



Insight Briefing: Gatsby Benchmark results for 2024/25

2024/25 headlines



94%

94% of state-funded schools¹ and colleges reported this year (4,863), up from 92% last year (4,751)



6.0

6.0 average number of Gatsby Benchmarks across state-funded schools and colleges (5.8 in 2023/24)



32%

Close to a third (32%) of special schools fully met all eight benchmarks (26% for all schools and colleges)



BM3&7

Fastest progress against Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each pupil and Benchmark 7: Encounters with further and higher education (both +3%pts)



6.2

6.2 benchmarks achieved by schools in Careers Hubs the longest, compared with 5.6 for those joining most recently



Parity

Schools with highest proportion of FSM students continue to achieve the same number of benchmarks as the average school (6.0)



98%

98% of students received at least one employer encounter (up from 85% in 2020/21)



25%

25% of Careers Hubs had schools and colleges with average benchmark achievement of 6.3 or more

Top three insights



Progress at scale

There have been significant improvements in the scale of engagement and performance in the careers system over time.

94% of schools and colleges now report. Average number of benchmarks fully achieved has risen from 2 to 6 out of 8 between 2016/17 and 2024/25. Over 1/4 of all schools and colleges now achieve all 8 benchmarks. Improvements were seen again this year across almost all benchmarks.

State-funded special schools outperform the average and schools serving the most disadvantaged students perform relatively well.



More to do

Schools and colleges find some benchmarks harder to achieve than others.

Progress is uneven within benchmarks and across institution types.

While almost half of all schools and colleges now achieve seven or eight benchmarks, there is scope for improvement nationally.



Where next

Updated benchmarks from 2025/26 offer a fresh challenge for the next 10 years.

Careers Impact System will underpin further progress through a focus on quality and continuous improvement.

The work experience guarantee will add impetus.

Introduction

The eight Gatsby Benchmarks provide a framework for what good career guidance looks like for young people in secondary schools and colleges. First introduced in 2014, they have become embedded in national policy and practice as the standard for careers education. The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC), as the national body for careers education, tracks national, regional, and institution-level progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks. The Compass evaluation dataset is based on Careers Leaders' evaluation of their careers provision in response to specific questions. We recommend completing a Compass evaluation every term, or quarterly for Independent Training Providers, to effectively monitor development and progress over time. [Guidance, training and resources](#) are available to support the completion of a Compass evaluation and use of this tool is voluntary. The goal is to promote continuous school and college-led improvement. This insight is shared publicly to inform policy and practice.

