fundamental element of careers guidance in England. There is a legal duty to provide independent careers guidance to young people from year 8 to year 13, in place since 2012 for schools and since 2013 for colleges. The Government's Careers Strategy, and statutory guidance for schools and colleges, further state that these institutions should work towards the Gatsby Benchmarks, with Gatsby Benchmark 8 (for schools) stating:

“Every pupil should have opportunities for guidance interviews with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of school staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level. These should be available whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all pupils but should be timed to meet their individual needs.

Every pupil should have at least one such interview by the age of 16, and the opportunity for a further interview by the age of 18.”

The Gatsby Benchmark criteria for colleges⁷ state:

“Every learner should have at least one such interview by the end of their study programme.”

Personal guidance is also a key element of the Government's careers offer to young people from age 13 and adults through the National Careers Service – for young people this takes the form of a web chat and telephone service, and for adults in-person support is offered, primarily to priority groups.

Through the CEC's recently published return on investment analysis, we know that personal guidance is a worthwhile investment for the Exchequer.⁸ For each £1 the Government invests in personal guidance, it should be confident of gaining at least £3 in value. It is worth noting that the net gain is likely to be much higher than this. CEC's Compass data⁹ has shown that Benchmark 8 is the highest-performing Benchmark overall, being met fully by 57% of schools/colleges in 2019,¹⁰ although variation exists between different types of provider. Positively, being a part of the Enterprise Adviser Network, and especially part of a Careers Hub, was linked to accelerated Benchmark 8 performance, regardless of prior achievement. CEC data from March 2020 has also shown that for schools and colleges in the first wave of Careers Hubs (in place since summer 2018), full achievement of Benchmark 8 stood at 72%, and 59% for schools and colleges in the Enterprise Adviser Network but not in a Hub.¹¹

In this paper, the term 'careers adviser' is used to refer to the professional workforce required to deliver personal guidance. Personal guidance is unique among the Gatsby Benchmarks in that it requires a dedicated workforce of careers advisers to

7 Good Career Guidance: Benchmarks for young people in colleges. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/final-0099-gcg-college-booklet-a5-4pp-rgb-aw1.pdf>

8 <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-research/personal-guidance-english-secondary-education-initial-return-investment-estimate>

9 Compass is a self-evaluation tool that schools and colleges use to track their progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks. <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/education/tools>

10 https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploaded/1273_state_of_the_nation_lep_analysis_2019_final_1019.pdf

11 <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-research/careers-education-englands-schools-and-colleges-2020>

drive achievement of the benchmark, in addition to favourable factors within the school or college. Careers advisers may be internal members of staff or employed externally as freelancers or through careers agencies. Beyond secondary and further education, careers advisers may also work in higher education (HE), privately with adults, or through initiatives set up by charities, community initiatives or Government (including the National Careers Service and Work Coaches with the Department for Work and Pensions).

In order to deliver personal guidance, schools and colleges must coordinate the activity of qualified careers advisers – whether internally or externally employed. The publication of this research exploring personal guidance is particularly timely. Gatsby-funded research by Pye Tait¹² with school and college senior leaders on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on careers guidance indicated that 49% felt the time students spent on career guidance activities had decreased during the 2019-20 academic year, and just over a third reported that careers advisers' time spent on personal guidance interviews had decreased. Encouragingly, 72% of senior leaders felt that careers was their 'highest priority' or 'amongst [their] five highest priorities' for the 2020-21 academic year.

Personal guidance therefore cannot be delivered without both a buoyant, well-trained and well-distributed workforce of professional careers advisers, and a school and college infrastructure which empowers them and enables access to all students. Gatsby therefore funded a programme of research to better understand the workforce that underpins personal guidance, what practice takes place in schools and colleges and why, and what improvements could be made.

The key insights from this research are summarised below.

¹² <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/secondary-school-and-college-leadership-views-on-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-careers-guidance-summer-2020.pdf>

