APPENDIX 4

NEW EVIDENCE TO INFORM THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 2014-2024

GATSBY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper sets out the findings of an in-depth literature review of new evidence on efficacy in school and college-based careers practice. The review has been conducted in direct response to the Gatsby Benchmarks and seeks to ascertain whether the evidence that has been produced in the period 2014-2024 can inform the development of the Gatsby Benchmarks. The review explores the literature published since 2014 that provides insight into good career guidance or addresses any of the eight Benchmarks and related themes to see whether the evidence base for the Benchmarks and sub-Benchmarks set out by Gatsby has strengthened or been challenged over the last decade. Secondly, the review explores whether new research suggests any potential refinements to the Benchmarks that may increase their impact on outcomes for young people.

In conducting this literature review, over 420 articles were reviewed with a subset of 173 articles and research reports, which were the most relevant to the topic, discussed in detail. Table 1 displays insights from recent literature on the Benchmarks, detailing both the enhanced evidence for each Benchmark and any suggested areas of refinement or new directions.

Benchmark	Does the recent literature improve the evidence for this Benchmark?	What new areas or refinements are suggested?
Benchmark 1	The review shows that consistent career programmes boost students' direction, employability, academic motivation, and lifelong earnings, while decreasing dropouts and increasing higher education participation. It further highlights the importance for schools and colleges to have a foundational stable careers programme rather than isolated career-related activities.	The requirements for evaluation could be sharpened further to move it beyond the measurement of stakeholder satisfaction.
Benchmark 2	There is a strong case that LMI is crucial for students as it provides them with valuable insights into job trends, employment rates, and salary expectations, enabling them to make informed decisions about their educational pathways and future careers.	Adopting a heterogeneous definition of LMI and recognising the full range of information sources that could be included within it. Broadening the range of ways in which parents are involved in the career development of their children. Improving the technical infrastructure to increase usability and access to LMI for careers professionals, parents and students.

Benchmark	Does the recent literature improve the evidence for this Benchmark?	What new areas or refinements are suggested?
Benchmark 3	There's limited evidence supporting Benchmark 3's record-keeping and tracking elements, indicating a need for more research. While research since 2014 strongly focuses on stereotyping within this Benchmark, a broad evidence base now promotes career guidance addressing inequalities.	There may be a case to rethink the wording of the stereotyping element of the Benchmarks and make it more specific. However, many of the insights offered by the evidence in this area are picked up elsewhere in the Benchmarks. Given this it may be the case that the social justice aims of the Benchmarks needs to be more explicitly communicated.
Benchmark 4	Research supports both approaches of embedding career education in academic subjects and introducing dedicated career guidance modules or subjects. While embedding has shown benefits in STEM subjects, standalone career guidance offers structured advice on career planning and skills, with research indicating its advantages, particularly for students facing challenges, as well as the added value of extracurricular activities in career development.	Dedicated careers education programmes outside of subject curricula and extra-curricular activities with a focus on career guidance are new areas which emerged from literature and which should be considered for inclusion in future amendments to Benchmark 4.
Benchmark 5	The evidence base for employer encounters has strengthened considerably and remains in line with what is recommended in the Benchmarks. The effectiveness of these encounters varies based on their frequency, quality, and type, with challenges such as ensuring equal access for disadvantaged students and the efficacy of virtual interactions in light of events like COVID-19.	Clarification on what constitutes a 'meaningful' encounter in terms of quality and quantity. There would also be value in considering whether this Benchmark should include wider and more strategic engagements with employers around teacher CPD, curriculum and school governance.
Benchmark 6	The evidence emphasises the importance of experiences of the workplace, with schools, colleges and students valuing its benefits and a range of positive personal, educational and employment outcomes associated with participation.	Further clarification on how work experience can be optimally organised. An important area would be to include a stronger emphasis on the need for schools and colleges to mediate experiences or the workplace. There may also be value in expanding the definition of experiences of the workplace to include volunteering and virtual experience. There is also need to look further at how this Benchmark can most effectively support the career development of SEND learners.

Benchmark	Does the recent literature improve the evidence for this Benchmark?	What new areas or refinements are suggested?
Benchmark 7	There is a well-developed evidence base which shows that young people benefit from support when making post-secondary educational choices. However, while this evidence does endorse the value of career guidance type interventions, it does not particularly support the interventions summarised in Benchmark 7.	There is a need to look at interventions in relation to Benchmark 7 more broadly and to consider whether the definition of meaningful needs to be made more demanding in terms of the sophistication and intensity of the interventions and their integration with the other Benchmarks. There is also a case for looking at how parents and teachers are enabled to more effectively support young people's choices.
Benchmark 8	The literature produced over the last decade strengthens the evidence for the inclusion of personal guidance in the Gatsby Benchmarks. The literature argues that career guidance needs to be provided by trained professionals in dedicated spaces with sufficient time allocation.	There would be value in further clarification on the appropriate level of training, time allocation and location for personal guidance as well as encouragement for professionals to use strongly evidence-based approaches.

INTRODUCTION

In the years since the *Good Career Guidance* report was published in 2014, the Gatsby Benchmarks for good career guidance have been adopted into statutory guidance for schools and guidance for colleges in England, with 84% of schools and colleges now engaging with the Benchmarks, and gaining increased attention from researchers, educators, and policymakers (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023). The Benchmarks provide a framework for best practice and enable the evaluation of quality and effectiveness of career guidance programmes to drive continuous improvement.

This literature review examines whether any new evidence that has been published since 2014 provides further insights into what constitutes good career guidance or speaks specifically to any of the eight Benchmarks. This report will involve a critical evaluation of the studies identified, considering the key themes and findings that emerge from the literature. We will then synthesise these findings to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on the Gatsby Benchmarks and good career guidance.

The original Gatsby research drew on a literature review intended to identify and consolidate the best practices in career guidance in secondary schools (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2014a, 2014b). To ensure that the recommendations capture the latest insights from research, it is necessary to update the summary of literature with new evidence. By incorporating the latest research findings, insights, and best practices we can ensure that the retention of, or any potential amendments to, any of the Benchmarks is grounded in the latest evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW APPROACH

In conducting the literature search, we used a combination of generic and specific search terms. General terms like 'career guidance', 'career education', and 'career counselling' provided a broad overview of the field. Additionally, we utilised targeted language and concepts from each of the Benchmarks and sub-Benchmarks to identify more focused and relevant sources of information. This approach enabled us to gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of effective career guidance practices.

To initiate the search, we used the search engine Google Scholar, LibraryPlus, which is the University of Derby's academic search engine for academic papers and Web of Science, which is a comprehensive index of scientific and scholarly publishing covering journals, proceedings, books, and data compilations. We supplemented this with additional searching using Google, particularly to find high quality grey literature that was not indexed in the academic databases and search engines. Additionally, we drew on the existing knowledge of the research team and Gatsby colleagues.

Finally, we used citation chaining approaches to expand the range of papers and triangulate existing approaches. This comprehensive search strategy yielded a corpus of papers and publications that were subsequently refined for inclusion in this literature review.

SEARCH TERMS

We used a collection of primary and secondary search terms, either independently or in combination, to identify relevant studies corresponding to the theme of each Benchmark. Based on the accuracy and nature of the initial search results, we adjusted and refined our search terms to obtain the most pertinent findings. This involved adding additional words or narrowing down the search criteria to ensure the utmost relevance of the obtained results:

Core search terms:

- Career development
- Career(s) education
- Career(s) guidance / career counselling / career coaching
- Secondary school
- School-based career programmes
- College-based career programmes
- Information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- Career(s) education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG)
- Career related learning (CRL)

While these kinds of general terms helped to identify evidence that was generally relevant to the Benchmarks, we also supplemented these terms with targeted and specific language and concepts drawn from each of the Benchmarks and sub-Benchmarks to identify more focused and relevant sources of information and to provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of effective career guidance practices.

Table 1: Search Terms

Benchmark 1	Careers strategy, career programme, career development programme, career planning programme, career guidance programme, career exploration, schedule, curriculum, careers leader, careers governor, parental participation and careers, careers programme evaluation
Benchmark 2	Career information, labour market information, LMI, labour market intelligence, career and labour market information, career exploration resources, career research tools, career development resources, job outlook information.
Benchmark 3	Individualised career planning, personalised career counselling, student-centred career development, career assessment, stereotypes, diversity, record keeping, student records, tracking, differentiation, raising aspirations, destination data, outcome data, accountability, alumni networks, reporting, data led planning, inclusion, equality, equity, disadvantage, gender, ethnicity, looked after children, special educational needs and disabilities/SEND, special needs, disability, English as an additional language (EAL), Pupil Premium
Benchmark 4	Careers in the curriculum, career-focused curriculum, career-linked curriculum, career education, career-oriented learning, integrate careers, embedding careers in curriculum, careers lessons, teacher role in building careers into curriculum, career readiness, career-connected learning, "career" AND "school subject", STEM, career learning, CEIAG, career management skills, skills, future skills, essential skills
Benchmark 5	Employer encounter, Employer engagement, industry partnerships, job/career fair, employer presentations, industry-based career education, education-business links, education-business partnerships, EBP, employer talks, employer volunteering, careers fairs, career carousels, mentoring, enterprise learning, enterprise games, business games, SME's and careers, visiting speakers, mentoring, enterprise, virtual encounters
Benchmark 6	Workplace visits, industry tours, workplace simulations, work-based learning, apprenticeships, internships, work integrated learning, work related learning, work experience, placements, work shadowing, workplace visits, networking, social capital, virtual experiences of workplaces, virtual work experience

Benchmark 7	Higher education opportunities, college and university partnerships, college fair, college exploration, campus visit, post-secondary education, university preparation, university exposure, Baker clause, provider access legislation, training provider and careers, independent training provider and careers, UTC, UCAS and Careers, widening participation and outreach, VET AND "career(s)"; TVET AND "careers"; ATE AND 'careers(s); technical education, apprenticeship providers AND etc; PAL AND careers etc, "qualification type" AND "careers" (e.g. higher technical qualification, T level, A level, degree, apprenticeship), university visit, college visit
Benchmark 8	Individual career planning, one-on-one career coaching, personal guidance, career guidance, career counselling, study counselling, career coaching, careers advice, guidance counselling, careers adviser, careers interview

One limitation of the approach that we have taken is that it views the evidence primarily through the framework of the Gatsby Benchmarks. This means that interventions and approaches that are not addressed within the Gatsby Benchmarks have not been covered. We would suggest that a further literature review is undertaken towards the end of the project to investigate the evidential basis of any major new proposals, that emerge from the wider project, that are not covered within the current review.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

The following criteria were used to determine which literature will be included in our review.

- Research articles published in the English language referencing the English (or similar) education and career guidance systems.
- Studies published between 2014 and 2023 (inclusive).
- Studies that examine career guidance interventions or practices in secondary schools and colleges.
- Studies that examine career guidance interventions and practices in additional settings including ITPs, specialist colleges, alternative provision and PRU's, SEND settings/special schools, hospital schools, young people in custody and any evidence in relation to those young people who are educated at home.
- Studies that report on the impact, outcomes or effectiveness of career guidance interventions or practices.
- Studies that use rigorous research designs, such as randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs.
- Studies that are published in peer-reviewed academic journals or other reliable sources.
- Studies that are conducted in a school/college-based setting.
- Studies that reflect current best practices in career guidance at schools and colleges.

We did not include studies that were published before 2014, studies published in languages other than English, studies that focused on career guidance of adults or higher education, or studies with methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes or inadequate data analysis techniques. Where exceptions have been made to these criteria they have been clearly indicated in the text.

BENCHMARK 1

The first Benchmark emphasises the importance of schools and colleges establishing a 'stable careers programme' which is described as 'stable, structured careers programme… published on the school's website in a way that enables pupils, parents, teachers and employers to access and understand it' and 'regularly evaluated'. This Benchmark includes a variety of concepts within it including that the career programme should be stable (consistent over time); programmatic (well-structured and based on learning principles); widely understood (by a range of different stakeholders); and evaluated (to ensure that it is effective).

The evidence that exists on the structure and organisation of careers programmes substantially endorses the conceptual basis of Benchmark 1. For example, a comprehensive literature review by Hughes et al. (2016) highlights the positive correlation between well-structured career programmes and improved student outcomes. Hughes et al. (2016) reviewed 45 international research studies that offered a credible evaluation of how career guidance influences the academic performance of young individuals. These studies collectively analysed 67 distinct interventions, out of which, approximately 60% reported mostly positive results, demonstrating improved educational outcomes and enhanced academic achievement. The review demonstrates that stable career programmes provide students with a sense of direction, enhancing their academic motivation and performance and reducing drop-out rates.

The decision to put evaluation at the heart of Benchmark 1 is endorsed by a wide range of literature which emphasises the idea that career guidance should be evidence based (Hooley, 2017; Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2017; Robertson, 2021; Whiston et al., 2017). However, more recent evidence has suggested that we may be able to go beyond gathering stakeholder feedback and utilise more robust forms of evidence.

Hooley (2017) sets out a typology of different levels of evidence that may be useful in demonstrating the impact and efficacy of career guidance (investment, take up, reaction, learning, behaviour, results and return on investment). In the years since the publication of the Gatsby Benchmarks we have seen progress in demonstrating the impact of careers programmes at many of these levels. For example, there has been progress in demonstrating that school-based careers programmes lead to forms of learning with both Dodd et al. (2022) and Chen et al. (2022) demonstrating the impact of school-based careers programmes on career readiness. Ngai et al. (2023) found an increase in students' motivation to achieve positive career outcomes and they took greater individual responsibility in exploring their options. David et al. (2022) have shown significant impacts on students' employability skills and knowledge and their career decision-making skills and knowledge. Similarly, Lee et al. (2021) in Korean secondary schools emphasises the significance of school-based career education in fostering students' competencies and mitigating the impact of parental education level on their career development. The study concludes that comprehensive career guidance and support within the educational setting helps to overcome students' socio-economic barriers and enhances their prospects for successful careers.

Choi et al. (2015) used longitudinal survey data to examine how participation in six different career education experiences influenced the development of career skills and academic outcomes among South Korean adolescents. The findings revealed that students who engaged in career education programmes in school over a 2-year period achieved the highest scores in both career development skills and student learning outcomes. However, no significant relationship was found between career education, career development skills, and school success for students who participated in career education programmes only once or not at all. These results highlight the importance of multiple and continuous participation in career education for enhancing students' skills and academic performance.

In Jordan, the Education Development Trust worked with the Jordan's Ministry of Education, INJAZ and Education for Employment (EFE) to design and pilot a whole-school careers education and guidance education model (Fitzpatrick, 2023). The model consisted of three key components for successful careers education and guidance delivery: resources, activities by school stakeholders and activities delivered with the community (Fitzpatrick, 2023). Out of the 519 Grade 9 students who participated in the pilot, 91% of students reported that their understanding of prospective industries to work in had improved, 89% increased their knowledge of education and training options, and 89% felt more confident and inspired when thinking about their future (Fitzpatrick, 2023). The pilot's findings suggests that engagement with a careers education and guidance programme has a significant impact on students' career readiness and career management skills (Fitzpatrick, 2023).

