
APPENDIX 7

YOUTH VOICE INSIGHTS ON THE
GATSBY BENCHMARKS: CAREERS GUIDANCE,
ENGAGEMENT AND PRIORITIES



GATSBY

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INTRODUCTION

As part of their review of the Gatsby Benchmarks,¹ the Gatsby Charitable Foundation asked us, Youth Employment UK, to capture the views and experiences of young people. As experts in youth employment, we supported young people to share their views and experiences on the careers guidance available to them, what they valued and found most useful and what could be improved.

The purpose of this report is to provide an understanding of young people's experiences of careers guidance in schools, colleges and with independent training providers (ITPs). It looks at the support they receive before, during and after activities, their engagement with the types of activities described in the Gatsby Benchmarks, the experiences they have found most and least useful and what changes they would like to see made to careers guidance that would help them get the most out of it.

¹ Gatsby Foundation (2014) *Good Career Guidance*

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this report are drawn from in-person qualitative sessions at secondary schools, a further education college and an open online session. During the sessions, the Youth Employment UK team recorded discussions with young people, identifying quotes, and written and verbal feedback. Where relevant, data has been included from other youth voice sessions held by Youth Employment UK.

Youth voice sessions: we held five in-person youth voice sessions and one online youth voice session with a total of 99 young people in February 2024. The sessions were held with young people in secondary school aged 12-16 and with those in further or higher education aged 16-18. All in-person sessions were held in the East Midlands and West Midlands, the online session included young people from Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Luton.

Two facilitators were present at all times during both the in-person and online sessions. These sessions were divided into three sections or topics: finding out young people's experiences of careers guidance in school through an overview of the Gatsby Benchmarks, what activities they had engaged with most and which activities in the benchmarks they would prioritise.

To help the discussion, young people were separated into groups. We used a combination of approaches in the sessions, such as mind mapping, worksheets, highlighting, reflection and verbal sharing.

We began the session by giving an overview of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. We then asked the young people to share which activities they had experienced, providing prompts when necessary. We then had discussions, during which we could follow up with more questions.

To find out more about young people's engagement in the activities included in the benchmarks, we asked them to reflect on the experiences and activities they had taken part in, based on what they had written on their mind maps. During discussions, we asked them to elaborate on their good experiences, including what had made them good, and on any experiences that had not been good.

Lastly, we asked young people to prioritise the activities described in the benchmarks from most important to least important.

Demographics: the schools where we conducted youth voice sessions accurately reflect the demographics of their respective regions.

North Northamptonshire	West Midlands (Coventry)	West Midlands (Wolverhampton)
Population: 359,500 ²	Population: 345,300 ³	Population: 263,700 ⁴
Ethnicity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White: 90.3% • Asian, Asian British: 3.5% • Black, Black British, Caribbean or African: 3.1% • Mixed or multiple ethnic groups: 2.3% • Other ethnic groups: 0.8% 	Ethnicity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White: 65.5% • Asian, Asian British: 18.5% • Black, Black British, Caribbean or African: 8.9% • Mixed or multiple ethnic groups: 3.4% • Other ethnic groups: 3.7% 	Ethnicity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White: 60.6% • Asian, Asian British: 21.2% • Black, Black British, Caribbean or African: 9.3% • Mixed or multiple ethnic groups: 5.3% • Other ethnic groups: 3.6%

² Office for National Statistics (2023) *How life has changed in North Northamptonshire: Census 2021*

³ Office for National Statistics (2023) *How life has changed in Coventry: Census 2021*

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2023) *How life has changed in Wolverhampton: Census 2021*

KEY FINDINGS

CAREERS GUIDANCE, EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- **Secondary school experiences:** young people in secondary schools were able to recall and talk about the range of careers-related activities they had experienced. Young people from all year groups described experiencing assemblies, careers fairs, employer visits/talks and one-to-one meetings with careers advisers.
- **Creating a long-lasting impression:** remembering encounters was difficult for those in college or sixth form, who often needed three or four prompts or suggestions. They were most likely to rate their experiences as poor after being prompted.
- **What makes a difference?** this small study found that while the biggest indicator of good careers guidance was the secondary school attended, characteristics also played a part. Those with additional needs, anxiety or other social, emotional and mental health challenges were less likely to feel prepared to participate or make the most of activities. Young people who did not have a network to help them access work experiences or put what they had learnt into context, were also more likely to miss out – these respondents included those on free school meals and those from ethnic minorities.

SUPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING

- **Pre- and post-activity support:** what most supported young people to both remember and feel positively about an experience was the support offered alongside it. Pre- and post-activity support were vital for young people to be able to put their learning into context, to better understand the learning and why they were learning it, and see how they would use the knowledge and skills they had gained in the future. Young people who had not received this support were more likely to rate their experiences as poor.
- **Careers guidance preferences:** young people indicated that they particularly valued personalised and tailored support and more frequent and varied experiences of workplaces.
- **Contributing factor:** young people identified that careers guidance, as described by the activities in the benchmarks, was only one factor that contributed to the development of their employability.

