

## About this submission

The [Careers & Enterprise Company](#) (CEC) is the national body for careers education in England. We work with almost all secondary schools and colleges and 1,000s of employers to improve careers education, as measured by the [Gatsby Benchmarks](#), and secure better outcomes for young people.

**The highest quality careers provision reduces the likelihood of young people [being NEET by 8%](#) (post-16 and post-18), with [double the impact](#) for high Free School Meal (FSM) cohorts.**

Analysis of CEC's data (from nearly a third of a million secondary school students in England) indicates that those in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM), typically report [lower career readiness](#) than their peers. This relative disadvantage can be [more than offset](#) by high quality careers education.

Our submission is informed by:

- Our role as the national body for Careers Education in England
- The insight we hold from over 330,000 young people, over 4,750 schools and colleges, and more than 1500 employers
- The work of 44 local [Careers Hubs](#) - partnerships with Strategic and Local Authorities which cover 96% schools and colleges in England and drive-up standards of careers education against the best practice [Gatsby Benchmarks](#).

This response will focus on the important and proven role that Careers Education can play in collective, multi-agency efforts on NEET prevention, including potential to go further. We see opportunity for future intervention to harness:

- **Early intervention through Primary School careers related learning** as a proven way to arrest and reverse harmful stereotypes that stunt aspiration, and to broaden horizons.
- **Identification and tracking as impetus for prevention** through (a) adoption of CEC's Risk of NEET indicator (RONI) feature OnTrack+ (trailed in the *Get Britain Working White Paper*) to deliver national authority on early identification of NEET risk starting from Key Stage 3; and (b) assimilation of existing key datasets including from OnTrack+ and net and granular achievement against Gatsby Benchmarks, to enable a consistent metric at the institutional and national level to monitor progress in context of outcome projection.
- **Incentivising more employers** to engage especially in the Government's roll out of its work experience guarantee for all young people.

## Question 1

### **What is stopping more young people from participating in employment, education or training?**

Progress has been made and the revised [Gatsby Benchmarks](#) offer an underpinning structure for inclusive, personalised and meaningful careers support for all learners including those who need most support.

However, barriers remain. The barriers young people (particularly those with certain characteristics) experience can be grouped into three themes:

- **Confidence** – In career readiness and next steps
- **Connections** – To support and to the world of work
- **Currency** – The relative ease of translating their skills and knowledge into a positive next step

## **Confidence**

### **At an early age**

[Research shows](#) children start to form ideas about their future as they start primary school. However, as early as the age of six, children adopt limiting stereotypes based on gender, ethnicity and social background. By age nine, children can start to abandon their biggest ambitions and rule out career options. Intervention can make a difference. [Findings](#) from CEC's primary school careers programme showed that in schools taking part girls' aspirations in business and finance grew by 31 per cent. Three-quarters of teachers observed fewer pupils limited by gender stereotypes when talking about future jobs.

### **In navigating next steps**

Learners eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and other groups [report lower career readiness](#) in general compared to their non-FSM eligible peers. They begin at lower levels in Year 7 (47% of FSM learners identify as career ready compared to 49% of non-FSM learners), with the gap widening by Year 11 (64% and 69%). This gap is particularly pronounced for understanding of A Levels – 75% of FSM Year 11 learners say they understand A Levels, 11%pts lower than non-FSM learners (86%).

### **In essential workplace skills**

The future workforce [needs essential workplace](#) skills but FSM learners report lower confidence across all eight essential skills. Specifically, they are 8%pts less likely to report confidence in Problem Solving and 7%pts less likely to report confidence in Creativity than their non-FSM peers in Year 11.

## **Connections**

### **To home based support**

[Parents and carers are one of the biggest influences on young people's career decision-making.](#) The evaluation of the [Talking Futures](#) programme found that parents' and carers' influence on young people's career choices outweigh the impact of teachers, friends, and careers advisors, with 67% of parents themselves saying that they feel they have an influence on their children's career choices.

### **To the world of work through work experience**

[Evidence](#) tells us that disadvantaged young people are less likely to access work experience—and when they do, it's often less impactful. Disadvantaged young people are [more likely to miss out than others, with 69% of schools serving the most disadvantaged young people achieving](#)

[Gatsby Benchmark 6 \(Experiences of workplaces\)](#), compared to 78% of schools serving the [least disadvantaged students](#). This matters as young people who have had 4 or more encounters with employers at school, are [less likely to become NEET](#) (not in education, employment or training) and they are likely to go on to earn more.