In special educational needs and disability (SEND) settings, Traina et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review to investigate evidence-based and methodologically robust career programmes for young people with learning disabilities. The results indicate that curricula promoting self-determination development, acquisition of job-related skills, opportunities for individualised internships, support from career coaches, and technological solutions are effective strategies to support students with disabilities in their post-secondary transition. Moreover, programmes rooted in personal vocational rehabilitation (McKnight et al., 2022), parental engagement (Papay & Bambara, 2014) and community-based settings have been proven to be an effective career provision for SEND groups (Mazzotti et al., 2022)

Some studies have gone beyond identifying impacts on student learning to demonstrate longer term results. For example, Kashefpakdel and Percy (2017) have demonstrated substantial long-term financial benefits from career counselling in schools in terms of salary and employment. Both Renée (2023) and Hopfenbeck et al. (2021) have found evidence of increased participation in higher education following career guidance, as well as higher average income in adulthood. Moote et al. (2024) analysed survey responses from 7,635 21-to-22-years-old and found that these young adults had a more positive outlook on future work prospects, greater job satisfaction and increased life satisfaction as a result of receiving careers education and guidance at school.

At the most challenging end of the evidence spectrum Percy and Hooley (2023) have conducted a systematic review of return-on-investment studies on school-based career guidance. They have described an emergent evidence base on return-on-investment which suggests that school-based career guidance provides a positive return on investment, with average estimates suggesting that for every £1 invested there is likely to be a return of £2.50. Percy and Hooley (2023) also suggest a framework for improving the quality of future return on investment research in this area.

Collectively, these studies and reviews convey a consistent narrative on the importance of stable careers programmes rather than just endorsing the value of single interventions. They underscore their impact on students' academic and career outcomes, thereby providing substantive evidence supporting the principles embodied within the Gatsby Benchmarks. The consensus emerging from this literature is a resounding call for strategic, integrated, and evidence-based career guidance interventions in secondary education.

SUMMARY

The review demonstrates that stable career programmes provide students with a sense of direction, enhancing career readiness, employability skills and academic motivation and performance, reducing drop-out rates, increasing participation in higher education and improving lifelong earnings. It also provides evidence which supports the necessity for schools and colleges to establish a stable careers programme as their foundation for career education and guidance rather than simply providing a series of disconnected career-related activities.

IMPLICATIONS

The evidence gathered in relation to Gatsby Benchmark 1 does not suggest that any major changes are required to this Benchmark. The only area where there may be room for further development is around the requirements for evaluation. There may be a case for schools and colleges to increase the sophistication of the evaluation evidence that they are gathering, perhaps through the use of measures like the Future Skills Questionnaire (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2022) or the Student Career Readiness Index (SCRI) (Dodd et al., 2022). The issue of enhancing the robustness of evaluations and the use of data also links to questions about destinations data that are addressed in Benchmark 3.

BENCHMARK 2

Benchmark 2 highlights the importance of 'learning from career and labour market information', emphasising the importance of 'access to good-quality information about future study options and labour market opportunities'. It also makes the point that 'they will need the support of an informed adviser to make the best use of available information'.

Since 2014, there has been a range of research addressing the use of labour market information (LMI) in career guidance in secondary schools and colleges. Work by Barnes and Bimrose (2021) demonstrates that sources of LMI are well developed in England although they are not always provided in a way that makes it easy for LMI to be incorporated into career guidance and individual's career development processes. The technical difficulties that they describe in finding, aggregating and using LMI provide an important context for the implementation of Benchmark 2, which encourages schools to provide good quality information about future study options and labour market opportunities for students and their parents. Very similar points are made by Drummond and Halliwell (2016) in the context of Canada, who again endorse the value of LMI for career decision making but highlight the technical challenges and lack of coordination that bedevils the practical deployment of LMI.

Despite these technical difficulties with England's LMI infrastructure, the broader literature endorses the value of LMI and aligns well with the approach set out in Benchmark 2. Milosheva et al. (2021) and Bimrose (2021) have examined the use of LMI in career counselling and decision-making. Their research emphasises how the effective utilisation of accurate and up-to-date LMI data can demystify complex labour market dynamics, provide individuals with essential information on job trends, wage levels, skills requirements, and industry growth forecasts. By accessing such information, individuals are equipped with the necessary tools to make educated career choices that align their personal abilities and interests with real-time market conditions (Pesch et al., 2018). Moreover, Vigurs et al. (2017) have demonstrated that career websites can be an important tool for the dissemination of LMI.

Despite this broadly positive literature on the value of LMI, McNally (2016), provides an important caveat. Information can influence educational and career decisions, but this is not necessarily the case. Where students face other constraints, where their aspirations are poorly aligned with opportunity or where they are seeking to enter highly competitive pathways, LMI is less likely to be effective in positively influencing career and educational decision making. LMI also needs to be provided early, which aligns well with Benchmark 2, and take account of the circumstances, motivations and interests of the individual. Furthermore, information-based interventions are likely to be more successful if they are supported by personal guidance, which again aligns well with the approach set out in Benchmark 2.

One of the most comprehensive and extensive reviews of the role of labour market information in career guidance is a report by Alexander et al. (2019). One significant observation highlighted in the report is the potential danger of defining LMI too narrowly, with an overemphasis on statistical and quantitative data. This limitation restricts the access of clients to a rich and diverse range of qualitative information. The report argues for a broader understanding of LMI that encompasses various types of data, ensuring that clients have comprehensive information at their disposal.

In the Netherlands, Fourage et al. (2024) sought to understand students' visual attention when reading and learning LMI about prospective study programmes, and how this subsequently impacts their study choices. The study used eye-tracking technology, employing a webcam to monitor the eye-movement of 63 students who completed a web-based survey (Fourage et al., 2024). The survey questioned students about their preferred choice of study programmes, revealed wage information about the programmes and other LMI indicators (Fourage et al., 2024). Fourage et al. (2024) found that the LMI made some impact on the participants' career decision-making, with 68% of students reporting that they found the information useful. However, the authors concluded that students should be given sufficient time to dwell on and process the LMI provided if this career activity is to have any significant impact, as only 22% intended to use the LMI when making decisions about their future study choices (Fourage et al., 2024).

Quality assurance emerges as another key aspect discussed by Alexander et al. (2019). They suggest that the development of quality standards for careers information and the identification of reliable sources would support users to access consistent and trustworthy LMI. In addition, they emphasise the point also raised by McNally (2016) that LMI is likely to be more effective where it is mediated by guidance professionals or other expert helpers and argues that this can be achieved by embedding the use of LMI within professional standards, qualifications for advisers, and guidelines for school and college staff.

In relation to providing Labour Market Information (LMI) for parents, research on parental involvement in career and educational decision-making has often found that solely information-based interventions are not the most effective approach (Oomen, 2018). Instead, needs-driven, active 'family learning' approaches are seen as more likely to engage parents successfully and influence the decision-making of young people (Borlagdan & Peyton, 2014; Oomen, 2018). Such approaches move beyond the provision of LMI and find other ways to engage parents in the career learning of young people.

The literature on parental engagement in career guidance highlights the importance of recognising parents as partners who can collaborate with educational institutions to support learning and career activities (Barnes, 2020; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Oomen, 2018; Williams et al., 2018). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that parents' expectations and needs vary over time, influencing their level of engagement, making it unwise to treat them as a homogenous group. Research funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation argues that parents can be segmented into six groups who are defined variously by their levels of optimism, trust of the system and willingness to get involved in their children's career development (Opinium, 2020). This research also highlights demographic patterns in parental involvement that suggest that those who might benefit from more engagement often receive less support from their parents.

Oomen (2018) stresses that parental capacity to engage with career guidance relies on their knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, and role definition, indicating that parents need both the time to understand and process career information to support their children and the confidence to be effective influencers.

Although the literature does not provide conclusive evidence regarding the most impactful materials to engage parents in career guidance, insights from a review by Barnes et al. (2020) show that specific resources such as a comprehensive guide to the careers programme in schools and colleges, as well as a resource on how to make the most of careers fairs, higher education open days, and personal guidance can have a significant effect on informing and engaging parents. In particular, addressing the diversity within communities, Barnes et al. (2020) highlight the necessity for context-specific careers literature available in relevant ethnic minority languages. They also stress the importance of arranging interpreters from the community to be present at school events to facilitate effective communication with parents who may face language barriers.

There has also been the growth of more critical perspectives on LMI which have examined and problematised the area (Alexander, 2023; Menzies, 2024; Staunton, 2022; Staunton & Rogosic, 2021). Such research challenges the idea that LMI can be viewed as a straightforward representation of reality and argues that students need to become more critical in their use of such information, attending to the sources of such information, recognising its potential biases, and considering what purpose it is created for and what effect it is trying to create. Staunton and Rogosic (2021) highlight the political and socio-economic assumptions that exist within much LMI and investigate how LMI can be leveraged to promote fairness and equity. Menzies (2024) argues that within educational policy, the use of LMI focuses heavily on employers' skills needs, rather than creating a labour market which supplies a range of opportunities for young people. Alexander (2023) questions whether it is always helpful to view career decisions as rational decisions to which there is a right or best answer. In the light of this, she goes on to ask whether the same information can be reasonably thought to be useful to individuals in a wide variety of contexts.

Although research has explored the practical implications of LMI in career counselling and decision-making, there is still a lack of studies that provide empirical evidence on how LMI interacts with students' career choices and outcomes. Nonetheless, the existing literature emphasises the fundamental significance of accurate and current LMI in enabling individuals to make informed decisions and successfully navigate the ever-changing job market.

SUMMARY

Since 2014, research has highlighted the importance of labour market information (LMI) in career guidance for secondary schools and colleges. Whilst sources of LMI in England are considered to be well-developed, research shows that they often are not presented in a user-friendly manner for career guidance and individual career development. These technical challenges of aggregating and utilising LMI present a context for implementing Benchmark 2, which aims to provide high-quality labour market information for students and their parents. Nevertheless, the broader literature highlights LMI's value, particularly its role in clarifying labour market intricacies and demonstrates that it is vital to ensure this information is provided early and is tailored to individual circumstances, motivations, and interests. It's also highlighted that information alone may not be effective in influencing decisions, especially when other constraints exist.

IMPLICATIONS

In general, the research that exists on LMI endorses the existing approach that is taken within Benchmark 2. However, it also highlights several areas that would be worthy of further consideration as the Benchmarks are revised.

There is a strong case for recognising the value of qualitative LMI. There would be value in the Benchmarks explicitly adopting a heterogeneous definition of LMI and recognising the full range of information sources that could be included within it. Linked to this, there may be value in actively developing students' capacities to be active and critical users of information. Benchmark 2 may be a useful place to address questions of information and digital literacy and career research skills rather than assuming that pre-packaged LMI can necessarily answer every question. There may also be value in Gatsby providing guidance on what sources of LMI are likely to be particularly valuable and trustworthy.

It is also important to recognise that LMI will often have to be interpreted and mediated for young people to get the most out of it. This creates a strong rationale for actively linking this Benchmark to others, particularly Benchmark 4 (where LMI can underpin much curricular activity) and Benchmark 8 (where careers professionals should be actively using LMI and supporting their clients to engage with it).

The literature also raises questions about the way in parents can most effectively be engaged in career guidance. The evidence suggests that the kind of information-based approach set out in Benchmark 2 is likely to be less effective, if delivered alone, than deeper forms of family learning and parental engagement which actively work with parents as key stakeholders in, and supporters of, their children's career development. However, it is questionable as to whether these more expanded visions of parental engagement are best addressed through Benchmark 2.

Finally, the technical infrastructure that supports LMI is often developed without an awareness of its potential value for career guidance and career decision making. Given this there is a need for work to develop the technical infrastructure and improve its usability for careers professionals, parents and students.

BENCHMARK 3

Benchmark 3 is concerned with addressing the needs of each pupil and recommends considering the different career guidance needs at different stages, providing opportunities for advice and support tailored to the needs of each pupil and embedding equality and diversity considerations throughout. The need for effective record keeping and tracking of students and challenge stereotypes are two important aspects of this Benchmark.

Our searches identified no new research that addressed record keeping as a part of career guidance processes in schools. An analogous process in higher education (tracking employability enhancing experiences) has been discussed in research (Cobb, 2019), with the argument being made that, particularly when combined with other data collection, it can provide valuable insights into the efficacy of a variety of career guidance approaches. Other research has questioned whether students have the technical skills and literacy to access and utilise their career guidance records, particularly with the continuing rise of artificial intelligence (AI) being used in school settings (Zhang et al., 2023).

There is very limited research which directly addresses how career programmes in schools and colleges can make use of destinations data. One example is the study by Julius et al. (2022) which explores the extent to which destination measures can provide information about the 'value-added' by schools and colleges in supporting young people to progress onto high quality destinations.

However, there is some research in higher education which explores the use of destinations data (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). This research endorses the existing Benchmark but goes further in specifying why destinations data is useful, highlighting that destinations data can be used as part of an evaluation of efficacy, to inform the development of the careers programme, as a source of LMI and as a tool for engaging key stakeholders in the careers programme.

In contrast to the more technical aspects of record keeping and tracking, there is extensive research that looks at the role that career guidance can play in relation to social justice (Hooley et al., 2018; Jeon et al., 2024). Specifically in relation to stereotypes, research has demonstrated that using counter-normative role models can effectively challenge career stereotypes (Drescher et al., 2020). The practice of 'norm critique' in Sweden provides another approach to actively tackling career stereotypes through forms of critically reflexive pedagogy which are designed to surface implicit stereotypes and subject them to scrutiny (Wikstrand, 2019).

While addressing stereotypes is an important aspect of a more social justice informed approach, there is also a much wider literature that looks at how career guidance can challenge disadvantage and inequality more holistically, and through a range of different approaches (Hooley et al., 2021; OECD, 2024; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017; Viviers et al., 2021). This work variously addresses gender (Amenya et al., 2023; Hutchinson, 2014; OECD, 2024), sexuality (Chen & Keats, 2016), ethnicity (OECD, 2024; Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022), migrant status (Fejes et al., 2022; OECD, 2024) and socio-economic status (Beremenyi, 2023; Groves et al., 2023; Hooley et al., 2014; OECD, 2024) as well as other diversity characteristics. Jeon et al. (2024) summarise this literature by suggesting that career guidance can act on social inequalities in four main ways.

1. Developing the capacity of career guidance practitioners, teachers, and other career informants to support disadvantaged young people.