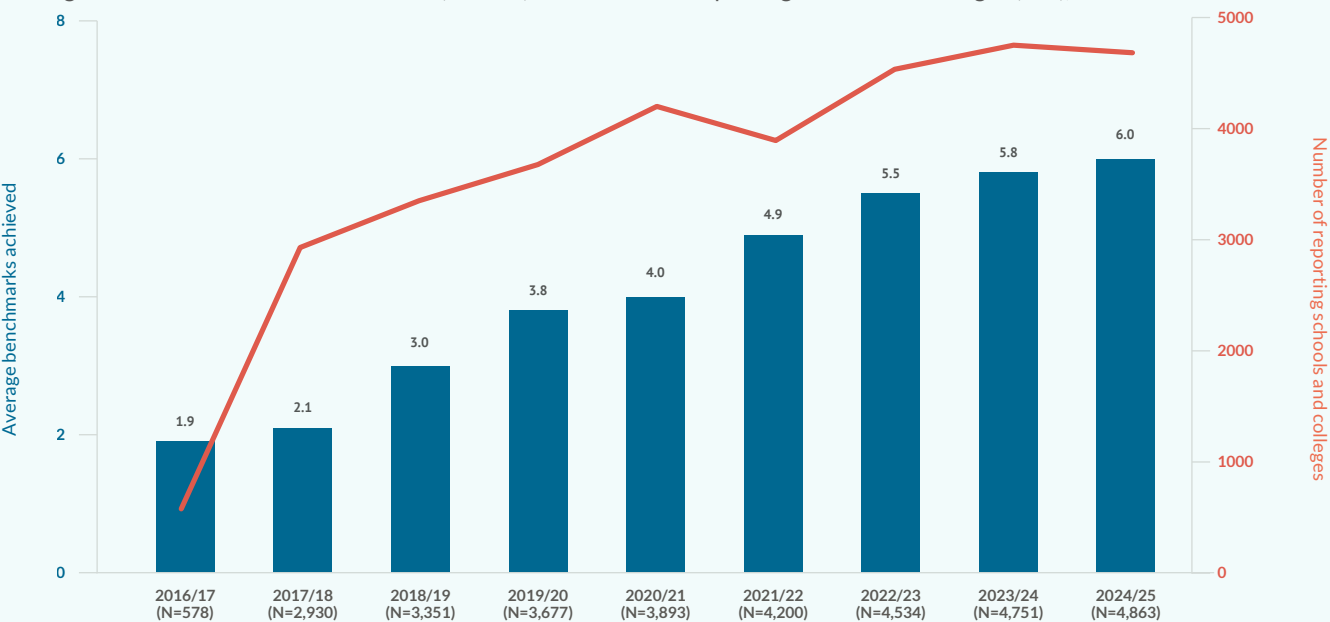
The 2024/25 findings draw on Compass returns from 4,863 state-funded secondary institutions in England. This represents 94% of the secondary sector. It includes 3,330 mainstream secondary schools, 270 colleges (FE colleges, sixth form colleges, 16–19 academies), 979 special schools (including 58 Section 41 independent special schools), and 284 alternative provision institutions. In addition, 69 Independent Training Providers completed a Compass evaluation this academic year, bringing the total number of evaluations to 4,932¹. Such comprehensive participation provides confidence that the results give an accurate picture of the national quality of careers education. All comparisons to previous years use the end-of-year Compass data for those years (e.g. 31st July 2024 for 2023/24, etc.); historic trend data goes back to the 2016/17 baseline, when the Compass self-evaluation tool was first introduced at scale.

This is the last in a series of annual national briefings for the current set of benchmarks. The data tell a story of increasing adoption and improvement. In 2016/17 (when systematic tracking began), 578 institutions (12% of total state-funded secondary institutions, which could reasonably be assumed to be leading adopters) fully met on average 2 out of 8 benchmarks. Today, in 2024/25, this has climbed to 6 out of 8 (4,863 schools and colleges, 94% of total) (Fig. 1).

This dramatic change reflects a sustained DfE-funded national effort and should be seen as a success story in education improvement – driven by Careers Leaders in schools and colleges, and the support infrastructure (CEC's national network of Careers Hubs, Enterprise Coordinators, training and digital resources) put in place to help implement the benchmarks. It is especially significant in the context of [rising levels of young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\)](#), given the [established link between achievement of Gatsby Benchmarks and reduction in the likelihood of becoming NEET](#).

Fig. 1: The number of reporting institutions and average number of benchmarks achieved has risen steadily since 2017

Average number of benchmarks achieved (column) and number of reporting schools and colleges (line), 2016/17 - 2024/25



Source: CEC Compass evaluation data, end of July 25 (N=4,863)

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Data from Independent Training Providers (ITPs) is reported separately in the accompanying data tables to this report.

Schools and colleges in England fully achieved on average 6.0 benchmarks out of 8, +0.2 benchmarks higher than last year (5.8), from more reporting institutions than ever

- In 2024/25, schools and colleges on average fully achieved 6 out of the 8 benchmarks (up from 5.8). The average number achieved was 6 for special schools, 6 for mainstream and post-16 provision, 6.1 for state-funded special schools and 4.6 for independent special schools with Section 41 funding, and 5.3 for alternative provision settings.
- Reporting levels rose from the previous year, with 4,863 schools and colleges reporting their assessments (94% of state funded schools and colleges), up from 4,751. This was driven by an increase of an additional 78 special schools and 24 mainstream schools.
- Notably, close to half (49%) of institutions achieved seven or eight benchmarks this year (52% for special schools), up from 46% last year, continuing the trend in performance towards higher benchmark scores.
- This is promising in light of previous CEC analysis establishing connection between increased benchmarks and [improvement in rates of young people achieving positive destinations in employment, education or training](#).
- The greatest increase in full achievement was on Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each pupil and Benchmark 7: Encounters with further and higher education (each up 3%pts from 2024/25). This is significant as they have been the two most difficult to achieve benchmarks (62% and 60% have been fully achieved respectively).
- The proportion of institutions fully achieving each benchmark was higher than 2023/24 across all benchmarks apart from Benchmark 8: Personal guidance, still the fourth highest achieved benchmark, but falling by 1%pt from 78% to 77% fully achieved.
- For the second year in a row, the largest proportion of schools and colleges fully achieved Benchmark 5: Encounters with employers and employees (87%).