WHAT WOULD HELP?

- **People make the difference:** young people found it extremely valuable to be able to engage with different people, like careers leaders, employers or alumni, in different ways, such as presentations, assemblies and careers fairs. Young people most enjoyed interactive sessions, which they felt more engaged in and they also felt helped them learn transferable skills. Most could also give examples of how an interactive session had made them think differently about industries.
- **Helping to make the most of it:** pre- and post-activity support, including how they could prepare and how they could link what they learnt to them as an individual, was pivotal to helping them remember activities and to being able to articulate their skills and knowledge. Most young people had not received this support and most commonly spoke about events and activities taking place in silo.
- **Personal guidance and experiences of work:** young people felt that personal guidance and experiences of work were of most value to them. But to be useful, personal guidance had to be consistent and regular, and experiences of work should be varied. Taster days or mornings and having more opportunities to engage with employers would support this.

YOUNG PEOPLES' EXPERIENCES OF CAREERS GUIDANCE

YOUNG PEOPLE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL (AGE 12-16)

The young people from secondary schools could remember their experiences and activities. They were also able to talk about the range of the careers-related activities they had experienced during their time in secondary school.

The young people highlighted several activities they had taken part in. Common activities were one-to-one meetings with careers advisers, careers fairs, work experience, assemblies and accessing online resources.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION (AGE 16-18)

Those who were no longer in secondary school were most likely to say they had received no support and could only recall experiences after several prompts. They were also most likely to rate their experiences as not being good and could not attribute learning outcomes to the activities.

The feeder schools that students had attended appeared to be a big factor in how many experiences they had taken part in (or could remember). Two white male students from one feeder school shared that they had received CV workshops, work experience, one-to-one careers advice, careers fairs, an apprenticeship presentation, a sixth form presentation, one-to-one careers talks and interview practice. But there were young people from other schools who, even after being prompted, could not recall engaging with any careers activities.

Most, but not all, remembered attending careers fairs and employer talks, some had taken part in work experience and some had received one-to-one careers advice.

THE ACTIVITIES YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH MOST

The activities that young people said stood out most, were those that were fun and interactive. Young people did not enjoy “being talked at”, particularly for prolonged periods. They said they “switch off” in assemblies, and do not enjoy talks without interactive practical elements.

Young people highlighted face-to-face experiences that allow them to engage as the most valuable activities. Whether this was with an employer, teacher, careers adviser or alumni, young people liked receiving guidance and information from someone in person. They said it gave them the opportunity to ask questions and get honest information from somebody doing the jobs they are interested in. They want to be able to talk to employees and employers, so they can learn from their expertise:

Visitors are helpful because you can learn from them.

White male

It would be good if we got to see all the facts and people were honest about their jobs. I want to know what jobs are really like.

Asian male

Young people elaborated that they would like to understand more about what employers are looking for so that they can match their skills to the jobs/industries they are interested in. Hands-on experiences were identified as significant, because they were useful and engaging. One group said they would like to visit different workplaces so they could compare them, which would help them explore their options for the future and choose the career path that is right for them.

Other examples shared with us included work experience or the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Those who had taken part in these types of activities said they had taught them transferable skills that they could use in the future.

When it came to online resources, we found that a lot of young people enjoyed taking part in online quizzes. They are a popular choice for young people because they are “quick and engaging”. Young people also said they liked quizzes because they showed them different kinds of jobs, some that they may have never thought of.

I love quizzes, especially those personality quizzes that tell you the jobs that link to your personality type.

White female

Online resources, like doing a skills interview where you can test your skills to see if you'd be good at the job you've chosen would be good. If it's checking your skills, it will help [you] know how you would need to improve.

Asian female

THE CAREERS GUIDANCE ACTIVITIES YOUNG PEOPLE PRIORITISE

SECONDARY SCHOOL

Young people in secondary schools highly rated personal guidance, individual support and having experiences of workplaces. They explained that being able to tailor support to their needs is important to them. One young person shared that generalised support would not have been helpful to her because of her diagnosis of autism. Her teachers addressed her individual needs by breaking down information so that it was not overwhelming.

Young people also explained that the one-to-one support they received in guidance interviews had been really helpful for them, as they got to reflect on and discuss careers they may want in the future.

Young people prioritise workplace experiences because they want to understand and experience their options – they want to see what the workplace is and how it functions. Young people also want to speak with employers so that they can learn from their expertise.

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Young people in further and higher education had similar priorities to those in secondary schools: personal guidance, individual support and experiences of workplaces.

Young people told us that personalised, tailored guidance and support is important to them because it allows for their individual needs to be met. Young people also shared that it is important for them to be able to ask questions so they can explore their options while receiving advice and support from a trusted person.