2. Building young peoples' social capital by working with their families and connecting them to the world of work.

3. Helping young people to develop a critical understanding of the world of work.

4. Providing more intensive and bespoke help for those that need it.

Regarding equitable career development, the OECD's analysis of their Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that England has shown some success in improving outcomes for young people who face specific barriers in their career development. Modest gender patterns reveal that girls are more likely to engage in some career development activities in comparison to boys (Mann et al., 2024). As well as this, foreign-born students possess more career certainty compared to their native-born counterparts, although the difference is very small (Mann et al., 2024). Despite England's success in improving equity in relation to gender and migrant status, the same cannot be said for socio-economic status. The OECD found that students with low socio-economic status (SES) are less likely to engage in career development activities, despite being more likely to need such engagement compared to high SES students (Mann et al., 2024). Overall, the OECD's extensive and insightful PISA data suggests that more needs to be done to support the career development experience of low SES students.

SUMMARY

Benchmark 3 focuses on the customisation of career guidance for each student's unique needs, emphasising the importance of diversity and equality considerations. This Benchmark also highlights the value of effective record-keeping and tracking of students, although there is limited research on this within schools and colleges. In higher education, the tracking of employability experiences offers insights into the effectiveness of different career guidance strategies. There's also a recognition of the benefits of using destination data as an evaluation tool and for stakeholder engagement.

Research shows that career guidance plays a crucial role in challenging societal stereotypes and advocating for social justice. Methods such as counter-normative role models and the 'norm critique' approach have been effective in addressing these issues. Good career guidance can be used as a tool to challenge and mitigate wider societal disadvantages and inequalities across various demographics and offer targeted support for those most in need.

IMPLICATIONS

There is still very limited evidence to support the elements of Benchmark 3 that relate to record keeping and tracking. This perhaps suggests an urgent need to commission new research in this area.

Since 2014, the element of this Benchmark that addresses stereotyping has been a strong focus for research. There is now a wide evidence base which asserts that career guidance should seek to act on inequalities, and which demonstrates a wide range of interventions that can have an impact. Given this there may be a case to rethink the wording of this element of the sub-Benchmarks and focus it more broadly on the social justice aims of the Benchmarks for example by committing to aims around improved social mobility and challenging racism, sexism, ablism and homophobia.

BENCHMARK 4

Benchmark 4 of the Gatsby Benchmarks is focused on linking curriculum learning to careers. It emphasises the importance of connecting what students learn in the classroom to career pathways. The rationale for Benchmark 4, is to make learning more engaging and relevant by showing students how the knowledge and skills they acquire can be applied in real-world contexts. The body of work concerning the integration of curriculum and career education can essentially be divided into two main approaches: one approach promotes the incorporation of career education across various subjects, whilst the other favours a distinct, standalone subject dedicated to career guidance within the school environment.

Integration of career learning across subjects involves integrating career-related content and skills into various academic subjects across the curriculum (Collins & Barnes, 2017). For example, incorporating career-related projects, case studies, or practical applications within subjects such as mathematics, science, literature, or humanities. This integration helps students see the relevance and applicability of their learning to real-world contexts and to become familiar with a wide range of different career pathways (Bridgstock et al.,2019; Potvin & Hasni, 2014).

The design of integrated career-related learning has been considered in Australia. Mahat et al. (2023, p. 409) undertook research with the objective of co-designing career education lesson plans 'that could be seamlessly infused into the formal curriculum' in middle schools located in regional, rural, and remote areas of Australia. Using a case study approach, the study collected data from 111 teachers, principals, carers and students through participatory design workshops and semi-structured interviews (Mahat et al., 2023). The study found three key elements that should be used when designing these lesson plans, to ensure the successful integration of career learning into existing school curricula: lesson plans should include accessible and engaging career activities, they should create positives narratives surrounding regional employment options, and students should be provided with comprehensive information about their post-secondary options (Mahat et al., 2023).There are several research studies, particularly in STEM subjects, which have shown that subject based approaches to careers education enhance students' understanding of the connections between their education and future careers and improve their interest in certain subjects (Artess et al., 2016; Falco & Summers, 2019; Grossman & Porche, 2014; Reiss & Mujtaba. 2017; Salonen et al., 2018; Webb, 2017 et al., 2017). For example, a recent study by Drymiotou et al. (2021) explored the effects of using career-based scenarios as an instructional approach to support students' interest in science and their understanding of STEM careers. The study found that active engagement in scientific practices and meaningful interactions with experts were crucial factors for the success of career-based scenarios in increasing students learning and career motivation and improving their comprehension of STEM careers. Such an approach suggests that there may be a need to create a closer alignment between Benchmark 4 and Benchmark 5.In the further education context, Huddleston and Unwin's (2024) extensive review into the history of FE colleges' curricula found enrichment activities which involved practical work experience and work shadowing have become increasingly popular methods of linking curriculum learning to careers. These enrichment activities allow students to build their skills in a practical context, subsequently meeting employer demand for a suitably skilled workforce (Huddleston & Unwin,

2024). This reiterates the argument that there should be closer alignment between Benchmark 4 and Benchmark 5, and potentially Benchmark 6.

The idea of embedding career guidance into subject curricula also connects to a strand of research which highlights the importance of all teachers in informing young peoples' career thinking and supporting them in their career choice making (Hooley et al., 2015, Wong et al., 2021). This research highlights that teachers are important career informants who young people will turn to and argues that the curriculum and discussions about subject interests and subject choice are an important place where this career thinking takes place (Kang et al., 2019; Potvin & Hasni, 2014). Research also shows that providing teachers with the opportunity to develop their careers learning and teaching through encounters with employers significantly improves their ability to link their subjects with careers (Blake et al., 2023).

In Denmark, Felby and Skovhus (2023) explored teachers' understanding and experience of the concept 'career learning'. The concept and practice of career learning in Denmark was recently introduced by the Danish government in 2017, becoming mandatory for upper secondary education to embed career learning across all curriculum subjects (Felby & Skovhus, 2023). The teachers reported that they found the concept of career learning vague, and sought a clear definition from the Danish government, as well as guidance about how to successfully put the concept into practice in the classroom (Felby & Skovhus, 2023). The teachers were also conflicted between their own understanding of career learning and the meaning they expected from the Danish government (Felby & Skovhus, 2023). Despite these conceptual paradoxes, the teachers were willing to meaningfully apply career learning to their practice (Felby & Skovhus, 2023).

Other research highlights the value of providing dedicated time for career guidance or career education outside of the mainstream subject curriculum. Such approaches effectively treat career guidance as a subject in its own right or proposes the need for dedicated short courses or modules addressing career guidance topics (Einarsdóttir et al., 2023; Kamm et al., 2020; Keele et al., 2020). In this case, students receive explicit instruction and support related to exploring careers, developing career plans, and acquiring employability skills. Career education often covers topics such as self-assessment, labour market information, CV writing, interview skills, and career exploration strategies. Research suggests that having a separate career guidance subject can provide structured and comprehensive guidance to students, offering them a focused space to develop career-related knowledge and skills.

In the international context, several studies of small size have been conducted concerning the introduction of a career guidance curriculum (Gonzalez-Herrera & Márquez-Domínguez, 2018; Bottia et al., 2015; Briddick et al., 2018, Hopfenbeck et al., 2021). Robust empirical examinations of the value of careers curricula include Talib et al. (2015) who employed a pre-post and control group design to investigate the impact of a career education module on career development among 122 community college students in Malaysia. Findings demonstrated significant differences between the experimental and control groups in terms of career planning, self-efficacy, and career maturity.

In a study by Martinez et al. (2017), the potential impacts of a guidance curriculum composed of eight modules delivered over 5 weeks were examined. The study specifically looked at students who were struggling academically and they found that when career guidance was added to these students' curriculum, it increased their understanding of postsecondary education. It also boosted their confidence in being ready for postsecondary education and their career. This suggests that integrating career guidance into the curriculum could be a good way to help students, particularly those who are struggling academically, to do better in school and feel more prepared for their future.

Grigal et al. (2019) conducted a focused examination on the effects of integrating a career programme into the curriculum for students with disabilities. Their findings shed light on the significance of providing these students with access to and familiarity with technology, delivering age-appropriate content, and implementing strategies to create universally designed curriculum. Another study by Björnsdóttir (2017) explored a specific vocational programme tailored for students with intellectual disabilities. This programme employed an adaptable curriculum, innovative pedagogical techniques, and robust collaborative frameworks that involved faculty, student mentors, and the diploma students themselves. The results indicated enhanced social integration and an improved sense of belonging among students during their post-secondary studies.

Emms et al. (2023) has conducted a study with young people to draw out their insights about where they develop relevant career skills. This research suggests that both activities embedded into subjects and dedicated activities are important sites of skill development. In addition, they highlight the importance of extra-curricular activities outside of formal teaching time and often not explicitly linked to 'careers' as another place where career relevant skills are developed. This is also supported in a range of other literature which highlights the value of rich extra-curricular experiences as a way of supporting students' career learning (Davis et al., 2023; Ozis et al., 2018). For example, Denault et al. (2019) provides strong evidence that extracurricular activities such as sports, volunteering, socio-cultural activities and civic activities predict an increase in vocational exploration and a decrease in career indecision.

SUMMARY

Benchmark 4 of the Gatsby Benchmarks stresses the importance of linking classroom learning to real-world career pathways, making education more engaging and relevant for students. Two primary methods are observed for this integration: one embeds career education throughout various academic subjects, enhancing students' understanding of real-world applications, while the other approach proposes dedicated career guidance as its own subject or in short modules. Research in STEM has shown the benefits of the former, demonstrating enhanced understanding of subject-career connections. Teachers play a significant role in guiding students' career thoughts through curriculum discussions and subject choices. On the other hand, having a separate career guidance subject offers structured guidance on topics like CV writing, career planning, and employability skills. In different countries, studies have explored the introduction of career guidance curricula, revealing its potential benefits, especially for academically struggling students and those with disabilities. Additionally, research highlights the value of extra-curricular activities in career skill development and reducing career indecision.

IMPLICATIONS

The evidence supports the integration of career guidance into the curriculum. There are strong reasons to believe that the approach adopted in Benchmark 4 is valuable and can support the development of students' careers. One area for refinement might be to say more about the specific role of the subject teacher and the way in which they can support the development of young peoples' career ideas, both within the curriculum and outside of it, for example in tutorial time.

There is also a wide range of literature that explores the value of having dedicated time for careers education outside of the mainstream subject curriculum. This research generally finds that these dedicated careers education interventions are effective and that they can be an important way to guarantee that young people are able to access careers education. Given this there would be a case for suggesting the addition of a new sub-Benchmark looking at dedicated careers education programmes outside of subject curricula.

Finally, there is literature that highlights the value of extra-curricular activities in developing student's careers. There may also be value in considering whether adding a sub-Benchmark around extra-curricular activities would be useful.

BENCHMARK 5

Benchmark 5, 'encounters with employers and employees' states that each pupil should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. Both schools and colleges can achieve this through a range of activities, such as visits from employers and employees, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and colleges can also include students' own part-time work as an encounter. Since the development of the Gatsby Benchmarks there has been considerable literature published which has further demonstrated the value of the kind of employer engagement approach set out in Benchmark 5.

The literature suggests that encounters with employers and employees during education can improve employment prospects, reduce the likelihood of young people being not in education employment or training (NEET) and lead to a host of other positive benefits (Hutchinson & Dickinson, 2014; Rehill et al., 2017a; Rehill et al., 2017b). Observed benefits from employer engagement include:

- **satisfaction** with both young people and their teachers typically valuing these encounters (Mann et al., 2017a);
- **increased opportunity awareness** (Makola et al., 2021) with participants in employer encounters typically reporting that they are more aware of the options available to them in their life;
- **increased career motivation** (Kashefpakdel et al., 2019; Makola et al., 2021);
- **increased career confidence and decidedness** (Makola et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2020) with students who participate in employer engagement more confident about their transitions and long-term career building;
- **improvements to attainment within school** (Kashefpakdel et al., 2019), with a particular effect observed in relation to improvements in the attainment level of students who are considered to be 'low' in their attainment levels (Kashefpakdel et al., 2019);
- **increased income during adulthood** (Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2017), with significant wage increases for young people who attended careers talks whilst at school. Kashefpakdel and Percy (2017) also make two other observations in this research that are important for the framing of the Benchmarks. Firstly, that the more careers talks you receive, the greater the benefit observed, with a minimum of four talks noted at the point at which an impact becomes observable. Secondly, that when young people report that talks are helpful or very helpful, they have a bigger impact in the long term, suggesting that students are likely to be a good arbiter of quality.

The model of employer engagement set out in Benchmark 5 is broad and inclusive, with the only stipulation being that encounters should be 'meaningful'. One area of focus in the research literature has been on exploring the range of different kinds of employer engagement that are valuable to education. Some of these can fit into the language of 'encounters' such as employers giving careers talks (Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2017, Covacevich et al., 2021, OECD, 2023), careers events (Rehill et al., 2017a), employer facilitated skills workshops (Rehill et al., 2017b), business games and enterprise competitions (Hanson et al., 2017) and employer mentoring (Hooley, 2016; Hooley & Boys, 2018).

Others fit into this conceptual framework less easily and suggest other ways in which employers can inform the careers programme of schools and colleges, such as by providing CPD for teachers (Dodd, 2017), through involving employers in the development of curriculum (Rogers et al., 2020) and bringing employers into school governance arrangements (CBI & Birkbeck, 2021).

The 2023 Enterprise Advisers Survey, conducted by the Careers & Enterprise Company, reveals significant insights into the perspectives of enterprise advisors regarding business engagement with education. According to the survey, 84% of enterprise advisors believe that such engagement is a valuable strategy for enhancing workforce diversity, addressing a critical issue in boardrooms.

Additionally, the survey highlights an increase in awareness of apprenticeships and technical pathways among students in schools and colleges. More than three in five advisors report that awareness of these alternative routes into the workplace has grown. This figure rises to 72 percent among advisors who have been collaborating with the education sector for over three years. This trend suggests that prolonged interaction between employers and educational institutions positively influences young people's understanding of diverse career options.

A lot of the literature cited above which explore employer engagement interventions provides further insights into both issues of quantity and quality. These suggest that it is not just the fact of having an encounter that matters, but the regularity, intensity and nature of this encounter. So, for example McIntosh & Yates (2019) discuss the value of integrating employer events with personal guidance to ensure that students can derive the maximum learning from their experiences, while Mann et al. (2017b) highlight the need for differentiation of employer encounters for different learners and the provision of a wide variety of different types of encounters.

Andrews and Hooley (2022) synthesise this research on employer encounters into 10 principles for effective employer encounters. In the terminology that Gatsby uses, these can be viewed as a definition of what kinds of encounters are 'meaningful'.