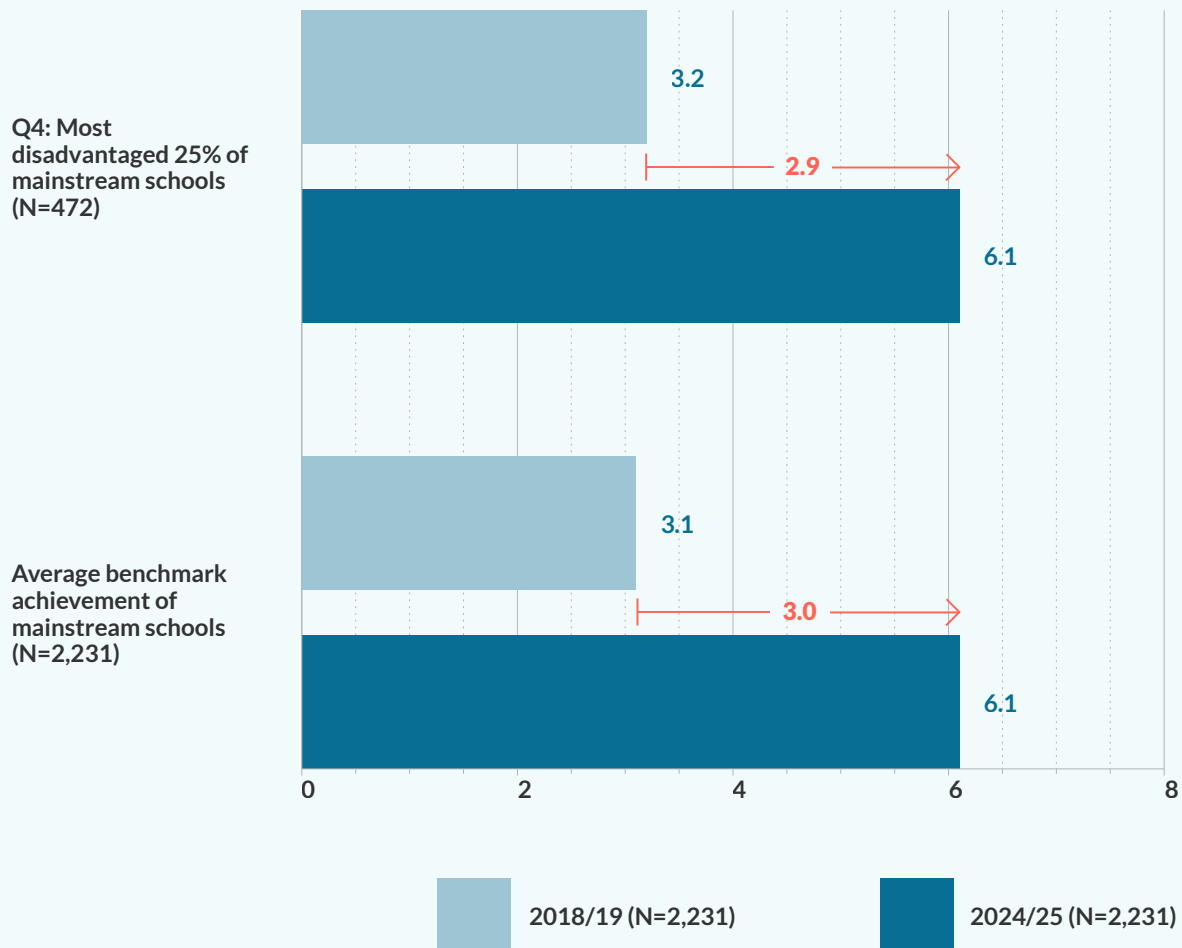
More disadvantaged mainstream schools have made similar progress to others over time