4 KEY INSIGHTS

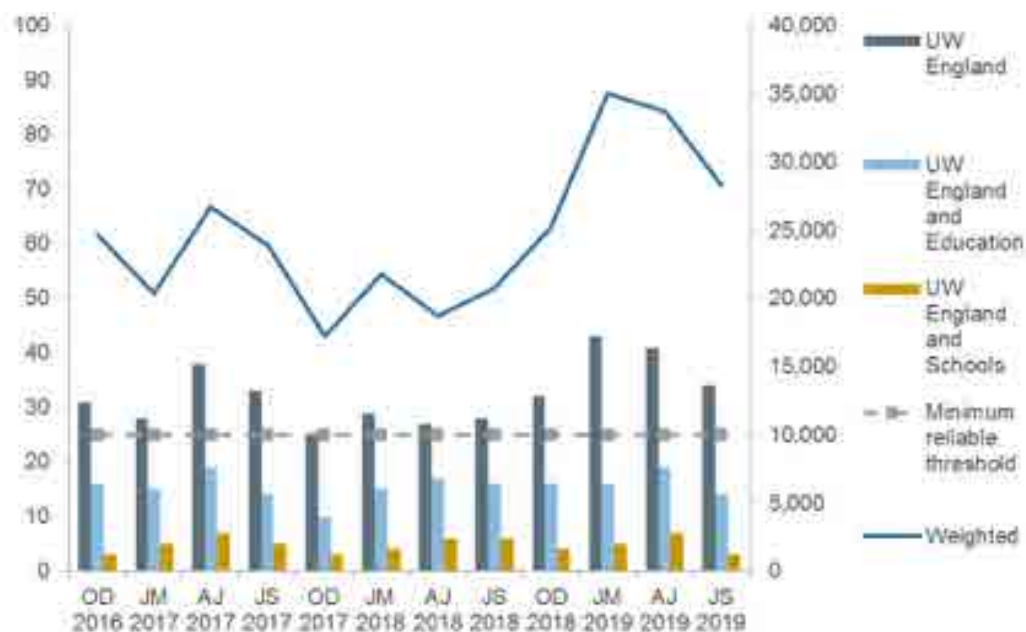
A lack of comprehensive, granular data on the careers adviser workforce makes it difficult to clearly understand any emerging issues which may affect schools and colleges.

All data sets analysed had significant limitations, underlining the importance of better and more consistent data collection on careers advisers. For example, while the Labour Force Survey (LFS) was able to track the total number of careers advisers in the workforce over time using weighted sample data, low sample sizes meant it was not possible to reliably isolate and track the number of careers advisers working in secondary schools and colleges.

It is not clear if the supply of qualified careers advisers is a major issue for schools and colleges, apart from when supporting students with SEND, where specialists are difficult to source.

There is no overall trend in the size of the careers adviser workforce over the last ten years. Quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, based on weighted population estimates, shows that the total workforce has fluctuated between 20,000 and 35,000 since the advent of the Careers Strategy. This indicates a lack of reliability in the data, but these overall figures are broadly consistent with Census data from 2011 which counted 21,250 careers advisers across all sectors. Despite the significant policy changes which have taken place since then, it would appear that careers adviser numbers overall are higher in 2019 than a decade ago. However, it is not possible to subdivide the data by sector, or therefore to determine how many careers advisers are active in schools and colleges, and whether this has changed over time.

Careers Advisers and Vocational Guidance specialists across all sectors in England. (From 'The professional careers adviser workforce', IES. [LINK])



Notes: Left axis is unweighted (UW) count, Right axis is weighted population estimate.
 Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey October 2016 to September 2019

There may be a particular shortage of careers advisers with the experience to work with young people with SEND. A minority of Careers Leaders in special schools reported not using any careers advisers, with some citing a lack of expertise in the sector as the barrier. It was also felt that a range of other professionals in special schools, who have strong long-standing relationships with each young person, can play a significant supporting role in provision of personal guidance in special schools. The CEC's Personal Guidance Fund¹³ is evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches to personal guidance, including with young people with SEND, which may shed further light on good practice in this area.

Careers Leaders report that the biggest barriers to securing personal guidance for students are internal, particularly senior leadership buy-in to secure time and funding for interviews.

Even with a healthy careers adviser workforce of sufficient size, personal guidance provision is very much dependent on schools and colleges' internal circumstances and priorities. Some Careers Leaders reported that a lack of understanding about the benefits, coupled with funding pressures, had led to an annual 'battle' to secure sufficient funding (or time) for a careers adviser to meet all students. This lack of prioritisation was also seen through difficulties accessing students – some institutions do not allow interviews to take place at certain times, particularly in Year 11 and during core curriculum subjects. This gives a clear impression that the value of personal guidance needs to be clearly articulated to school and college senior leaders, in order to secure sufficient prioritisation and funding.

There are opportunities to increase the diversity in the careers adviser workforce.

Data from national sources (such as the census) and school and college-specific staffing records indicates that the dominant demographic groups among careers advisers are female, white and aged in their 40s and older. This lack of diversity appears to be most pronounced among careers advisers working in secondary schools and colleges relative to other settings, and suggests there is an opportunity to strengthen the workforce by increasing its diversity.

Schools and colleges vary in how they secure personal guidance for their students – employing careers advisers directly, and commissioning an external agency, were equally common approaches.

Careers Leaders were roughly evenly split between those who employ their careers adviser as a member of school staff, and those who buy in services externally. Those using external services valued their confidence in the professionalism (through qualifications and commitments to continuing professional development) of those they employ, and being able to 'outsource' personal guidance so as to focus on other aspects of their careers programme. Those using internal careers advisers valued their increased flexibility (often being accessible to students throughout the year), and opportunity to build up stronger relationships with students.