### **To wider support**

[Evidence](#) from our Effective Transitions Fund programme shows the power of providing those at risk of becoming NEET with additional careers support. The post-16 education choices and life chances of the young people taking part significantly improved:

- 94% successfully transferred to college or training on leaving school at 16.
- 93% were still on their course after six months, compared to 87.8% of all disadvantaged young people.

The Careers & Enterprise Company is working with Careers Leaders in schools and colleges to utilise an enhanced local, data-driven Risk of NEET indicator (OnTrack+) through the [Compass+](#) digital tool which is used by over 4800 schools and colleges in England. This will help schools to identify and then support those at risk of NEET in secondary school, lessening the risk of disengagement.

### **Currency**

#### **In applying skills**

Groups at risk of becoming NEET often report lower essential skills. For example, Year 7 SEN learners on average report lower confidence across all eight essential skills. SEN learners on average respond positively to 57% of the eight essential skills questions, 16%pts lower than non-SEN learners. For some groups, they may have the skills but perceive themselves as less able to apply them. 68% of FSM girls in Year 11 report feeling confident in their speaking skills, but just 51% feel confident speaking about their skills in an interview - a gap of 17%pts. For non-FSM boys those figures are 66% and 67% respectively.

#### **In taking up high value pathways**

Learners in Year 11 are nearly twice as likely to understand apprenticeships compared to learners in Year 7 (almost on a par with A-levels [79% vs 83%]). However, there is regional variance. 83% of learners in Year 11 in the East Midlands understand apprenticeships but that figure is 10%pts lower at 73% in London. CEC's [comprehensive regional analysis](#) into the barriers young people face also highlights limiting factors some groups of young people can face in converting understanding and interest in apprenticeships to take up. These include travel costs, the impact on family benefits and entry requirements.

#### **In being included in opportunities**

SEND young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with low qualifications are [almost three times more likely to be NEET](#) than the average learner. [Four out of five employers](#) say they are ready to consider employing someone with an impairment or long-term health condition, but fewer in fact do so. Encouragingly, 65% of employers who have completed CEC's employer

standards tool are targeting support to at least two under-represented groups, rising to 81% for employers engaging over the long term. This is important as SEND learners in Year 11 rate themselves as almost as career ready as non-SEN learners 64% vs 69%.

### **In summary**

**Without targeted support, certain groups of young people are more likely to limit their horizons or miss out on opportunities** because they cannot navigate or confidently engage with the world of work. A consistent approach to targeting and early intervention is required, that is sustainable and integrated with existing approaches. The **unprecedented scale and granularity of learner-level data** CEC holds **offers both insight and direction** to efforts to **address the lags in careers knowledge, confidence and employability skills** that are holding young people back from participating in employment, education or training.

### **Question 2**

#### **What would make the biggest difference to support more young people to participate?**

Careers Education plays an important role, building the careers readiness, knowledge and skills of young people and [reducing the likelihood](#) of them becoming NEET.

#### **Careers education is improving**

Performance against the independent international standard of world class careers education ([Gatsby Benchmarks](#)) [has risen](#). Schools and colleges in England now fully meet 6 of the 8 benchmarks on average, up from an average of 2.1 in 2019. In practice this means young people are:

- ..having [more touchpoints with employers](#)
- ..[increasingly understanding career options](#) in context of their curriculum learning
- ..receiving more personalised experience of careers education as demonstrated [by increasing numbers of schools meeting Gatsby Benchmark 3](#) “Addressing the needs of each pupil“

Improvements have been independently recognised by [the OECD](#), the [Education Select Committee](#) and [Ofsted](#).

However, we also see gaps, as outlined in our response to Question 1. There are three particular areas where an amplification of support could catalyse further progress:

- 1) Strengthening aspirations
- 2) Early identification and tracking
- 3) Skills development through modern work experience

## 1) Strengthening aspirations

**Starting careers interventions earlier** as part of a more rounded and universal offer in primary schools helps address inequities in careers paths and the underrepresentation of certain groups. Early intervention should reduce the need for intensive one-to-one support later on.