- Schools with the highest proportion of young people eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) were more likely to achieve Benchmark 7: Encounters with further and higher education (62% for the most economically disadvantaged quartile compared to 53% for the least) and Benchmark 8: Personal guidance (86% compared to 68%).
- When comparing the subset of 2,231 schools that completed Compass evaluations in 2018/19 and 2024/25, those with the highest proportion of young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (receiving FSM) achieve the same number of benchmarks as the average mainstream school and have made similar progress over time (Fig. 2).
- This demonstrates that there is parity in the quality of careers education overall between high-FSM schools and the average school, though this varies by benchmark.

1 The 25% of mainstream schools with the highest proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) — a commonly used indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Fig. 2: Mainstream schools with the largest proportion of young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds achieve the same number of benchmarks as the average and have made similar progress over time

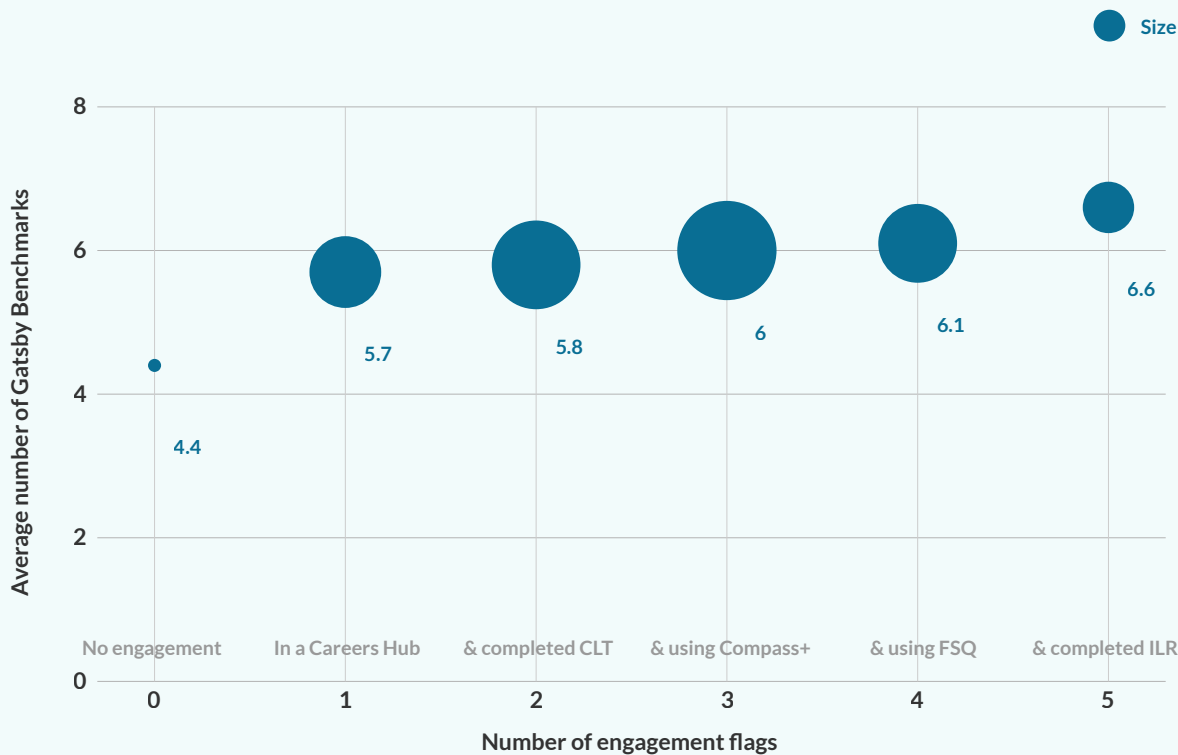
Average number of benchmarks achieved by mainstream schools, 2018/19 – 2024/25



Source: CEC Compass evaluation data, end of July 2025 (Schools completing Compass evaluations in 2018/19 and 2024/25, N=2,231)

Fig. 3: More engagement with with CEC support is associated with higher performance