- Well designed with clarity about what outcome is sought.
- Learning focused
- Context aware
- High volume
- Varied, using a range of different kinds of interventions
- Experiential
- Led and co-ordinated by professionals

- Ensuring that young people are prepared
- Recognising the diversity of learners
- Providing feedback and assessment

Other research has highlighted some challenges with delivering employer encounters, particularly in the light of the restrictions around Covid-19 (Schoon & Henseke, 2021). This has led to a growth in interest in online encounters (The Careers & Enterprise Company, n.d.), but at the present time the evidence base supporting virtual encounters remains limited (Vigurs et al., 2017).

Other research raises concerns that there is not always equal access to employer engagement, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds including those who receive free school meals often more likely to miss out (Mann et al., 2017b). However, there are also some signs that access to employer engagement is improving, with research from Percy and Tanner (2020) reporting that four out of five young people in England encountered an employer every year and the number of young people missing out on these encounters halved from 1.2 million to 700,000.

The 2024 PISA report shows that in 2022, only 22% of students in England participated in three key career development activities: worksite visits or job shadowing, attending job fairs, and consulting with a careers adviser in school. This low engagement is further highlighted by the fact that 71% of students had not experienced a worksite visit, 41% had not attended a job fair, and 30% had not spoken to a careers adviser. Comparatively, the participation rate for job shadowing or worksite visits in England was 29%, significantly lower than the OECD average of 45.3% which represents a decline from 2018, indicating a reduction in the uptake of these career readiness activities among English students after COVID-19. However, the report shows that 59.4% of students in England visited a job fair, which is higher than the OECD average of 35.5%. (Mann et al., 2024)

There are also important questions about how employers can most effectively be engaged in employer encounters and wider work with schools. This is particularly an issue for small-and-medium-sized businesses (SMEs) who typically lack the capacity to manage these relationships on their own (Russell, 2022). An open question also remains as to whether schools have the internal capacity to broker these interventions or whether there is a need for external brokerage. Painter (2021) highlights the important brokerage role played by Enterprise Co-ordinators in underpinning these activities.

SUMMARY

Benchmark 5 emphasises the importance of students having multiple encounters with employers and employees to understand work dynamics and essential workplace skills. Schools and colleges facilitate this through various activities, like employer visits, mentoring, and enterprise competitions. Extensive research showcases the various benefits of such employer encounters. These advantages range from improved employment prospects and reduced chances of youth being unemployed or not in education, to heightened career awareness, motivation, and confidence. Notably, encounters with employers boost academic achievement, especially for lower-performing students, and have been linked to increased adult earnings. The quantity, regularity, and quality of these encounters matter; hence a need for a varied and well-structured approach. However, challenges exist, including accessibility disparities for disadvantaged students and the efficacy of virtual encounters amidst global challenges like COVID-19 and some of the literature argues that disadvantaged students and small-and-medium-sized businesses (SMEs) need further support to provide high quality effective encounters.

IMPLICATIONS

The evidence produced since 2014 endorses the Gatsby Benchmarks' focus on employer encounters. Over the last decade the evidence base for employer encounters has strengthened considerably and remains in line with what is recommended in the Benchmarks. However, we now know more about what works in this area, suggesting that the Benchmark could potentially now be more precise about what constitutes a 'meaningful' encounter. This could include greater specification both in terms of quality (e.g. through greater integration with curriculum and professional guidance) and quantity (e.g. through specification of the minimum number of encounters that a student should experience).

There is also a question as to whether the language of 'employer encounters' is too restrictive given the wide range of approaches that could be used to bring education and employment together. This suggests another area for deliberation around broadening the Benchmark to include wider and more strategic engagements with employers around things like teacher CPD, curriculum and school governance.

BENCHMARK 6

Benchmark 6 focuses on 'experiences of workplaces', which is defined as providing first-hand experience of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience for pupils to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.

A summary of the evidence on work experience by Buzzeo and Cifci (2017) suggests that work experience and other forms of work-related learning such as job shadowing and workplace visits are associated with a range of impacts including student satisfaction, the development of employability skills, increased personal effectiveness and career readiness and improved educational and career outcomes (OECD, 2022). This is endorsed by some empirical work which finds that work experience placements contribute to increased salary, reduced likelihood of NEET outcomes, increased work-relevant skills (Kashefpakdel & Percy, 2022; Kettunen et al.,2023, Manno, 2024) and employability skills (NatCen Social Research & SQW, 2017; Hakiki et al., 2023).

There is also evidence to suggest that student and employer satisfaction with work experience is generally high (NatCen Social Research & SQW, 2017). Student surveys show that students continue to value experiences of the workplace (Youth Unemployment UK, 2018; 2022). Satisfaction drops when placements are poorly organised, the placement role is too limited or undemanding or where there is poor communication between the student and the employer.

As well as providing insights into the impacts of work experience, recent evidence also provides ideas about how work experience can best be organised to make it effective. Key elements of effective practice include:

- **Clear aims.** Work experience placements have clear aims which are communicated to all of the stakeholders involved (students, parents and employers) (SQW, 2022). These aims should establish what the outcome of a young person's experience should be and support them to develop their skills and knowledge (Alexander et al., 2020).

- **Structured for learning.** Placements need to be carefully structured to encourage learning and provide students with a varied experience of the workplace (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017; O Regan & Bhattacharya, 2023).

- **Progressive programme of placements.** Interviews with professionals involved in the delivery of work experience suggest that schools and colleges should have a comprehensive and progressive programme of work experience placements (Alexander et al., 2020; NatCen Social Research & SQW, 2017). These experiences of the workplace should be age appropriate, meet students' individual needs and career aspirations, and provides a range of opportunities. (Alexander et al., 2020).

- **Length/time.** There is no research that provides clarity about how long work experience placements should be or when they are best timed. NatCen Social Research and SQW (2017) do however provide further insights on what current practice is. They find that the average work experience placement for years 10 and 11 is 8 days, while for years 12 and 13 it is 12 days.

- **Brokerage.** To make work experience happen there is a need for relationships to be developed between education and employers. Specialist brokers either located within the school or college or outside of it can be important in establishing these relationships (Hallam et al., 2015). It is important for brokerage between education and employers to be appropriately resourced and for there to be an identified contact point within schools or colleges (SQW, 2022).

- **School/college mediation of experience.** It is important for schools and colleges to play an active role in the mediation of work experience opportunities, rather than simply allowing students and their parents to organise all work experience placements (SQW, 2022). This is particularly important in ensuring that disadvantaged students can access high quality placements. If students are left alone to identify their own placements there is a risk that work experience serves to reinforce rather than challenge social reproduction (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017).

- **Alignment.** Placements should be aligned with the interests and ambitions of the student (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017; SQW, 2022).

- **Monitoring and review.** It is important for students to be monitored whilst they are on placement to check that the placement is working effectively and for employers to be encouraged to provide them with feedback on their performance (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017).

- **Preparation and debriefing.** It is important to prepare students for their placements and ensure that they are debriefed after the placements have taken place to support them to draw career learning out of the placement (Buzzeo & Cifci, 2017; NatCen Social Research & SQW, 2017; SQW, 2022).

Other research argues for the broadening of the conception of work experience to include forms of volunteering and social action (Williams, 2017). Supporting students to engage in this kind of activity has been found to develop students' personal effectiveness and employability skills (Williams, 2017). Williams (2017) found that for volunteering to be successful and to meet the criteria of an effective work experience placement many similar conditions must be in place as those described above in relation to more conventional approaches to work experience. These include ensuring that the benefits of volunteering are advertised appropriately, at a suitable time, and that structure and support is provided to young people to volunteer, and that young people should be given the opportunity to reflect on their volunteering experiences.

In the context of career guidance for SEND schools, Kaya et al. (2016) discovered that young people on the autism spectrum who participated in job placements, especially when combined with other forms of career guidance, were significantly more likely to secure competitive employment compared to those who did not receive such services.

There is also evidence to suggest that young people with special educational needs and disabilities may need placements to be organised in a different way from mainstream students (NatCen Social Research & SQW, 2017). Research on SEND schools highlights both the value of offering placements for SEND young people and the need for additional forms of support and adaption to make this work (Emms et al., 2020). The supported internship model offers one approach to work experience, which sees students placed with an employer over an extended period of time (up to a year) offers one well evidenced approach for some young people with SEND (Hanson et al., 2021).

Since the pandemic there has also been considerable interest in whether work experience can be successfully delivered online. Evidence remains emergent in this area, but there are some positive examples from higher education that suggest that this can be done (McAllister et al., 2022; Taylor & Salmon, 2021). In the context of schools (Kashefpakdel & Akande, 2022) have shown that virtual experiences of the workplace can broaden the range of opportunities to learn about a business, build key skills such as teamwork and presentation skills and increase self-efficacy and confidence.

Recent research also demonstrates a range of challenges in accessing work experience. Archer and Moote (2016) found that less than half of pupils (45%) in the north of England had had an experience with a workplace. Both those with lower attainment and those on an academic path were less likely to have received an experience. There is also some evidence to suggest that colleges are better at delivering work experience than schools (NatCen & SQW, 2017). NatCen Social Research & SQW (2017) argue that there is a need for both more precise guidance about what schools and colleges should be delivering and for more funding to support the organisation of work experience.

SUMMARY

Research shows that experience of workplace has numerous benefits. They boost student satisfaction, foster employability skills, and enhance career readiness. Effective work placements are defined by having clear objectives, being structured for learning, aligning with students' interests, and involving thorough preparation and debriefing. Volunteering is also emerging as a valuable avenue for work-related learning, contingent upon it meeting specific effectiveness criteria. For SEND students, the approach needs to be even more tailored, ensuring placements fit their unique needs, with extended support systems. The introduction of virtual work experiences in the post-pandemic era has widened the scope of opportunities, though accessibility remains an issue for some.

IMPLICATIONS

The recent literature provides further evidence to support the inclusion of experiences of workplaces as an aspect of careers guidance and provision. There is evidence to show that experience of workplace leads to a range of outcomes including satisfaction, skills development, improved career readiness and better educational and career outcomes.

The evidence also provides considerable insights about how work experience is best organised. Given this, it might be possible to provide more clarity on the optimum organisation of experiences of the workplace. Particularly important areas to consider are the centrality of brokerage arrangements to successful experiences of the workplace and the importance of providing school or college mediation of work experience placements rather than leaving it to young people and their parents to source placements. There would also be a strong case for explicitly broadening the definition of work experience to include volunteering and social action. There is also some promising evidence on virtual experiences that could inform the definition of experiences of the workplace in the future.

Another area that merits further attention is the organisation of experiences of the workplace for young people with SEND. There is growing practice and evidence that suggests that there may be value in a substantially different approach for this group e.g. through supported internships. This is an important area to consider as the Benchmarks are developed.

BENCHMARK 7

Benchmark 7, 'encounters with further and higher education', focuses on the need for all pupils to understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and technical routes and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace (Burgess, 2023). While there is a wide range of existing literature examining diverse elements that shape the move to higher education – including gender, ethnicity and a range of social, cultural, personal, and economic considerations (McCall et al., 2020; Fontanini et al., 2020; Bolton & Lewis, 2023) there is less evidence which discusses secondary school students' transitions to, and encounters with, further education.

The evidence base is also limited in its ability to demonstrate causal links between career guidance interventions and information and experiences about post-secondary choices and young people's subsequent progression into post-secondary studies. Despite this there is strong agreement that career guidance is important in underpinning young people's post-secondary learning choices, including vocational choices (Gordon & Steele, 2015; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

There is a strong case that young people need help and support in making post-secondary choices and that the education system is often poor in providing such information. Dickinson (2019) identifies that a substantial minority of young people and their parents face challenges in finding and accessing relevant information to help them to make educational choices, noting that a key is students' concerns about the reliability of the information sources that they can find. Challenges in finding useful, high-quality information about post-secondary choices are exacerbated by a lack of awareness of vocational qualifications such as T levels amongst classroom teachers (CFE Research & Hughes, 2017). CFE Research and Hughes, go on to argue that it is important to ensure that teachers are informed about technical qualifications as teachers are central to advising students about post-16 education choices.

There is a growing evidence base which shows that career guidance interventions can support young people to become more informed about and move into a range of post-secondary choices. Although, as noted earlier, the research is typically stronger with respect to higher education choices than vocational pathways. For example, CFE Research (2015) have looked at the progression into higher education of disadvantaged and under-represented groups. Their findings emphasise the significance of earlier and more robust engagement by higher education institutions throughout all school ages. It demonstrates that these institutions must engage with young people in the initial stages of decision-making and foster a sustained and favourable presence in local communities, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. The report suggests that the value of these activities is particularly high for young people and their parents who have had scarce or no interaction with higher education.

There is a relatively well-developed literature base which addresses the engagement of students from under-represented groups (e.g. those from working-class or ethnic minority backgrounds) into higher education. Much of this work overlaps with discussions of career guidance, often recommending a range of approaches which are similar to those contained within the Gatsby Benchmarks. Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) is a What Works Centre that have developed an evidence toolkit (TASO, n.d.) that provides a useful summary of the main approaches to widening participation and assesses the evidence base in relation to these. Younger et al.'s (2019) and Robinson and Salvestrini's (2020) systematic reviews also provide further useful summaries of this evidence. These sources identify four main evidence-based approaches for supporting disadvantaged young people's journeys to higher education.

- **Information advice and guidance.** Describes a range of approaches that are primarily focused on providing students with information about post-secondary choices and what the costs, benefits and outcomes of this might be. TASO argues that there is medium strength evidence which suggests that this kind of intervention can have a positive, albeit small, impact on young people's desire to access post-secondary education and on their likelihood of doing so.

- **Summer schools.** Describe on-campus activities which provide participants with an immersive experience of higher education. TASO view the evidence for summer schools as emergent and argue that there is a need for more research to demonstrate causality. However, what research does exist typically finds a positive impact from summer school participation including increased aspirations and improved attainment.

- **Mentoring, counselling, coaching and role models.** Describes a range of interventions that provide students with access to a supportive adult or current student in post-secondary education. This mentor might provide information and inspiration through talks and events or more intensive forms of support, perhaps delivered through a structured programme or a series of meetings. TASO argue that there is currently only emergent evidence to support the use of such approaches and little evidence of causality. However, while there are some mixed results such interventions seem to have a broadly positive impact on students' aspirations. Younger et al. (2019) also provide evidence of the impact of similar kinds of interventions, although their assessment of the overall strength of the evidence is similar.

- **Multi-intervention outreach.** Finally, TASO discusses what it refers to as 'multi-intervention outreach' which describes programmatic interventions which take place over a period of time and combine a number of smaller activities (such as the three discussed above). It is possible to describe the Gatsby Benchmarks in total as a multi-intervention approach.

