INTRODUCTION

The Gatsby Benchmarks¹, which have been central to the government’s careers strategy and statutory guidance since 2017, recognise school leaders as a crucial enabler of a stable and high-quality careers programme. Decisions made by school leaders around budgets or timetabling, and the backing they give to their Careers Leader, have a significant impact on the success of the programme²,³. The Gatsby Foundation therefore has a strong interest in school leaders’ views on career guidance and how practice is developing.

In December 2021, Gatsby commissioned Opinium Research to survey school leaders in England in relation to career guidance, and in particular to explore how practice has changed since the 2020/21 academic year, when delivery was being disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic⁴.

Opinium surveyed 206 secondary school leaders (from maintained schools and academies) between 2-8 December 2021. Job titles reported were principally headteacher, deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher but also included CEO, Principal and Director of Education.

FINDINGS

Career guidance prioritisation
47% of school leaders say that career guidance is one of their top five priorities. 45% also say that career guidance has become more of a priority since the last academic year: Only 5% say prioritisation has decreased.

Career guidance investment
While money for careers guidance may not have increased for many schools, students and staff are spending more time on career guidance. Six in ten school leaders (61%) say that their budget for career guidance has remained the same, and 31% that it has increased. However, half (52%) say that the time students spend on career guidance activities has increased, and 42% report staff time allocated to career guidance has increased.

Concerns related to career guidance
School leaders are most concerned about access to experiences of the workplace (65%) and employer encounters (49%).

Question: “Which of the following, if any, are significant concerns in relation to career guidance in this academic year (2021/22)?”

Access to work experience 65%
Employer encounters (e.g. Careers fairs) 49%
Prioritising catch up curriculum content following Covid 41%
Ensuring those that need it the most are accessing support 34%
Providing sufficient personal guidance interviews 34%
Prioritising core curriculum content 29%
Evaluating and tracking impact on students 27%
Monitoring student participation 26%
Communicating a changing labour market 21%
Communicating a changing education landscape 16%
No significant concerns 1%
The role of parents
Parents are becoming more influential in their involvement in careers guidance. Half of school leaders (50%) say that parents are becoming more influential.

A third of school leaders (35%) also think that parents are having a closer relationship to school careers activities this academic year, compared to the previous year.

How career guidance programmes have improved
Only 5% of school leaders say that nothing has improved in their school’s career guidance programme in the last year, while 60% say that they now make better use of online and digital support.

Question: “Compared to the last academic year (2020/21), how do you think your planned career guidance programmes have improved?”

Figure 2: How careers guidance programmes have improved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better use of online and digital support</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More personal guidance interviews available to students</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved information about careers options</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved information about education options</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved staffing to support careers</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased employer engagement</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student motivation to engage in careers guidance activities</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better parental engagement in careers activities</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing has improved</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 When using the term ‘parents’ throughout this report, we are also referring to carers and guardians.