Average number of benchmarks achieved by all schools and colleges by number of indicators (in a Careers Hub, completed accredited Careers Leader training, using Compass+, using FSQ, completing an ILR¹, 2024/25)



Source: CEC Compass evaluation data, end of July 2025 (N=4,863)

Stronger engagement with careers support is associated with higher benchmark scores

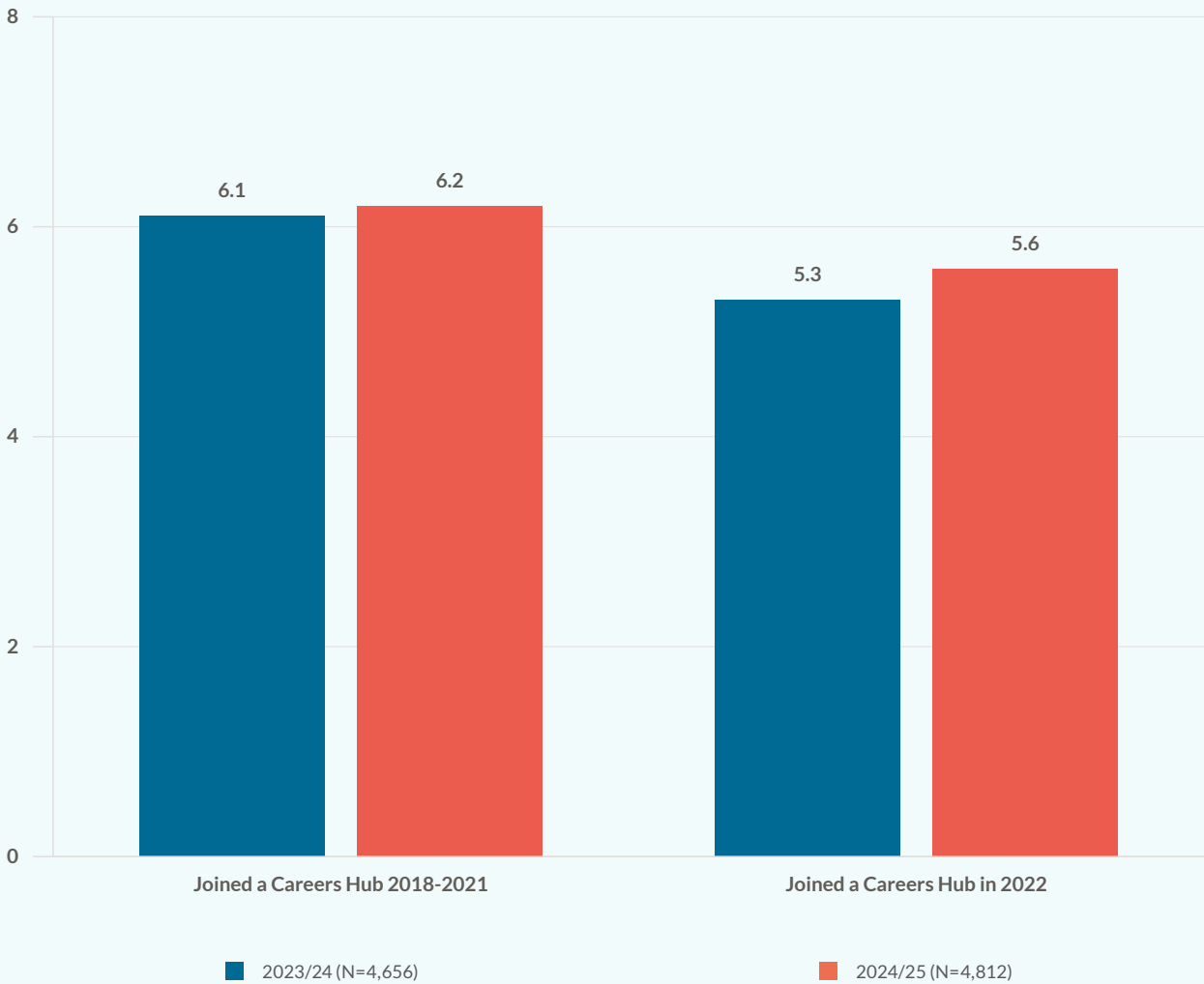
- Engaging with careers support (being part of a Careers Hub, completing Careers Leader Training, using the Compass+ digital tool, supporting young people to complete the Future Skills Questionnaire (FSQ) and completing an Internal Leadership Review (ILR)¹) are all associated with higher benchmark scores.
- Schools and colleges engaging in all these five ways achieved 6.6 benchmarks on average, compared to 4.4 for those not engaging with these support offers (Fig. 3).