Although the young people in further and higher education also saw experiences of workplaces as a priority, they frequently mentioned the importance of having encounters with multiple employers and employees. When asked why workplace experiences were such a priority, they explained that gaining practical real-life experience was extremely important to help prepare them for their next steps.

I would like to explore the different types of jobs you can do, not just the really obvious ones that everyone knows about.

Mixed or multiple ethnic group female

TAILORING CAREERS INFORMATION TO THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS

Young people seemed to find it difficult to link curriculum content with careers and jobs. They appeared to see it in simplistic terms. For example:

I wouldn't care to hear about how Pythagoras theorem could help me in a job in the future because I want to do plumbing and I know I won't need it.

White male

When we discussed the transferable skills that are developed in maths lessons, such as problem-solving, and how that could relate to his plumbing career, the link made sense to him.

Young people felt it was better to learn about sectors and skills in their subject lessons, rather than specific jobs in isolation. It appears that focusing on the softer skills that young people can apply to various jobs and sectors is more meaningful and relevant to them.

LEARNING FROM CAREERS AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

Although young people did not initially understand the term labour market information (LMI), when it was explained they said that it was particularly useful to understand jobs in more detail, including the qualifications and skills that are needed, different routes into them, locations and how many of those jobs there will be in the future.

Young people said that explicit lessons on LMI were not needed, and they would prefer for LMI to be integrated into other careers-related activities. For example, young people felt it would be valuable for LMI to be incorporated into discussions about local jobs during one-to-one careers advice talks.

PRE- AND POST-ACTIVITY SUPPORT

Pre- and post-activity support is crucial for providing a comprehensive and effective careers programme, because it helps young people make the most out of the activities they engage with.

Experiences of this type of support were mixed. Most young people could not remember receiving any support before or after any activities. Some students said they had received a quick “5 minute debrief” before employer talks, just telling them who the visiting employer was and how long the session would be.

Based on what young people told us, it appears that in many cases careers-related activities were not part of a clear and progressive programme, but were delivered in isolation without giving young people time to prepare or reflect.

When young people had received pre- and post-activity support, the experiences were more meaningful and valuable. One group of students had received preparatory support for a lot of their career-related activities. This group was able to link and describe the activities they had taken part in with ease. Some of the support they had received included CV writing and interview preparation before attending work experience.

A different group identified the key role staff could play in their career decision-making. They found their careers adviser meetings had allowed them to ask any questions they had about their next steps, and provided post-activity support by giving them the space to reflect on their careers guidance activities. They also talked about the importance of their careers lead, particularly in helping to set up work experience placements.

One young person shared how he had enjoyed the careers guidance he received from his college. He was able to articulate his experiences well and discuss how pre-activity support and follow-up activities with tutors had helped him get the most from his experiences.

In conclusion, we found that often it was not the case that young people had not taken part in careers activities and experiences. When prompted, young people were able to remember activities they had taken part in. However, it became clear that the young people who had received pre- and post-activity support could remember the experiences in more detail.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO SEE

While individuals placed emphasis on different activities, there was a broad consensus that for careers guidance to be meaningful and useful, it should follow the principles below.

- **Variety:** it was clear that young people want variety. Many of the young people said that having a variety of activities and options would help them engage in careers activities. They want a variety of experiences so they can compare their options and make the best possible decisions for their future.
- **Enjoyable and memorable:** the main point made by young people was that interactive and engaging careers-related activities was more enjoyable and memorable. They most valued the opportunities where they could engage with people and ask questions, take part in activities, etc.
- **Careers guidance and skills to be embedded in the curriculum:** young people are keen to understand what employability skills they are developing during their subject lesson, and how the subjects connect with different careers. We were told that the information provided about different options was often limited, and young people did not feel that their teachers had enough knowledge or expertise about some pathways, such as apprenticeships and T Levels, to help them make informed decisions about their next steps. Hearing directly from experts, such as employers and employees, and having opportunities to speak to further and higher education institutions is key to making young people aware of their options so they can consider their pathway.
- **Consistent access to one-to-one careers advice:** young people want access to tailored and individualised support. They felt the role of one-to-one meetings with careers advisers was a particularly important part of this. Those who had received this type of support highlighted how significant it had been in helping them make decisions that were right for them.
- **Frequency:** although young people had different ideas about the exact frequency of different types of activities, they agreed that they wanted a variety of activities to take place throughout their education as part of a progressive and well-sequenced programme.
- **Access to and quality of work experience to be improved:** young people want more opportunities for and more varied experiences of workplaces. They want those experiences to be meaningful and clearly link to the occupation they plan to pursue. It was clear that work experience does not need to be a block placement, but can include short afternoon or one-day visits to different workplaces, so that young people can experience a variety and can understand their options.