A broader review of the literature conducted by Dickinson (2019) for the Department for Education examines the impact of access to career guidance on young people's choices between HE, FE and apprenticeships. The report highlights the importance of information and reveals varying information needs among young individuals pursuing different post-18 educational pathways. Irrespective of the route chosen (Technical, FE or HE), most young individuals seek course entry requirements and the nature of the learning they can expect. However, those favouring academic routes show a stronger interest in aspects such as previous learner satisfaction, costs, financial support availability, and potential job and earnings outcomes.

For pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, research suggests that early transition planning for higher education is crucial because in SEND settings, young people often need help expressing their post-school goals and actively participating in planning so the non-academic assistance and mentorship programmes might be even more vital than academic support in this context to prepare them for a new academic environment (Bell et al., 2017; Hamblet, 2014; Lindsay et al., 2016).

When making educational decisions, Dickinson (2019) finds that students exhibit a preference for centralised career information coupled with personal guidance that is tailored to their needs, preferably communicated through face-to-face interaction, phone, or text, especially among those on technical FE/HE routes. Those on technical routes consult subject teachers less frequently and perceive them as less helpful than those on academic routes. Dickinson also points out perceived biases in career guidance towards academic routes, often neglecting technical or vocational options, especially apprenticeships.

A more recent study by The Careers & Enterprise Company (2023) indicates that while young people generally understood apprenticeships and, to a lesser extent, other technical pathways, this understanding did not translate into a corresponding uptake of these pathways. The study identified several barriers to uptake, including a lack of local opportunities, travel difficulties, the influence of parents and teachers, ineligibility due to specific requirements, fear of specialisation, and the length and variable timing of the application process.

SUMMARY

The existing literature provides stronger insights on the engagement of young people with higher education than with technical pathways. How schools and colleges can support engagement with technical pathways remains an area for further research in the future. The existing research around higher education, suggests that to influence students' progression into post-secondary studies, higher education institutions need to increase engagement, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. This, along with tailored and reliable career guidance services that consider students' diverse needs and interests, can support students' informed decision-making. Parents, carers, and teachers are the key influencers in these decisions, necessitating initiatives that cater to them and counter the perceived bias towards academic pathways. Additionally, addressing the disparity in T Level awareness among educators is vital, indicating a need for their professional development.

IMPLICATIONS

While the evidence does not contradict the prescriptions set out in Benchmark 7, neither does it explicitly endorse them. The focus on meaningful encounters, both in terms of meetings with staff and students from post-secondary destinations and visits to higher education is supported theoretically by evidence already discussed in relation to Benchmarks 5 and 6. But where specific evidence exists around supporting transitions to post-secondary educational destinations, it typically highlights the need for multiple interventions, more intensive interventions and strong integration of interventions with personal guidance. They also frequently emphasise the importance of developing more informed stakeholders around the young person, including parents and teachers.

BENCHMARK 8

Benchmark 8, 'personal guidance', states that 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.

There is extensive literature that supports the efficacy of personal guidance (Brown, 2015; Everitt et al., 2018; Whiston, 2021). With evidence suggesting a range of outcomes from effective personal guidance including increased career readiness and educational outcomes such as increased likelihood of attending higher education (Tomaszewski et al., 2017). Percy's (2020), return on investment analysis, suggests that the impact of career guidance on increased lifelong earnings, reduced NEET levels and reduced higher education drop out, mean that for every pound that is invested in career guidance, the government should anticipate recouping at least £3 from reduced expenditure and increased tax revenue.

In their longitudinal study, Poynton and Lapan (2017) have examined the influence of career guidance services received in secondary school on post-secondary aspirations, initial enrolment in post-secondary destinations, retention, and persistence. They discovered significant relationships between these predictors and both the short-term and long-term outcomes studied. The researchers emphasised the value of high-quality college and career counselling services, indicating the vital role of school counsellors in students' post-secondary aspirations. A meta-analysis conducted by Brown (2016) demonstrates that personal guidance has been proven to be modestly, but significantly, more effective than no intervention, particularly in the context of choice-making and job-finding outcomes.

Similarly, the findings of a qualitative research by Maree and Magere (2023) in Tanzania revealed that career guidance intervention has enhanced the participants' career decision-making capacity, improved their career adaptability, and their ability to make informed career decisions.

Hanson et al.'s (2021) evaluation of The Careers & Enterprise Company's *Personal Guidance Fund* is particularly interesting as it explores the efficacy of personal guidance within English educational settings. The evaluation explores the influence of personalised guidance on the overall student experience and concludes that personal guidance significantly enhanced students' attitudes and behaviours by increasing attributes such as confidence, motivation, determination, and school or college engagement, and decreasing stress and anxiety levels. As result of personal guidance, many students could articulate their future plans, often linking these, either directly or indirectly, to the personal guidance they received which showed the integral role of such interventions in shaping students' career pathways and overall well-being.

The evidence on personal guidance also suggests a range of key factors that support the delivery of effective personal guidance:

- **Integration** with other career guidance interventions. Personal guidance should not be viewed in isolation but rather integrated into a comprehensive career guidance programme by receiving support from senior leadership (e.g. in terms of appropriate resourcing and provision of space and time), and the participation of all staff (e.g. through engagement with referral processes) (Keele et al., 2020; Everitt et al., 2018).

- **Appropriate spaces.** Personal guidance needs to be delivered in appropriate spaces which are private, comfortable and of sufficient size (Everitt et al., 2018).

- **Fostering proactivity.** Effective career guidance includes a range of approaches that are designed to encourage students to become proactive managers of their own careers. Brown (2016) highlights similar elements like goal setting, supporting students to build relationships and access social support, and encouraging them to believe that their actions can shape the way that their lives unfold (boosting self-efficacy) as critical components of career interventions.

- **Sufficient time.** Guidance professionals need dedicated time to work with clients. Everitt et al. (2018) view 30 minutes as the minimum length for an effective interview. Reid (2018, 2022) goes further, arguing that longer guidance interviews are likely to be more effective and offer the possibilities for deeper kinds of conversation. She reiterates the idea that 30 minutes should be viewed as a minimum, highlights that shorter appointments could affect the quality of guidance provided and calls for the establishment of standard durations to ensure effective guidance outcomes.

- **Preparation and follow-up.** Young people need to be well prepared for personal guidance sessions and then provided with ongoing support to help them implement the decisions and plans formulated during those sessions (Everitt et al., 2018).

- **Professionalism.** It is also important that personal guidance interviews are conducted by qualified professionals (Keele et al., 2020). In England level 6 qualifications are usually seen as the minimum requirement (Everitt et al., 2018). Key aspects of professionalism are the recognition of the importance of ethics and the ability to use up-to-date and evidence-based approaches to ensure successful outcomes in personal guidance.

A recent international review by Hooley (2022) examines the practice of school-based career guidance in five countries (England, Iceland, New Brunswick (Canada), the Republic of Ireland, and Sweden), focusing on the training and qualifications required to lead career guidance in schools, the skills necessary for these roles, and how these skills are developed. Key findings indicate that governments commonly place a legal expectation on schools to deliver career guidance, often specifying the methods of delivery and the training and qualifications required for careers professionals.

In these countries, qualifications for career guidance professionals typically range from BA to MA degrees, often supplemented by formal certification or registration processes. Most countries have also implemented quality assurance mechanisms for school-based career guidance, ensuring quality across policy, organisation, process, and personnel domains.

There is also some evidence that personal guidance is particularly important for young people with SEND. For example, Kaya et al.'s (2016) research focused on young people on the autism spectrum and reported that when these young people received job search assistance and career counselling, as part of a broader package of career support, they were significantly more likely to secure competitive employment compared to those who did not receive such services.

SUMMARY

The review of the literature shows the important role of personal guidance in shaping students' post-secondary aspirations and readiness. The literature advocates for a more integrated, whole-school approach to career guidance (Everitt et al., 2018; Keele et al., 2020), reinforces the need for substantial personal guidance provided by trained professionals in dedicated spaces with sufficient time allocation (Reid, 2018, 2022). Importantly, it suggests that such support can significantly enhance university participation rates, particularly among disadvantaged individuals (Tomaszewski et al., 2017), and solidify students' post-secondary aspirations (Poynton & Lapan, 2017) as well as offering a range of other personal and societal benefits.

IMPLICATIONS

In general, the literature produced over the last decade strengthens the evidence for the inclusion of personal guidance in the Gatsby Benchmarks. As with other Benchmarks, new evidence has provided greater insights into what works and may suggest that there is value in some refinements to the articulation of Benchmark 8. In particular, there may be value in thinking about how the specifications for what constitutes a personal guidance interview are set out. Greater precision about time, location, professionalism, and the need for interviews to be based on an evidence-based approach may be helpful.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature published over the last decade has strengthened the evidence base for the Gatsby Benchmarks. In general, it provides further evidence that the Benchmarks continue to serve as a viable and practical summary of the evidence in relation to careers programmes in schools and colleges.

While there are some areas highlighted in the Benchmarks where hard evidence remains limited, on no occasions has work produced between 2014 and 2023 contradicted the Benchmarks. We can therefore conclude that the Benchmarks remain as an evidence-based framework and that new evidence supports this.

However, there are a range of areas where greater clarity about what works is suggestive of refinements that could usefully be made to the Benchmarks. In many cases we now know more about what works and this could allow us to tighten up the prescriptions set out in the sub-Benchmarks to make them clearer and more strongly evidence based.

Finally, the review of the literature on career provisions in SEND settings highlight a range of insights that may be useful in informing future guidance for the interpretation of the Benchmarks in special schools and specialist colleges as well as for the career guidance of SEND students in mainstream. However, this review has also revealed a larger literature about special education settings and the transitions of SEND students to post-secondary destinations that is beyond the scope of this review. In the future there may be value in undertaking a more in-depth literature review focused on this subject so that the net can be spread more widely in exploring career guidance, transition support, and the interaction between these two areas, for SEND students. Such a review could provide a deeper understanding of, and better address, the challenges and needs of students with disabilities transitioning to post-secondary environments.

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HOW HAVE THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS BEEN ADDRESSED IN ACADEMIC AND GREY LITERATURE?

GATSBY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the literature that has been published since 2014 which explicitly addresses the Gatsby Benchmarks. It is based on a systematic review of the published evidence. A corpus of 765 papers and publications were addressed, and 126 relevant pieces of literature were identified.

The review finds that the Gatsby Benchmarks have come to define 'good career guidance' in England. This definition is rarely contested and has shaped policy on both a national and local level. There are strong indications that the Gatsby Benchmarks have become core to the English career guidance system with policymakers intending to continue to use them and the Benchmarks now built into a range of frameworks that support practice.

The Gatsby Benchmarks have now been implemented in the overwhelming majority of English schools and colleges, with the average school or college now meeting more than half of the Benchmarks. The experience of almost a decade of implementation has enabled the identification of a range of features associated with stronger performance, including: the Careers Hubs, quality assurance processes, senior leader buy-in, strong careers leadership, engagement from wider teaching staff, and time and resources. This in turn has led to substantial implications for the training, development and practice of a range of different professional and stakeholder groups.

There is an emergent evidence base on the impacts of the Gatsby Benchmarks. This suggests that they are well received by all stakeholders and support positive behaviour change. It also suggests that they contribute to both career learning and support wider academic learning, and that they reduce NEET (not in education, employment or training) levels, with the impact on NEET twice as strong as for the most disadvantaged student cohorts. There is also some evidence that suggests that the Benchmarks can have wider social impacts and ameliorate disadvantage.

Finally, there are a range of challenges in implementing the Benchmarks and critiques of them. These critiques can be grouped into four main categories: (1) that the Benchmarks are difficult to implement; (2) the Benchmarks are a one-size fits all approach; (3) that there is a need for a stronger vision for careers education and career learning in them; and (4) critiques which challenge the educational philosophy implicit within the Benchmarks.

This review raises a number of issues that could be addressed as part of the review of the Benchmarks.

- Given the strong influence of the Gatsby Benchmarks, and their level of embeddedness into the existing English career guidance system, it is important that any changes are managed carefully to minimise disruption.
- There is a need to further align policy, regulation, guidance and funding with the Gatsby Benchmarks to ensure that the level of engagement with the Benchmarks can continue to grow. This is not primarily about changing the Benchmarks themselves, but rather about improving the level of support available to schools and colleges to help them to implement them.
- There is growing clarity about what constitutes effective conditions for the implementation of the Benchmarks e.g. Careers Hubs, attention to quality, leadership, whole school buy-in and appropriate time, resources and training. It is important to consider how this underpinning infrastructure can be developed and guaranteed in all schools and colleges.
- There are a wide range of tools and systems which are designed to provide schools and colleges with help in quality assuring their career guidance. There may be value in reflecting on this quality assurance landscape with the aim of simplifying it and placing the Benchmarks unambiguously at its centre.
- Finally, there are questions about how well the Gatsby Benchmarks are differentiated to specific and local contexts. Given this Gatsby could be more explicit about the possibilities for adaption.

This paper also suggests a number of specific considerations that relate to individual Benchmarks.

- **Benchmark 1.** The recognition of the importance of leadership is an important part of Benchmark 1. In order to make this more effective there may be value in thinking about how career guidance is embedded into senior leaders training, as well as in extending the range of training available for careers leaders.
- **Benchmark 3.** Schools and colleges may need more help in developing both targeted support and good record keeping. Again, this may not be about the need to change the Benchmarks, but rather about the need to support schools and colleges further at they engage with this Benchmark.
- **Benchmark 4.** There may be value in thinking more broadly about the model of careers education encompassed in the Gatsby Benchmarks. Revisions might include a more explicit link to learning outcomes and a recognition of the possibility of delivering careers education outside of a subject context. Effective implementation of Benchmark 4 relies on the engagement of classroom teachers. Research suggests that awareness of the Benchmarks is far from universal and so it may be worth considering whether actions need to be taken to increase engagement.
- **Benchmark 6.** Effectively delivery of Benchmark 6 relies on schools having access to employers and appropriate levels of resourcing to support the management and supervision of experience of the workplace.
- **Benchmark 7.** Effective delivery of Benchmark 7 has similarities with Benchmark 6 and also relies on having appropriate networks and resourcing.
- **Benchmark 8.** There may be value in further specification about the nature and level of personal guidance that is needed, as well as value in improving the funding for personal guidance.

While there are a small number of issues that could be addressed through the amendment of the Benchmarks, in most cases the commentary on the Benchmarks has broadly accepted the framework set out and critiqued the policy and practice infrastructure which exists to deliver them. This therefore raises as many questions about the development of the system as it does about the development of the Benchmarks themselves.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the literature that has been published since 2014 which explicitly addresses the Gatsby Benchmarks. It is based on a systematic review of the published evidence. The aim of this review is to understand the reception of the Benchmarks by the academic and policy communities and to examine the way in which they have been used, with a particular focus on evidence which demonstrates the impact of the Benchmarks, or which surfaces issues for consideration in their implementation, development and adaption.