¹ Internal Leadership Reviews enable a whole school approach to careers and are the first stage in the [Careers Impact System](#)

- 96% of schools and colleges, and 99% of those completing a Compass evaluation, have now joined Careers Hubs, which is associated with higher benchmark performance.
- Those in Careers Hubs the longest achieve on average 6.2 benchmarks, compared to 5.6 for those joining most recently. This pattern, consistent with last year, shows that new members benefit quickly while sustained membership maintains high performance.
- Compared to last year, the pattern is consistent: long-standing Hub members maintain high performance (6.2), while the newest joiners continue to make the fastest progress. Notably, schools that joined in 2022 improved by 0.3 benchmarks in a single year (Fig. 4).
- The comparison group of non-Hub members is now very small (and likely includes atypical institutions), scoring on average 4.4 benchmarks. Hub members outperform these institutions on all benchmarks, in particular on Benchmark 1: A stable careers programme (+44%pts) and Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces (+26%pts).

Fig. 4: Gains in benchmark achievement are most significant on joining a Careers Hub

Average number of benchmarks achieved by schools and colleges in a Careers Hub, 2023/24 – 2024/25



Source: CEC Compass evaluation data, end of July 2025 (N=4,812)

More students than ever are experiencing workplaces (Benchmark 6)

- Overall performance on experiences of workplaces improved by 2%pts (up from 72% to 74% this academic year).
- 78% of special schools reported that the majority of learners (for whom appropriate) had experience of workplaces by the end of Year 11 (+1%pt on last year), increasing to 89% (+1%pt respectively) in Year 12 or 13 (also +1%pt on last year).
- The majority of students in 77% of mainstream schools (+1%pt from 2023/24) had an experience of a workplace by the end of Year 11, +1%pt from Year 12 or Year 13 (+2%pts).
- 72% of colleges (+5%pts) reported that the majority of their learners had an experience of a workplace (excluding part-time jobs) by the time they finish their programme of study.

Schools and colleges are making most progress in addressing the needs of each pupil (Benchmark 3), but still face barriers

- Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each pupil (62%) saw a 3%pts improvement in 2024/25. Benchmark 3 is the second least likely to be fully achieved.
- 73% of mainstream schools were able to collect and maintain accurate data for each pupil on their destinations for three years after they leave school (+2%pts).
- 72% of colleges reported integrating records of learners' participation in careers programmes at previous stages of education (+3%pts).
- 86% of special schools enabled pupils and parents/carers/families to access accurate records about their own careers and enterprise activities and decisions on future pathways (+1%pt).

Strong achievement has been maintained in relation to personal guidance in schools and colleges (Benchmark 8), despite a drop of 1%pt

- Benchmark 8: Personal guidance (77%) was the only benchmark with a score to decrease this academic year by 1%pt.
- A contributing factor was a decrease in the proportion of special schools and alternative provision institutions reporting that the majority of students have had 2+ interviews with a qualified careers adviser by the end of Year 13 (-2%pts to 77%).
- 90% of mainstream schools reported that the majority of students have had an interview with a qualified careers adviser by the end of Year 11 (+2%pts).
- 98% of colleges reported that interviews with a qualified careers adviser are made available to all learners whenever significant study or career choices are being made(+3%pts).