Evidence from CEC's Start Small, Dream Big pilot showed pupils developed interest in a wider range of professions beyond the usual favourites. Girls' aspirations in business and finance increased by 31%, with similar growth in digital, law, and construction. Three-quarters of teachers observed fewer pupils limiting themselves due to gender stereotype. Parental awareness and involvement also rose: more families are having deeper conversations about careers and are more conscious of bias and opportunity.

Home-school partnerships can be strengthened by ensuring parents have the right knowledge and information at the right time. This is particularly important where learners face barriers. The CEC offers training and resources to Careers Leaders in schools and colleges, through Careers Hubs. A new parent questionnaire is currently undergoing piloting to ensure parent feedback shapes strategies.

## 2) Early identification and tracking

### Identification

The Careers & Enterprise Company is exploring ways to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET from Key Stage 3 onwards through an enhanced local, data-driven **Risk of NEET indicator** OnTrack+, helping target additional personalised preventative support. This aligns closely with recent guidance for local authorities on the use of a risk of NEET tool and is underpinned by wider government interest in NEET prevention. CEC is working with Careers Leaders in schools and colleges to use the Compass+ digital feature to identify and then support those at risk of NEET in secondary school, to prevent the risk of disengagement.

OnTrack+ is just one aspect of a wider opportunity to link CEC data sets to inform and guide NEET prevention. By triangulating our data from learners, employers and education institutions we can identify work readiness deficits in specific groups, sectors or skills, some of which are highlighted in our response to question 1. Underpinned by the quality assurance of a national body, Careers Hubs can then target and measure early action to mitigate and remove these work readiness deficits through established relationships with education institutions, employers and third parties.

### Tracking

The scale of reporting against the Gatsby Benchmarks (94% of secondary schools and colleges in England), aligned with the growing evidence of their impact (by correlating with longitudinal outcomes) and the chance to triangulate with other data sources (such as granular learner career readiness data) offers an opportunity go further and create a metric of the impact of careers education on a diverse set of learner outcomes.

For example, in January 2023, CEC published a technical note finding that schools who achieved higher Gatsby Benchmark scores typically reported that more students had positive

sustained destinations post-16. It was found that on average, each additional benchmark fully achieved was associated with a 1.1% decline in the proportion not in confirmed education, employment and training (EET), controlling for a range of school-level characteristics.

This insight could form the basis of an enhanced understanding of the work and destination readiness of young people. Combined with other growing sources of information such as student data from the Future Skills Questionnaire, it could help to inform and measure action to tackle barriers. This could be further enhanced by aligning with other tools such as the new OnTrack+ feature which starts from year 7 and which could ensure those who would most benefit receive timely preventative support.

### **3) Skills development through modern work experience**

Employers and educators, supported by CEC, are starting to deliver on the Government's commitment to **two weeks' worth of work experience** through the equalex modern work experience framework. This will help young people get ready for the world of work and the pathways that lead there.

When integrated into a structured careers programme, as defined by the Gatsby Benchmarks, work experience:

- increases awareness of jobs and pathways like apprenticeships.
- builds confidence in key skills like speaking and listening
- reduces the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) at 16 and 18.

CEC's Equalex quality framework helps maximise the impact of work experience by:

- Embedding work experiences into careers and wider enrichment programmes: ensuring work experiences focus on outcomes (such as skill building) and are integrated into the broader careers provision, offering multiple touchpoints rather than a single, isolated event.
- Strengthening employer partnerships: collaborating with local businesses and organisations to offer meaningful, high-quality skills-building experiences that align with regional job market needs.
- Tailoring support for vulnerable or disadvantaged learners including highly personalised and inclusive work placements, extended opportunities with ongoing support, and a strong emphasis on individual needs.

Recent evidence from the first year of piloting in 4 regions shows early promise for learners facing barriers and employers, who find the flexibility to engage and clear focus on quality helpful.

### **In Summary**

By strengthening the aspirations of all learners, identifying early those at risk of becoming NEET and building skills through modern work experience we can increase our ability to support young people to progress to their best next step. The proven and established model of careers education is positively impacting young people's outcomes and offers a ready-made

combination of data, expertise and partnerships which can support further NEET prevention ambitions.