The review seeks to capture the discourse and debate that has emerged around the Gatsby Benchmarks. A second review has also been undertaken that looks at new evidence which can inform judgements about the efficacy of the different Benchmarks.

REVIEW APPROACH

The review began with a search for the phrase 'Gatsby Benchmarks' in the search engine Google Scholar, university library search engines which aggregate a range of academic databases and in selected additional databases like Bloomsbury Education and Childhood Studies, ERIC, Scopus and Web of Science. This was supplemented with further searching using Google and with the existing knowledge of the research team and the support of the team at the Gatsby Foundation.

A citation chaining approach was then used to expand the corpus meaning that where reviews of papers identified new research that had not been identified in the initial search, these were also added to the list. This gave us a corpus of 765 papers and publications which addressed the Gatsby Benchmarks. The results were reviewed and refined down to 106 results which were chosen to be included in this literature review.

Key criteria for inclusion were as follows:

- **relevance.** Studies had to explicitly address the Benchmarks and so literature that was not directly relevant to the Benchmarks was excluded;
- **substantive.** Literature was included where it provided substantive new information, ideas or data. If it was just a reiteration of the Benchmarks or another document (e.g., summary documents produced for schools) it was excluded;
- **research-based.** Literature was excluded where it was not based on any research or new thinking. This meant that we excluded some policy documents if they did not include new thinking, data and information;
- **English.** Literature was excluded where it focused on the use and translation of the Gatsby Benchmarks in other countries. This will be addressed in a subsequent paper.

DEFINING 'GOOD CAREER GUIDANCE'

When Sir John Holman and the International Centre for Guidance Studies conducted the initial research for what would become *Good Career Guidance* (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2014) a key aim was to define what 'good career guidance' was. The review drew on the OECD (2004) definition of career guidance, which framed career guidance as a broad and multi-faceted activity, rather than in narrow terms as a one-to-one activity (what Gatsby called 'personal guidance').

> **Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counseling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services. (OECD, 2004, p.10).**

Gatsby decided to build on the OECD's definition through *Good Career Guidance* and the development of the Benchmarks. Firstly, the OECD definition was focused on all ages, whereas the Gatsby study was primarily interested in young people in schools and colleges. Secondly, it was somewhat abstract and unsuitable to use as a practical framework, and thirdly, and most importantly, the OECD definition described what career guidance was, but it did not have very much to say about how it could or should be done at the level of the school, in other words, what constituted 'good' practice.

By the end of the study, The Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2014) concluded that:

> **There is no single 'magic bullet' in [good] career guidance. It is about doing a number of things – identified in our benchmarks – consistently and well. (p.15)**

The report went on to define 'good career guidance' through eight Benchmarks, supported by more detailed sub-Benchmarks. Andrews (2019a) welcomes this clear definition and argues for the adoption of the language used by Gatsby as a way of clarifying the wide array of terms (from vocational guidance to CEIAG) that have been used to describe the area. His only suggestion for change is that the term 'personal guidance' be changed to 'career counselling' or 'personal career guidance'. The support for the language and definitions used in the Gatsby Benchmarks was also endorsed in the evaluation of the Gatsby Benchmark pilot in the North East (Hanson et al., 2021a, p.13) which concluded that the Benchmarks created '*A shared language across schools, FE [further education] and HE [higher education] institutes, employers and other careers providers and stakeholders*'.

The Benchmarks have been widely adopted in government policy, schools, and colleges across England and beyond, as the framework to follow. Over the following nine years the Benchmarks have become a widely accepted definition of good career guidance. As Stewart (2021, p.5) says in a report for the Department for Education (DfE); '*there is a clear definition of what good careers guidance looks like in the form of the Gatsby Benchmarks*'. And, as we will demonstrate, most other literature, whether it comes from a research, policy or practice perspective, acknowledges the Benchmarks as a valid definition of good career guidance and as a useful framework for schools and colleges.

SHAPING POLICY

When the Gatsby Benchmarks were first published, career guidance was widely understood to be in a poor state following a series of cuts during the austerity period (House of Commons Education Committee, 2013; Watts, 2013). Despite the establishment of the National Careers Service in 2012, as well as continued government support of the National Citizen Service, these services were not a like for like replacement in terms of target age remit or funding the previous Connexions service offered (BIS, 2012; National Citizen Service, 2012). Importantly in the period after 2011/2012 all dedicated funding for youth-focused career guidance ceased, with local authorities and increasingly schools and colleges left to find funding for this area out of existing budgets. However, alongside the publication of *Good Career Guidance*, ministerial interest in the area began to grow and the Government began to invest in youth-focused careers provision again (DfE & Morgan, 2014).

During this period academics and commentators began to argue for the Gatsby Benchmarks to be embedded into policy (Andrews, 2016; Hooley et al., 2015). This demand gathered pace with civil society actors making the same call (Gadsby & Loftus, 2017).

By 2017 the Government's new careers agency, The Careers & Enterprise Company had begun to support schools and colleges in meeting the Benchmarks and in monitoring the level of uptake across the country (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2017). At the end of 2017, the DfE determined that the Benchmarks should be part of its Careers Strategy (DfE, 2017), with the Benchmarks also picked up in the accompanying statutory guidance that was released in early 2018.

Government guidance on careers guidance in colleges has undergone significant change, with recognition of post-16 institutions growing over the past decade. Starting in 2013, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) and the DfE (2013) published relatively sparse guidance for further education (FE) colleges and sixth form colleges, referring to the National Careers Service, case studies and useful resources such as contacts and websites. This was followed in 2018 with *Careers guidance for FE and sixth form colleges*, which used the newly modified Gatsby Benchmarks for colleges as the framework to use to deliver a successful careers guidance programme in these post-16 institutions (DfE, 2018; Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2018; Holman, 2018). In 2021, the *Skills and Post-16 Education Bill* reiterated the importance of using the Gatsby Benchmarks for colleges to provide technical education advice post-16 (Hubble et al., 2021).

Since the 2017 Careers Strategy and the statutory guidance that followed it, the Benchmarks have continued to influence career guidance policy in England, with the government continually referring to the Benchmarks to inform them about best practice when making decisions about careers provision in schools and colleges (Long & Hubble, 2019; Long et al., 2020; Long, 2021; Long et al., 2021; Long & Hubble, 2022). They have become increasingly embedded in the Government's statutory guidance, with the latest version devoting 22 pages to detailed guidance on the Benchmarks (DfE, 2023). Despite this, some differences remain between the statutory requirements and the Benchmarks.

Beyond their importance to central government there are a range of other examples of where the Benchmarks have influenced policy makers including the way that Gatsby's commentary on them for students with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) has been referenced in policy documents (DfE, 2017; Long, 2021; Long et al., 2020; Long et al., 2021). They have also been cited as important by a variety of select committees and inquiries (Youth Unemployment Committee, 2021; Business, Innovation and Skills and Education Committees, 2016). Ofsted has also begun to use them as an indicator of effective practice in both mainstream and specialist settings (Long et al., 2020; Ofsted, 2023; Ofsted, 2024) and they have served as a framework for other government funded activities like the National Careers Service's Inspiration Agenda (Artess & Hanson, 2017).

Beyond central government the Benchmarks have provided an important framework for thinking about careers provision in local government (DfE, 2021a; Moore et al., 2017; Petrie, 2019) and other governmental initiatives such as the *Northern Powerhouse Strategy* and the *Augar Review* (Long, 2021; Long et al., 2021; Stewart, 2021). Critically the Benchmarks have also served as the conceptual basis for the work of the Government's agency responsible for career guidance, The Careers & Enterprise Company. Initially established to support young people aged 12 to 18 with their careers, The Careers & Enterprise Company adopted the eight Gatsby Benchmarks in 2017 as part of the Government's Careers Strategy in 2017, using the framework to measure schools' and colleges' success in providing careers guidance provision (DfE, 2017; DfE & Morgan, 2014; DfE & Morgan, 2017).

Looking to the future there is a good reason to believe that the Gatsby Benchmarks will remain important to policy makers. The Conservative Government set out its plan to reform skills provision in a white paper (DfE, 2021a). This document devoted space to career guidance in schools and colleges and made use of the Gatsby Benchmarks both to measure progress on career guidance and to set expectations for the future (Hooley, 2021b). On the other side of the political aisle an independent report conducted for The Labour Party recommended that to create a successful and skilled workforce in the UK, there needs to be effective careers provision (The Council of Skills Advisors, 2022). The report referenced the Gatsby Benchmarks and suggested that they should continue to be the basis of careers provision in schools. The adoption of the framework by both the current (Conservative) Government and The Labour Party suggests that there is cross-party consensus on the Benchmarks. This offers the Benchmarks a good chance of surviving regime changes and embedding themselves as a permanent part of the educational landscape.

The assumption that the Gatsby Benchmarks are now core to the English career guidance landscape is endorsed by many of the research papers (Allen & Chant, 2021). Yet despite this, much research also highlights the limitations in policy and notes that while policymakers typically endorse the Benchmarks, they do not necessarily follow through by providing the structures and funding that would support their effective implementation (Holt-White et al., 2022). This has been acknowledged by the House of Commons Education Committee (2023a; 2023b) with evidence raising concerns about slower progress being made on Benchmark achievement in some schools and colleges. However, the House of Commons Education Committee (2023a; 2023b) continue to support the implementation of the Benchmarks, highlighting the year-on-year improvement in the average number of Benchmarks achieved (1.8 to 4.9 between 2018/19 and 2021/22).

In summary the literature suggests that the Gatsby Benchmarks have become well embedded into policy at a range of levels in England.

FRAMING PRACTICE

As already discussed in section 0, the Gatsby Benchmarks have created a clear definition of good career guidance and provided schools and colleges and the practitioners that work within them, with a framework for practice. The research literature concurs with the idea that the Benchmarks have been adopted as a standard that schools and colleges are expected to meet when providing career guidance to their students (Holliman et al., 2023; Percy & Tanner, 2022; Regan & Bhattacharya, 2022; Regan & Bhattacharya, 2023; Robson et al., 2024). Andrews (2019a) notes the similarity between the Benchmarks and one proposed by Law and Watts in 1977, arguing that 'the essential elements of a good careers programme remain broadly the same' (p.89).

Throughout the literature, the Benchmarks are widely referred to as a standard against which actual practice can be compared. Many papers which discuss effective practice in careers, relate their discussion to the Gatsby Benchmarks as the overarching framework for practice (CBI, 2019; CBI & Pearson, 2019; EngineeringUK, 2020; EngineeringUK, 2021; Hooley et al., 2016; Hooley et al., 2023; Hutchinson, 2018; Isherwood, 2023; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2016). Research articles also typically use the Benchmarks to describe and evaluate current practice in England's schools and colleges (Andrews & Hooley, 2019; CBI, 2019; Dimitrellou & Moore, 2020; Moore et al., 2017; Percy et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018). In the international context, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) refers to the Gatsby Benchmarks as a key pillar of the career education system in England, in their exploration of the career development experience for teenagers (Mann et al., 2024).

As previously discussed, following the development of the Benchmarks for young people in colleges (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2018) there has been some literature that has specifically focused on the implementation of the Benchmarks in colleges and other FE settings (Williams et al., 2018). Again, this literature highlights the Benchmarks as a relevant and compelling framework for career guidance in these settings and provides examples of their use (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2020b).

The Benchmarks have shaped the careers sector's approach to developing resources and careers programmes, including digital provision (Leung, 2022). The Benchmarks have also been used as a framework of inquiry into careers guidance in elective home education (Mundy et al., 2024). In some cases, individual Benchmarks alone, rather than the framework as a whole, have also been important in setting standards and focusing debate and discussion around the nature and intensity of the components of 'good career guidance', for example in relation to clarifying the nature and level of personal guidance that is required (Everitt et al., 2018; Hanson et al., 2021b; Andrews and Hooley, 2018).

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Because the Benchmarks provide a clear and widely accepted description of 'good career guidance' they have the potential to be used in the quality assurance of provision (Hughes & Smith, 2020). Hooley and Rice (2019) argue that the Benchmarks seek to assure quality by describing the type of organisation that can deliver effective career guidance, the organisational practices that typify good quality, the processes that constitute good career guidance and also require attention to the experience of students and other stakeholders (the user experience).

The Gatsby Benchmarks have been recognised by Ofsted and are used, to some extent, to inform their judgements on school and college quality (Long et al., 2020; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2020a). Some commentators have argued that the Benchmarks should have a greater role in informing Ofsted judgements as a way of increasing the status of career guidance within schools and colleges (Regan & Bhattacharya, 2022).

While the Benchmarks offer a framework for good practice, they are not a formal quality standard which is inspected against. The introduction of the Compass self-assessment tool in 2016 as a standardised self-assessment tool has incentivised engagement with the Benchmarks and allowed schools and colleges to gain insights into how their practice measures up against the Benchmarks and against other institutions' provision (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2017). The fact that The Careers & Enterprise Company and Enterprise Advisers use this self-assessment to guide development work with schools and colleges also moves the Benchmarks closer to being a formal quality standard. The Careers & Enterprise Company have also created the Future Skills Questionnaire, a self-evaluation tool which is designed to measure how student participation in the careers activities influences the development of students' career learning and skills (Tanner & Finlay, 2021).

The Careers & Enterprise Company's newly developed Careers Impact System also shows potential for a way in which schools and colleges can assess their careers provision, measured against the Gatsby Benchmarks (Chrysalis Research, 2023; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023b). The Careers Impact System adopts several approaches, including self-assessment, expert reviews and peer-to-peer reviews, and national reviews which allow for deeper insights into individual Benchmark achievement and impact (Chrysalis Research, 2023; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023b).

The careers sector's existing quality standard (the Quality in Careers Standard) took the decision in 2018 to align its standards and processes with the Gatsby Benchmarks (Quality in Careers, 2023a, 2023b). The Quality in Careers Standard combines the publication of a standard, with an inspection and accreditation (and reaccreditation) process delivered by a national network of assessors. The alignment of the Benchmarks with the Quality in Careers Standard reiterates the influence the framework has had on practice and the definition of quality in the careers sector. There is some evidence linking achievement of the Quality in Careers Standard with increased compliance with the Gatsby Benchmarks (Moore et al., 2017; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2018). Some commentators argue that there would be value in further strengthening the connection between the Quality in Careers Standard and the Gatsby Benchmarks (Andrews, 2019b; Regan & Bhattacharya, 2022).

In summary, the Benchmarks now stand as a relatively uncontested framework for careers practice and quality assurance in England's schools.

DIRECT INFLUENCE ON PRACTICE

The Benchmarks were originally developed for secondary schools, with a version later being created for colleges. However, they have also been adopted and applied to various other settings including alternative provision.