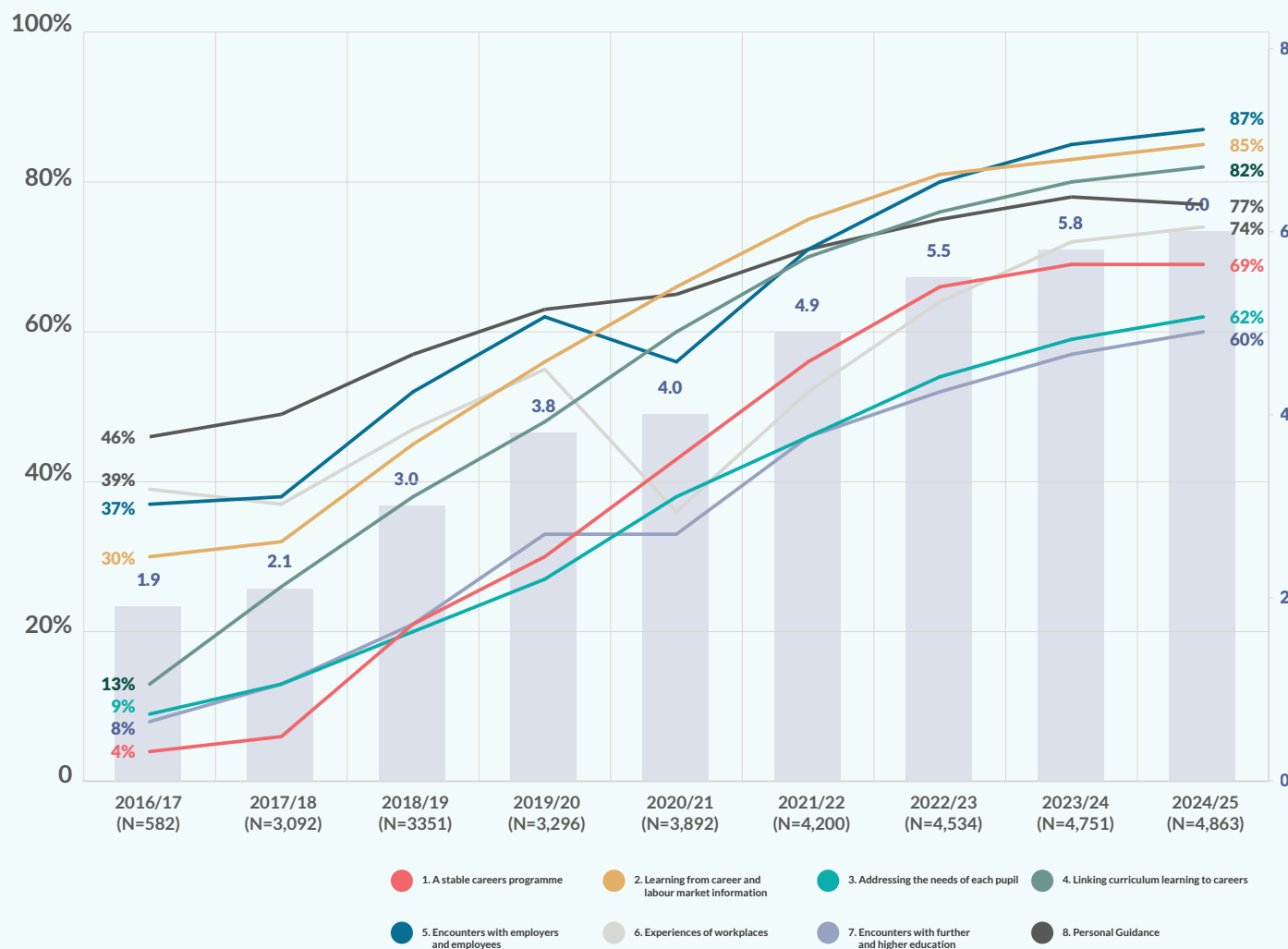
Trends over time across the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks

There has been considerable improvement against the benchmarks since 2016/17, when fewer than 5% of institutions fully met Benchmark 1 (Stable programme) and fewer than 10% met Benchmark 3 (Addressing the needs of each pupil).

