

# Careers Impact: National System Review 2

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Driving equity and tackling disadvantage through careers provision -  
Executive Summary



# About National System Review 2

This paper summarises key insights from the 2024/25 second National System Review (NSR) conducted by The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC). The NSR focused on how schools, special schools and colleges leverage careers as a vehicle to achieve equity for all learners and address the disproportionate impact of disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

Between September and December 2024, 35 educational institutions took part in the National System review. 15 of these were mainstream secondary schools and the remainder were either Further Education (FE) colleges, special schools and alternative provision settings.

[The Careers Impact System](#) is a process that drives continuous improvement in the quality of careers. National System Reviews offer independent system-wide insight and thought leadership, taking a cross-cutting, thematic approach.

The CEC conducted the second National System Review, which involved 35 schools, colleges and special schools with leading practice. [Chrysalis](#) – an independent research agency, hosted the forum and provided the technical report. For more detail and an Educator Guide including practical examples, see [here](#).



<sup>1</sup> [The first National System Review in 2023/24 focused on Gatsby Benchmark 1 - A stable careers programme](#)



## Use data to identify and address disadvantage or vulnerability

### Findings

A data-driven approach is essential for targeting support and shaping effective careers provision. Institutions in the review demonstrated nuanced, multi-dimensional use of data beyond standard eligibility markers.

Mainstream secondary schools utilise Pupil Premium (PP) eligibility ('Ever 6' Free School Meals – FSM - and 'looked after' children) as primary indicators of disadvantage. Further Education (FE) colleges, special schools and alternative provision settings, where nearly all learners face significant challenges, rely on multiple measures beyond economic disadvantage, including learning difficulties, adverse childhood experiences, and mental health issues.

### Best practice:

- **Identify disadvantaged or vulnerable learners:** using a combination of data, such as, Pupil Premium eligibility, performance data (e.g., attendance records, behavioural incidents, exclusions), aspirations and intended destinations, learner perception of career readiness and/or learner postcodes.
- **Establish cross-team data sharing:** track, record, and share data on learner vulnerabilities, enabling timely interventions and support.
- **Use learner level data:** ensure careers provision is responsive to identified learner needs by tracking individual student journeys using personalised data rather than broad cohort-level groupings. Consider using indicators such as the Risk of Not in Education, Employment, or Training (RONI) to identify early risk factors and tailor interventions effectively.



## Careers is a tool to tackle disadvantage or vulnerability

### Findings

Careers has emerged as a key strategy for mitigating the impact of socio-economic disadvantage. Institutions serving disadvantaged or vulnerable learners recognise careers provision as a critical mechanism for preventing learners becoming NEET and bridging gaps in opportunities.

### Best practice:

- **Prioritise support around the learner:** through early and sustained 1:1 personal guidance with appropriately qualified careers advisers, embedded within wider student support structures. Reinforce planning through informal opportunities and multidisciplinary reviews (e.g. EHCP meetings). Actively involve parents and carers through tailored events, conversation tools.
- **Embed careers into institutional vision and strategic leadership:** ensure careers provision is a core part of the school, special school, or college's vision and improvement strategy. Strong leadership and governance should drive a clear focus on personal and skills development, backed by sufficient resources and strategic commitment.
- **Empower Careers Leaders:** Careers Leaders should be equipped with the autonomy and expertise to develop responsive careers provision, especially for disadvantaged or vulnerable learners. Professional development and training opportunities should be prioritised to maintain sustainable careers leadership.



## Meaningful work experience prepares disadvantaged or vulnerable learners for future careers

### Findings

High-quality work experiences are particularly valuable for disadvantaged or vulnerable learners, helping them to build confidence and develop employability skills to prepare for their next best steps.

### Best practice:

- **Embed work experiences into careers strategies:** ensure that work experiences are integrated into the broader careers provision, offering multiple touchpoints rather than a single, isolated event. Include diverse activities beyond traditional placements, such as industry masterclasses, virtual work experiences and employer-led projects.
- **Strengthen employer partnerships:** collaborate with local businesses and organisations to offer meaningful skills-building experiences that align with regional job market needs.
- **Tailor support for vulnerable or disadvantaged learners:** recognise practice from special schools and alternative provision, where all learners are considered vulnerable. Careers support in these settings often includes highly personalised work placements, extended opportunities with ongoing support, and a strong emphasis on individual needs. Ensure equitable access through tailored interventions such as travel assistance, mentoring, and bespoke work experience planning.



## Next Steps

The 2024/25 National System Review reinforces the essential role of careers in tackling socio-economic disadvantage. Recommended next steps are:

- **Education leaders and governors:** strategically embed careers into school, special school or college priorities, ensuring every learner receives high-quality careers provision and responsive support.
- **Careers Leaders:** use information and data effectively to identify and support vulnerable learners, fostering a culture of aspiration.
- **Employers:** [engage with the careers system](#), providing more [meaningful workplace experiences](#) to help remove barriers for disadvantaged or vulnerable young people, supporting them to gain career-related knowledge, skills, confidence.

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Careers Impact System

NSR1 Executive Summary

CEC impact

Driving equity and tackling  
disadvantage through your careers  
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