Across the variety of setting there is strong evidence that the Gatsby Benchmarks are having a strong impact on practice. Recent research by The Careers and Enterprise Company (2023) suggests that at least 84% of English secondary schools and colleges are now engaged with the Gatsby Benchmarks through Compass. The average school or college is now meeting almost five of the Gatsby Benchmarks (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a). A much wider array of literature confirms this picture of strong engagement with the Gatsby Benchmarks by both schools and college and explores the experience of implementation (Gadsby & Loftus, 2017; Gough, 2019; Cockett et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021).

The evaluation of the Gatsby Benchmarks pilot in the North East provides a wealth of information about what leads to successful implementation (Hanson et al., 2021a). This is supported by a range of other evidence, discussed below. Drawing together the evidence suggests that there are a range of key factors which lead to successful implementation. These include:

- **Careers Hubs.** The existence of local Careers Hubs which can provide schools and colleges with support, some (limited) supplementary resourcing and a community of practice is seen as a critical element of implementation (Andrews, 2019b; Hanson et al., 2021b). Percy and Tanner (2022) report accelerated achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks in careers hub schools compared to non-hub schools at around half a Benchmark per year. This is associated with reducing economic inactivity amongst young people (Regan & Bhattacharya, 2023);
- **engagement with the Quality in Careers Standard.** The Quality in Careers Standard is closely aligned with the Gatsby Benchmarks, and there is some evidence that engagement with it provides support for schools and colleges to achieve more Benchmarks (Moore et al., 2017; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2018);
- **senior leader buy-in.** Proactive support from senior leadership within schools and colleges is significant in the successful implementation of the Benchmarks. (Allen & Chant, 2021; Hanson & Neary, 2019). Some writers broaden this out to include school governors as well as senior leaders within the school (Hanson et al., 2021b; Moore et al., 2017);
- **strong careers leadership.** Having a Careers Leader provides a focus for a school or college to develop its career programme and implement the Benchmarks (Andrews & Hooley, 2017; Andrews & Hooley, 2022, Gadsby & Loftus, 2017; Hanson et al., 2021a; Andrews and Hooley, 2018). It is important that careers leadership is stable, suggesting that schools need to attend carefully to succession planning (Hooley & Andrews, 2018, 2022; Moore et al., 2017). In doing this, effective careers leadership enables Careers Leaders to achieve more of the Benchmarks, with 94% reporting that the framework improves careers guidance (Tanner et al., 2019);

- **engagement from teaching and wider teaching staff.** The recognition that Gatsby requires all staff to engage is critical, but achieving this kind of teacher buy-in is not always easy (Hanson et al., 2021b; Hooley et al., 2015);
- **time and resources.** The Benchmarks require schools and colleges to allocate substantial amounts of time to successfully implement them (Allen & Chant, 2021); and
- **training.** Delivering the Benchmarks requires skills and knowledge. There is evidence that trained Careers Leaders can deliver careers programmes more effectively (Finlay & Tanner, 2021; Gough, 2019; Williams et al., 2020). It is also important to recognise the importance of having careers advisers trained to at least level 6 (Everitt et al., 2018).

The process of implementation has led to a sector wide process of learning and development. Research has highlighted key requirements for implementing and ensuring the effectiveness of the Benchmarks. For example:

- in relation to Benchmark 3, it is important to build relationships with specialist organisations who can deliver targeted support to different groups (Hanson et al., 2021a). There is also a need to identify technical systems that can help schools and colleges to manage the record keeping and tracking elements of this Benchmark (Moore et al., 2017). However, Compass has proved considerably successful in capturing key data that measures schools' and colleges' delivery of the Benchmarks and was developed into Compass+ by The Careers & Enterprise Company in 2017, allowing users of the Benchmarks to track and report their careers provision for individual students (The Careers & Enterprise Company, n.d.)
- in relation to Benchmark 6, Alexander et al. (2020) argue that it is important for schools to build networks of employers, dedicate staff time to the development of experiences of workplaces, make sure that the experiences start early (in Key Stage 3) and that they are designed pedagogically and embedded into the wider careers programme; and
- in relation to Benchmark 7 it is important to build close relationships with college and university outreach programmes including widening participation programmes such as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme / Uni Connect (Hanson et al., 2021a).

PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BENCHMARKS

The development of the Benchmarks and their increasing centrality to practice in UK schools has had an impact on a range of different groups. Ultimately this has led to some reshaping of the professional landscape around careers in England with Careers Leaders emerging as a key professional role and substantial implications for other professional groups.

School leaders

The Gatsby Benchmarks see a substantial role for school leaders. Much of the literature highlights the importance of senior leader buy-in to the programme (Allen & Chant, 2021; Hanson & Neary, 2019) with some writers going further and making specific suggestions for how this can be developed. For example, Gadsby and Loftus (2017) argue that careers training should be embedded into the training of all school middle leaders as part of an initiative to drive widespread culture change.

Careers leaders

The original *Good Career Guidance* highlighted the role of the *Schooldekaan* (a middle leadership careers teacher role) in the Netherlands and discussed the important role that it could play in supporting the development of the school's careers programme. During the piloting of the Benchmarks, it became clear that this leadership role was critical to the successful implementation of the Benchmarks in schools (Hanson et al., 2021a). This then developed into the Careers Leader role (Andrews & Hooley, 2017; Andrews & Hooley, 2018, 2022; Andrews & Hooley, 2018) which was embedded into the Government's careers strategy (DfE, 2017) and codified by The Careers and Enterprise Company and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2018a, 2018b).

A Careers Leader is 'the individual responsible and accountable for leading a school's or college's *careers programme*' and they are based in a school or college (Andrews & Hooley, 2018, p. 15). Research conducted into the role of Careers Leaders recommends the Benchmarks as the framework to use to be successful in this role (Williams et al., 2020; Allen & Chant, 2021), with further research helping to optimise and clarify the role further, including in colleges and other settings (Alexander et al., 2020; Gibson et al., 2021). However, other research has highlighted patchy implementation of careers leadership across the country and argued that more time and resources are needed for Careers Leaders (Allen & Chant, 2021; Holt-White et al., 2022). Providing careers guidance in an already busy curriculum and school schedule has proved challenging for Careers Leaders, as well as the lack of funding for schools or colleges to ensure that Careers Leader's are appropriately trained and resourced (Allen & Chant, 2021; Holt-White et al., 2022).

Research has found that well trained and experienced Careers Leaders are an important factor in successfully implementing the Benchmarks (Finlay & Tanner, 2021; Williams et al., 2020). Other findings make the case that training should be deepened beyond the current initial training offer to allow Careers Leaders to engage further with career theory, and continued through ongoing government funding (Gough, 2019).

Careers advisers

The delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks is dependent on access to appropriately qualified careers advisers. Research and recent statutory guidance states that careers advisers should be qualified at level 6 or above (Everitt et al., 2018; DfE, 2023). The careers adviser role is primarily related to the delivery of Benchmark 8, but also has implications for other Benchmarks, notably 2,3 and 4 (Hanson et al., 2021b).

Analysing the careers adviser workforce has proved complex, as research commissioned by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation highlights that there is 'no one source of data [which] provides a full and up to date picture of the size and nature of the professional careers adviser workforce' in schools and colleges (Cockett et al., 2021, p. 49). Some small-scale research suggests that the majority of schools had a qualified careers adviser, who were recruited both internally and externally; whereas other research argues that it is not possible to identify the number of internally and externally employed careers advisers in schools and colleges, due to there not being that 'one source of data' (Allnut, 2020; Cockett et al., 2021).

Some research argues that most schools do not directly employ a careers adviser (numbers may be as low as 300 directly employed careers advisers) and consequently schools rely on buying in a careers adviser from an external careers company. There is the potential for considerable market failure here as careers companies are reporting skills shortages, retention difficulties and wider business challenges (Gordon, 2022).

Where careers staff are trained to an appropriate professional level, they can contribute to the raising of the profile of career guidance provision in the school or college, work more effectively with teaching staff, support students more effectively and work more strategically (Hanson et al., 2021b). Effective training includes appropriate funding; buy-in and support from senior leadership teams, including their recognition of careers advisers as an established role and providing continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities; and training programme which prepares careers advisers to support SEND students, as well as those who are at risk being NEET (Hanson et al., 2021b).

There are challenges related to the level of training and competence for careers advisers. Careers advisers have reported finding it difficult to progress from lower-level qualifications to Level 6 or 7, particularly if they had not previously undertaken careers adviser study, therefore academic study and learning about theory proved challenging (Hanson et al., 2021b). Also, it has been difficult to schedule the time to participate in training and CPD during schools' and colleges' busy academic year (Hanson et al., 2021b).

As a result of these problems there are calls for increased funding for careers advisers to ensure that schools and colleges can meet the requirements of Benchmark 8, as well as allocating more time for training and CPD to take place, with the support from senior leadership (Hanson et al., 2021b; Holt-White et al., 2022). Holt-White et al. (2022) highlight the challenges of careers advisers being paid for through the school's budget. They suggest that there should be universal funding for careers advisers, but stop short of saying how this funding should be organised e.g. through the provision of funding to schools or through a national or local agency. Like Hanson et al. (2021b), they argue that some of this funding should be spent on ensuring that careers advisers are appropriately qualified to level 6.

Teachers

The Benchmarks also suggest an important new role for subject teachers (Davenport, 2019a; Hooley et al., 2015). Responsibility for implementing the Benchmarks cannot be allocated to the Careers Leader alone, but rather needs to be viewed as a whole school responsibility. This is reflected in recent statutory guidance that states that although Careers Leaders are 'responsible and accountable for the delivery of the school or college careers programme', in order for Careers Leaders to do this, they need the full support from their senior leadership team, as well as the opportunity to work with subject teachers (DfE, 2023, p. 17-18).

Research has been conducted to explore teachers' attitudes in contributing to careers guidance (Dodd & Hooley, 2018; Gatsby Charitable Foundation and Pye Tait Consulting, 2019; Holt-White et al., 2022). This research suggests that teachers have varying levels of understanding of, and degrees of confidence and competence in, delivering career guidance. However, further research has been conducted to address these concerns. Blake et al. (2023) to conduct an evaluation of the *Teacher Encounters Programme*, which found that providing teachers with opportunities to directly engage with employers increased their confidence in having careers conversations with their students.

The teacher's role is particularly important in relation to Benchmark 4. The process of embedding careers content into curriculum is skilled and requires staff with good careers knowledge and a clear understanding of curriculum (Collins & Barnes, 2017). However, the level of understanding about the Benchmarks is weakest amongst classroom teachers with only 40% aware of the Benchmarks (Holt-White et al., 2022). Given this there is probably a need to clarify the role of teachers further and support them to deliver on their role (Moote & Archer, 2018).

Parents

Parents and families are an important source of career information and advice for young people (Stewart, 2021). The Gatsby Benchmarks include criteria which concern the involvement of parents in career guidance. Firstly, they are viewed as a stakeholder whose perspectives should be sought, and secondly, they are viewed as having a particular role to play in the dissemination, and understanding of, career and labour market information. The Gatsby Charitable Foundation has commissioned additional work to explore the role of parents in supporting the careers of young people (Barnes et al., 2020, Opinium, 2020a,b). This work argues that parents are concerned about their children's careers and want to help. It also suggests that the role of parents should be increased.

Employers

The Benchmarks have embedded the importance of the role of employers within the framework. The number of experiences of workplaces and encounters that young people have with employers has grown as the Benchmarks have been implemented, with 4 out of 5 young people meeting employers every year, and 2 out of 3 young people leaving school and college having had an experience of the workplace (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2019). There has been considerable interest in the Benchmarks from employers and there are some examples of employers and employer representatives using it as a framework for their engagement with schools (Hertfordshire Business School, 2018). PwC provide a good example of this with all of their school's outreach activities matched to the Gatsby Benchmarks (Holt-White et al., 2022).

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

There is a growing body of evidence which traces the impacts of the Benchmarks on a variety of outcomes for young people. There is also some evidence suggesting that they have contributed to social justice.

We can understand the impacts of career guidance across a range of different levels (Hooley, 2017). Many of the impacts identified in the literature relate to young people's positive 'reaction' to the Benchmarks (e.g., 'the participants' experience and whether they have enjoyed participating and found it useful' [Hooley, 2017, p. 27]) and their 'behaviour change' and 'learning' following engagement. There is also evidence of harder 'results' attributable to the Benchmarks (e.g., the 'concrete outcomes' of participation in careers guidance [Hooley, 2017, p. 28]).

Reaction and behaviour change

The evidence suggests that young people are broadly satisfied with the career guidance that they receive (Stewart, 2021). The evaluation of the Gatsby pilot in the North East found that teachers recounted how their students were 'enthusiastic' during the pilot of the Benchmarks, as they felt like they had developed a stronger awareness and interest in careers, as well as an increase in their 'aspirations' (Hanson et al., 2021a, p. 271). The involvement of parents engaging with the students' careers increased, with them providing 'positive feedback' on their experiences. Also, employers experienced better conversations with students about careers, as they are more interested in the nature of work and why employers are in the roles that they are in (Hanson et al., 2021a). In the academic year 2022/23, 96% of young people in secondary schools had at least one encounter with an employer (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024). As a result, employers are increasingly supporting young people they engage with to enter into a career in their industry (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023c).

This suggests that experiences of the Benchmarks have been positive for both schools and colleges, parents and other stakeholders outside of schools and colleges.

Learning

Participation in the Benchmarks has also been found to increase students 'career readiness' (students self-evaluation of their preparedness for their career) (Dodd et al., 2022; Hanson et al., 2021a; Percy, 2024a; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024). This research has found that the greater the participation in Gatsby Benchmark activities the higher the level of career readiness.

Further research reveals a student in a school achieving all eight Gatsby Benchmarks would achieve a career readiness score of 3.5%pts higher than a student in a school achieving one Gatsby Benchmarks, illustrating the impact of schools and colleges implementing the whole framework (Percy, 2024a). As well as this, compared to students with a 0% career readiness score, students with a 100% career readiness score are two times more likely to engage in a wider variety of career options, are two times more likely to dismiss gender stereotypes and are two times more likely to make more considered economy-aligned career choices (Percy, 2024c). This is a result of engagement with the Gatsby Benchmarks (Percy, 2024c).

There is also some evidence of an impact on academic attainment; the more Benchmarks that were met, the greater the likelihood of students obtaining A*-C GCSEs (Hanson et al., 2021a). However, the impact on attainment remains inconclusive due in part to some changes to the examination system during the pilot study. Other studies have also observed relationships between attainment and the achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks, but also suffer from methodological limitations (Moore et al., 2017).