Over the nine-year period from 2016 to 2025, the greatest improvement has been in Benchmark 4: Linking curriculum learning to careers, which improved by 69%pts in the proportion of schools and colleges fully achieving it (from 13% in 2016/17 to 82% now), reflecting widespread adoption of embedding careers in the curriculum. Benchmark 5: Encounters with employers and employees and Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces have risen by 50%pts and 35%pts over that time. By contrast, Benchmark 8: Personal guidance started relatively high and has seen the smallest increase since 2016 (+32%pts), but it remains one of the best-achieved benchmarks (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Schools and colleges have improved considerably against all Gatsby Benchmarks since 2016/17

% of schools and colleges fully achieving each benchmark (line), average number of benchmarks fully achieved (column), 2016/17 - 2024/25



Source: CEC academic year-end data, end of July 2025 (N=4,863)

The Next 10 Years of Careers Guidance

The Gatsby Benchmarks remain the foundation of world-class careers education and have been updated to reflect the changing needs of young people, employers, and the education system. Following two years of consultation and evidence review, Gatsby Foundation published [Good Career Guidance: The Next 10 Years](#) in November 2024. From September 2025, all schools and special schools, alternative provision, colleges, and training providers are expected to adopt the updated benchmarks, enshrined in new [DfE statutory guidance](#), aligned to the new definitions.

Key features of the [updated Gatsby Benchmarks](#) are:

- Same eight benchmarks retained as the framework, with clarified and strengthened criteria.
- Five cross-cutting themes embedded across the eight benchmarks:
 1. Careers at the heart of education and leadership
 2. Inclusion and impact for each and every young person
 3. Meaningful and varied encounters and experiences
 4. Focusing on the use of information and data
 5. Engagement of parents and carers

Increased accountability and transparency will be facilitated, including through termly Compass evaluations, reporting to governors and parents, and new external validation through the [Careers Impact System Internal Leadership and Peer-to-Peer reviews](#).

Implications for schools and colleges

- Compass will be recalibrated to align with the updated definitions from 2025/26. Institutions will establish a fresh baseline, with initial results expected to reflect challenging expectations for the next 10 years of careers guidance.
- Over time, the expectation is that institutions will meet these more challenging benchmarks, driving continuous improvement and better outcomes for learners across the careers system.
- Longer-term membership of [Careers Hubs](#), [Careers Leader Training](#), engagement with the [Careers Impact System](#), and high-quality use of tools ([Compass+](#), [FSQ](#)) continue to support higher benchmark achievement and better outcomes for young people.

Looking ahead to 2025/26 academic year

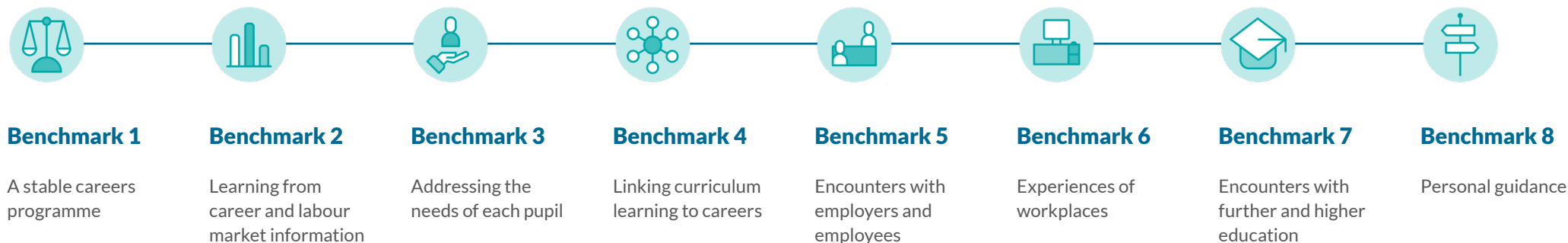
The careers system now needs to take these steps:

- Implement the updated benchmarks as the organising framework for careers guidance across schools, colleges and ITPs, in line with statutory guidance.
- Work towards the government's vision for two week's worth of work experience.
- Undertake Careers Impact System Internal Leadership Reviews and engage with Peer to Peer reviews.
- Consider how high quality careers provision can play a role in the NEET prevention and supporting the most disadvantaged young people, including those with SEND.

Gatsby Benchmark for Good Careers Guidance

In 2014, Lord Sainsbury's Gatsby Charitable Foundation published a report by Professor Sir John Holman, Adviser in Education at the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, titled "[Good Career Guidance](#)." A review took place in 2023/24 which updated the benchmarks for [the next 10 years](#).

The report identified eight benchmarks that are the core dimensions of good careers and enterprise provision in schools and colleges.





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