Sector-specific data from the School Workforce Census (SWC) and the Staff Individualised Record (SIR – for FE staff) put the numbers employed directly by schools and colleges much lower than the overall workforce figures – around 400 individuals working in schools and around 300 in FE. However, there are numerous caveats about both these sector-specific datasets, chiefly that they only capture those employed directly by the school or college, and not, for example, by external

¹³ <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/funding/personal-guidance-fund>

agencies or Multi-Academy Trusts. With Careers Leaders in our qualitative research not indicating that access to careers advisers was a significant issue, this could suggest a changing model of personal guidance provision in schools or colleges – moving from advisers directly employed by schools to contracting arrangements with external providers, something which is not captured in these datasets.

Schools and colleges have a variety of delivery models for personal guidance.

Personal guidance interviews typically last 30 minutes, with some Careers Leaders able to allow up to 60 minutes. However, a minority of Careers Leaders indicate that sometimes interviews can be limited to 10-15 minutes, which could indicate careers advisers' time being stretched due to lack of resources. Good practice (as determined by the Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development) recommends personal guidance interviews of 45 minutes. There are differing interpretations of what good quality personal guidance looks like across schools and colleges, and this is determined in a variety of ways, including interview observations and student feedback.

Some colleges report that securing access for all students to one-to-one guidance with a qualified careers adviser is financially extremely challenging. Therefore, the vast majority of colleges consulted used a 'triage' system, with tutors, welfare officers and mentors offering an initial level of guidance and support. Careers advisers trained to Level 3 or 4 are then available to support all learners, with Level 6 advisers available for cases of significant need. Under such models, any student who requests, or is identified as needing, specific support is seen at least once by a Level 6 adviser, but resource and capacity issues and the size of colleges mean it is often not available as standard to all students.

COVID-19 has caused significant disruption to personal guidance provision.

Roundtables held during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that many colleges have switched to online methods for delivery of guidance, but some have seen limited initial take-up of these services. Special schools consulted during this time have also attempted this, but report that students have struggled to engage with the concept of remote personal guidance interviews, either through face-to-face video technology or over the phone. In special schools there is a strong preference for returning to face-to-face guidance as quickly as practicable, while many colleges indicated they would like to continue with a blended personal guidance offer if it is preferred by some students.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While personal guidance is the highest-performing Gatsby Benchmark, it's clear there is significant variation in practice across English schools and colleges, with senior leaders often holding the key to whether personal guidance is high-quality and reaches all students. It has also been difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding the workforce of professional careers advisers who are so vital to this work, but qualitative research indicates that lack of access is not a significant issue outside of special schools.

Based on this body of Gatsby-funded research into personal guidance, we make the following recommendations.

A comprehensive national register of careers professionals would be a valuable asset for understanding the size and characteristics of the workforce. As of October 2020, the CDI's Register of Career Development Professionals¹⁴ (all of whom are qualified to at least Level 6) contains approximately 1,600 individuals. All careers advisers should be encouraged to sign up to this register when qualifying, which could then be used both to track sector trends and serve as a useful recruitment tool for schools and colleges to help source a suitable adviser.

- **Improvements to workforce datasets**, for example by increasing sample sizes, could help determine more accurately how the overall workforce changes over time. Schools and colleges should be encouraged to complete the School Workforce Census (and equivalent datasets for colleges) which should be designed to ensure both internal and external careers advisers are counted. This would allow demographic characteristics to be analysed with greater certainty, and help determine whether lack of access to a careers adviser is a limiting factor for schools and colleges.
- **Specific training for careers advisers on working with young people with SEND** could be expanded, for example as part of the Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development. Alternatively, specific CPD for personal guidance in a SEND context could be introduced to help careers advisers build up their experience working in this setting. This will help ensure all special schools can access personal guidance which is appropriate for their setting and student body.

Further guidance for Careers Leaders on successful models of personal guidance should be developed, building on evidence from the evaluation of the CEC Personal Guidance Fund¹⁵ (to be published in 2021) and good practice currently available in the CEC Resource Directory¹⁶ and from the CDI.¹⁷ In particular it should address methods of quality assurance, which appear to vary significantly between institutions.

¹⁴ <https://www.thecdin.net/find-a-professional>

¹⁵ <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/funding/personal-guidance-fund>

¹⁶ <https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>

¹⁷ https://www.thecdin.net/write/What_Works_-_Personal_Guidance.pdf

- **Strong messaging should be developed to emphasise the value of personal guidance to senior leaders.** Current evidence such as its strong favourable Return on Investment (ROI), and data linking local support (such as that from a Careers Hub) with strong Benchmark 8 performance, should be coupled with good practice examples from senior leaders who are successfully prioritising personal guidance, and how this benefits their students.

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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