Results

There is evidence that suggests that participation in the Benchmarks increases young people's chance of achieving positive post-secondary outcomes and reducing NEET outcomes (Percy & Tanner, 2021; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a). This research estimates that a school with all eight Benchmarks will have 17% less NEET outcomes than a comparable school which does not meet any of the Benchmarks (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a). Further research into NEET outcomes found that Millennium Cohort Study students in institutions achieving a full Gatsby Benchmark score were 3.7%pts less likely to be NEET than their peers in schools with no Gatsby-style provision (Percy, 2024b). As well as this, students who received high-quality careers guidance through the Gatsby Benchmarks revealed a 1.2%pt improvement in post-18 EET rates, in comparison to providers who provided a lower quality of provision (Percy, 2024b). This not only highlights the positive impact the Benchmarks have on post-18 destinations but reiterates the importance of quality assurance when delivering the framework (Quality in Careers, 2023a, 2023b).

Social justice

The literature argues that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to face barriers to being successful in their careers' (Archer & Moote, 2016; Gadsby, 2017). To combat this, high quality career guidance should 'widen the horizons of young people, challenges stereotypes, and raise aspirations', however, the literature has argued that disadvantaged young people are often less likely to receive access to such high quality career guidance than their more advantaged peers (Stewart, 2021, p. 5).

Despite this, The Careers & Enterprise Company (2023a) find that schools serving more disadvantaged young people are now meeting more of the Gatsby Benchmarks. There is considerable optimism that the Benchmarks could provide the support and tools that could help those from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve their career aspirations (Hooley et al., 2014; Hanson & Neary, 2019; Hunt et al., 2021).

The Benchmarks have had a significant effect on the career prospects of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024). The Careers & Enterprise Company highlighted the fact that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds typically have lower career readiness, arguing that participation in the Gatsby Benchmarks can ameliorate this.

Geography is another feature which shapes young people's careers prospects in important ways (Alexander, 2023). Research exploring careers provision in rural and coastal areas has found that such schools can often struggle to deliver on high quality careers provision (Shepherd & Hooley, 2016). A key response to this has been to provide such schools with increased support to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks, suggesting that the framework is a useful tool in identifying regional inequalities and targeting support (DfE, 2021b; Shepherd & Hooley, 2016).

Finally, there is some evidence which suggests that the Benchmarks have made a positive impact on the career development of young people with SEND. The volume of SEND students receiving careers provision has increased since the initial implementation of the Benchmarks (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a). For example, the percentage of special schools where students had workplace experiences by the end of their studies has increased from 70% in the academic year 2020/21, to 83% in 2021/22, and to 87% in 2022/23 (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2023a; The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024).

CHALLENGES AND CRITIQUES

Despite the Benchmarks successes, there are a range of challenges and critiques of the Benchmarks. These critiques can be grouped into four main categories: (1) that the Benchmarks are difficult to implement; (2) the Benchmarks are a one-size fits all approach and lack sensitivity to different contexts; (3) that there is a need for a stronger vision for careers education and career learning; and (4) critiques which challenge the educational philosophy implicit within the Benchmarks. We will discuss each of these issues in turn.

Challenges of implementation

A range of literature has highlighted challenges and difficulties in implementing the Benchmarks. Implementing the Benchmarks is seen as time consuming, with many schools and school staff reporting that they do not have enough time during busy academic years with other commitments to successfully implement them (Holt-White et al., 2022).

Achieving the kind of whole school buy in that is required for the Benchmarks is also difficult. Benchmark 4 provides a good example of where this is the case. There is support in the literature for the idea that teachers are a significant 'source of careers information' for students and that learning about careers supports students' engagement and attainment in subject based learning (Davenport, 2019b; Ofqual, 2017). However, Davenport (2019a, b) argues that subject teachers often struggle to understand their role and feel confident and informed enough in the integration of career learning into their curriculum. Some research highlights Benchmark 4 as one of the most challenging for schools (Allen & Chant, 2021). Although the most recent report from The Careers & Enterprise Company (2023a) strikes a more optimistic note arguing that careers education is becoming increasingly embedded into the curriculum with 70% of schools and colleges now fully meeting Benchmark 4.

There is also concern that schools are insufficiently resourced to fully meet the Gatsby Benchmarks (Andrews, 2019b). In research from the Sutton Trust, there were widespread concerns from a range of stakeholders in schools about the level of resourcing available for career guidance (Holt-White et al., 2022). This includes 37% of senior leaders, 35% of teachers and 50% of, a small sample of careers leaders, disagreeing with the statement 'Our school has adequate funding and resources to deliver careers education and guidance'. Concerns were even higher in relation to concerns about staff time and substantial differences were noted between state schools, who were typically more concerned about funding, and private schools.

Resourcing issues are particularly highlighted in relation to personal guidance, as local authority provision of this service was defunded by government in 2011/2012, with no corresponding funding ever being given to schools (Andrews, 2019b). Other issues highlighted include difficulties in providing travel opportunities for students e.g. for visits to post-secondary learning providers (Hanson et al., 2021a).

There are also a range of specific issues that are experienced by colleges in implementing the Benchmarks including challenges of scale particularly around Benchmarks 3 and 8, achieving cross-institutional buy-in and capturing destinations data (Hanson et al., 2021a; Hector, 2021).

A one-size fits all approach

Some research highlights the fact that 'schools are not blank slates' meaning that they are institutions which have pre-existing practices and understandings of careers guidance in place (Houghton et al., 2021) For this reason, the Benchmarks have been criticised for assuming that the framework can easily be adopted into all schools (Houghton et al., 2021). Aligned with this critique, the same paper, also makes the critique that the Benchmarks are not attentive enough to socio-economic differences between schools and pupils (Houghton et al., 2021). A single fixed framework inevitably raises concerns about whether it is flexible enough to address the range of contexts within which it may be used. The Gatsby Charitable Foundation has partially addressed this through the creation of alternative versions of the Benchmarks for colleges (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2018) and through issuing guidance on how to interpret the Benchmarks for special schools (Gatsby Charitable Foundation et al., n.d.).

Other research has engaged with the issue of aligning the Gatsby Benchmarks with local contexts by highlighting the importance of using the Benchmarks to reflect on the current practice of schools and colleges and plot a path forwards (Hanson et al., 2021a) and of providing schools and colleges with support, as they seek to align pre-existing practices with the Gatsby Benchmarks (Artess & Hanson, 2017).

Career learning and careers education

Career guidance is a learning process through which individuals learn a variety of skills, knowledge and behaviours that will support them to transition to, and succeed in, their careers. Some literature argues that the Benchmarks do not engage young people in these learning processes.

McLoughlin et al. (2023) suggest that the Benchmarks prove successful in informing young people about the breadth of career options available, however, they argue that the framework does not consider students' moral reasoning behind their career decisions. As a result, this does not ensure that students are making career decisions for the right reasons due to a lack of engagement in deeper philosophical considerations behind their reasoning for these decisions (McLoughlin et al., 2023). McLoughlin et al. (2023) are cautious of extensive revisions to the Benchmarks because of how embedded the framework has become in secondary schools. Instead, McLoughlin et al. (2023) suggest that careers professionals, particularly careers advisers, who deliver the Benchmarks should understand the importance of students' moral reasoning in their career decision-making and be sufficiently trained to engage young people in activities that explore their moral reasoning.

Some literature describes the Benchmarks framework as an input model rather than an articulation of learning outcomes, viewing them as a 'useful check list' of activities, but criticising them for lacking a clear articulation of what the aims of these activities were (Allen & Chant, 2021). Although Collins and Barnes (2017) argue that these aims can be articulated and encompassed as part of the careers programme that schools and colleges are required to set out under Benchmark 1.

Andrews (2019b) argues that the Gatsby Benchmarks have a limited and narrow definition of careers education. Careers education should teach students about the nature of careers and support them to develop the skills that they need to progress through their career (career management skills) rather than simply help them to make decisions and transition into their first post-school destination. The absence of a framework of learning outcomes, such as that offered by the CDI framework (Hooley, 2021a) is a limitation for the Benchmarks. However, the Benchmarks are not antithetical to such an educational approach and can be combined with the CDI framework or with other frameworks of learning outcomes (Hooley, 2021a).

The Gatsby Benchmarks seek to embed careers education within subjects (The Careers & Enterprise Company, 2021). Andrews (2019a, 2019b) highlights the fact that this ignores an important alternative way in which career education was delivered in the past, as a subject in its own right or embedded as a key component within PSHE.

Andrews (2019a, 2019b) argues that the attempt which is made within the Gatsby Benchmarks to address careers education purely through embedding it within subject curricula is doomed to failure. While the embedding of careers into subject curricula is important, Andrews contends that there also needs to be dedicated curriculum space for careers education as a subject, highlighting that the provision of dedicated space for careers education as a subject is common in other countries, including some of the countries examined in the original Gatsby research was based on.

Educational philosophy

Houghton et al. (2021) express concerns that the Benchmarks, with their strong focus on employer engagement and employability, could drive young people towards technical pathways, to the detriment of higher education. It is difficult to fully understand this critique as the Benchmarks balance experiences of workplaces with experiences of a range of post-secondary pathways including higher education. Houghton's critique is perhaps more easily understood as a critique of work-focused careers education and guidance in general, rather than the specific form of the Gatsby Benchmarks. In this they are not alone, as there is an extant literature which argues that work experience can serve as a force for social reproduction, mitigating against social mobility (Hatcher & Le Gallais, 2008). However, this research also highlights that models of school-mediated experiences of workplaces, such as that suggested by Gatsby, provide a way to counter this kind of social reproduction.

Elsewhere, Hearne and Neary (2021) have argued that the Benchmarks place all responsibility for career success onto individuals. This argument suggests that models like the Benchmarks ignore the way in which opportunity is structured in favour of a, potentially false, meritocratic narrative which assumes that if we build individual's social and cultural capital and support their career transitions, then they will be able to achieve any outcome. This does raise the question as to whether the Gatsby Benchmarks could be reframed to be more critical or community focused.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Gatsby Benchmarks have had a clear influence on government policy and have shaped careers guidance provision in schools and colleges across England. The framework has successfully established itself as the career guidance framework for schools and colleges to follow, reiterating the findings of the initial report into its inception, that this is the framework to follow to achieve 'good career guidance'.

There is strong evidence that the Benchmarks have been well implemented across schools and colleges in England, and that they have influenced the way in which career guidance is delivered, and who is involved in delivering it. This has been most clear in relation to the development of the role of the Careers Leader but has also influenced other roles.

There is also evidence that the Benchmarks have had an impact on young people. Students and other stakeholders value the Benchmarks and rate them as useful. Career readiness amongst young people has increased and there is limited evidence that student attainment has improved. As well as this, the Benchmarks have contributed to social justice, supporting those who are disadvantaged economically and geographically, and those who are SEND students.

Finally, there are some critiques of the Gatsby Benchmarks. These focus on the framework's implementation challenges, the potentially one-size fits all nature of the framework, the attention given to career education and learning within the framework, and questions of educational philosophy.

The Gatsby Benchmarks framework

There are several recommendations which Gatsby could consider when reviewing the Gatsby Benchmarks as a whole framework:

- **Improving differentiation.** Gatsby could be more explicit about how the Benchmarks could be adapted to schools' and colleges' specific context. This might include a greater recognition of the need to specifically meet the needs of disadvantaged students, recognise challenges associated with rural and post-industrial locations as well as institutional issues like a lack of resources or difficulties in sourcing appropriately qualified staff.
- **Increasing resourcing.** Some research suggests that schools and colleges need sufficient time and resources to implement the Benchmarks. This is also bound up with issues of accountability as the allocation of time and resources to the activity becomes more likely as organisations prioritise career guidance more highly. It is debatable as to whether the Benchmarks should be adapted (which in reality means made less demanding) to accommodate the realities of these constraints, or whether there is a need to campaign for better resourcing in these areas, if the Benchmarks are to be fully realised.

- **Clarifying the professional basis of the Benchmarks.** Research has demonstrated that the successful implementation of the Benchmarks is a multi-professional endeavour. Yet, the original Gatsby report has relatively little to say about the professional basis of the Benchmarks, nor about the range of stakeholders who need to be involved in their delivery. There would be a case for clarifying these professional and stakeholder roles further. This is particularly the case for the Careers Leader, which has become central to the delivery of the Benchmarks and may benefit from further formalisation and professionalisation.
- **Simplifying the quality assurance landscape.** The Gatsby Benchmarks are central to the way in which quality is understood within the English career guidance system, yet they do not constitute a formal quality mark. There would be value in exploring how the quality assurance landscape (including Quality in Careers Standard, matrix Standard, The Careers & Enterprise Company's various initiatives on quality and Ofsted) could be simplified and more closely aligned to the Benchmarks.

In addition to the four recommendations above it is also useful to take stock of what the evidence presented in this review mean for the individual Benchmark. Table 1 provides a summary of how the Benchmarks are supported by the evidence and where there are areas for consideration as the Benchmarks are revised.

Table 1: Conclusions and recommendations by Benchmark

Benchmark	Does the recent literature improve the evidence for this Benchmark?	What new areas or refinements are suggested?
Benchmark 1	The literature supports the idea that the Gatsby Benchmarks have clarified the way in which schools and colleges should organise and deliver a stable careers programme.	
Benchmark 2	There is limited literature which provides direct evidence on Benchmark 2.	There would be value in gathering further evidence specifically looking at Benchmark 2.
Benchmark 3	There is limited evidence addressing Benchmark 3 specifically.	However, it is clear that schools and colleges continue to find record keeping and tracking challenging areas. Gatsby may want to consider whether these sub-Benchmarks should be tweaked or whether schools and colleges need more support.
Benchmark 4	There is strong support for the embedding of career guidance in the curriculum across the literature.	The literature suggests a range of critiques of Gatsby's approach to careers education which should be considered as the Benchmarks are developed further. These include either specifying learning outcomes or using an existing framework of learning outcomes like the CDI framework, creating an additional sub-Benchmark to guide the delivery of careers education beyond curriculum subject and providing more guidance and support for classroom teachers who have to deliver this Benchmark.

Benchmark 5	The literature is supportive of Benchmark 5 and suggests that schools' and colleges' encounters with employers and employees have seen a significant rise since the creation of the Gatsby Benchmarks.	Some literature argues that there is still further work to do to more fully engage employers with the education system. This is primarily a question of whether appropriate resourcing, infrastructure and support exists to facilitate the achievement of Benchmark 5.
Benchmark 6	The value of Benchmark 6 is endorsed in the literature alongside that of Benchmark 5. The literature shows that experiences of workplaces have increased following the introduction of the Gatsby Benchmarks.	The issues of resourcing and whether the necessary infrastructure exists that were highlighted in Benchmark 5 also apply to this Benchmark.
Benchmark 7	Similar to Benchmark 2, encounters with further and higher education is not discussed in great detail in the literature.	One paper raises concerns about whether the Gatsby Benchmarks are too vocationally focused, but in general there is support for the role that it plays in encouraging young people to consider all routes.
Benchmark 8	The literature recognises that careers advisers play a significant role in the delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks, including personal guidance.	The literature emphasises the importance of specifying the level of training required for personal guidance and increasing the resourcing available to schools to deliver on this.

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