

Careers Leadership in Colleges:

Supporting learners through a 'whole college' approach

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About this paper

The Careers & Enterprise Company partnered with CooperGibson Research to carry out this research into careers leadership in colleges. Three years on from the Careers Strategy, the research explored how careers leadership is delivered in practice, effective approaches for embedding careers across a college, and how Careers Hubs and Enterprise Advisers support delivery. The report presents evidence from a survey of 81 Careers Leaders in colleges and 27 follow-up qualitative interviews. The report offers insights on effective practice for senior leaders and Careers Leaders in colleges, and the Hub Leads, Enterprise Coordinators and Enterprise Advisers who support them.



Glossary of terms

ALS	Additional Learning Support
CDI	Career Development Institute
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GFEC	General Further Education College
HE	Higher Education
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
LMI	Labour Market Information
MIS	Management Information Systems
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
SAR	Strategic Area Review
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment



Executive summary

In December 2017 the Government's Careers Strategy set out the expectation that all colleges should have a named Careers Leader. The Careers & Enterprise Company produced a guide detailing the role of Careers Leadership, including the responsibility to ensure that all 16 -19 learners in colleges (and up to age 25 for those with EHCPs) receive high quality careers support in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Supporting Careers Leaders is a core objective of The Careers & Enterprise Company. To support this objective, a need was identified to understand how careers leadership is being delivered in practice, what approaches are working and how Career Hubs and Enterprise Advisers could further support the delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Careers & Enterprise Company therefore, embarked on a two-phase research programme. The first phase, conducted by The Careers & Enterprise Company in January 2021, consisted of a survey of strategic Careers Leaders. Following this, CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned by The Careers & Enterprise Company in February 2021 to carry out phase two, in-depth qualitative research interviews with Careers Leaders.



Aims and approach

The aims of this report are to provide up-to-date insight on:

- How careers leadership is delivered in practice, including the role of Careers Leaders, both at strategic and operational levels, and how this has changed over recent years.
- Effective approaches for embedding careers education across a college and catering for the different needs of learners.
- How Careers Hubs and Enterprise Advisers can support the delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks, including challenges and successes.

The Careers & Enterprise Company carried out an online survey of Careers Leaders with strategic responsibility for their college's careers programme. Invitations were sent to the 240 Further Education and sixth form colleges on the Get Information About Schools list and 81 responses were received (approximately one-third). The responding sample was representative of college type and somewhat skewed towards those which are more engaged with The Careers & Enterprise Company resources, tools and training.

CGR conducted 27 in-depth qualitative video or telephone interviews with a geographically dispersed sample of Careers Leaders across a range of colleges, that had completed The Careers & Enterprise Company's Careers Leadership in Colleges survey. The sample included a range of college contexts representing differences by college type, size, Ofsted rating and type of study programme.



Key findings

Careers leadership roles and responsibilities

Three different strategic Careers Leader structures were identified in the research:

- Careers Leaders at Senior Leadership Team (SLT) level.
- Careers Leaders at management level, reporting to a staff member on the SLT.
- Careers Leaders at operational level, part of the careers education team, reporting to a manager who then reported to a member of staff on the SLT.

The structure of careers education and leadership varied across the colleges involved in the research, varying in relation to size of the college, whether it was on single or multiple sites, and the type of provision. Structurally it was common for careers education to be part of the Student Services department.

Those with representation at SLT level felt able to easily engage other members of the SLT to progress careers strategy and plans. Careers Leaders at management level, and in smaller colleges, commonly had a combined strategic and operational role. They were responsible for directing and driving forwards the strategic careers plan and also for operationally managing careers education. It was difficult for some to effectively lead careers when time was taken with operational duties. Careers Leaders working at operational level felt that by not being on the SLT or with a direct line of communication, it was difficult to influence change and drive progress. However, some invested time in developing a whole college approach to overcome a lack of SLT engagement.

Often the Careers Leader role was integrated with other responsibilities. A multifaceted role for some resulted in difficulties trying to balance time and ensure sufficient focus was given to careers, although others thought it aligned well with areas like marketing, pastoral or tutorial responsibility.

Whole college approach

An effective whole college approach to careers education was created via the collaborative working of staff across an entire college. This included SLT, management and operational levels, and those within careers education, curriculum and wider college services. Levels of progression towards this ideal varied across the colleges. The most progressive colleges had careers cross-college working groups, bringing together colleagues to review strategy and progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks, and to generate actions to drive plans forward. The Careers Leader was often the instigator and leader of such groups. Their objective was to instil a sense of shared responsibility and ownership for careers across all college areas.

One of the most common approaches to embedding careers across the college (mentioned by 87% in the survey) was to collaborate with curriculum areas. This was often through curriculum leads (including those invited to attend careers working groups) and involved contextualising careers in curriculum delivery through informing planning and working on joint strategies. Having a 'careers focused curriculum' was a key part of the careers strategy for many of the Careers Leaders, and to support this, the vision was embedded into wider college strategic policy. This helped to raise the profile of careers across colleges and gain 'buy-in' from colleagues. In addition, some Careers Leaders were using CPD to raise awareness and understanding of how to embed careers in curriculum delivery.

The embedding of careers in teaching and learning helped to engage learners. This included for example, signposting and discussing relevant LMI, use of guest speakers and support from employers to design and deliver curriculum content, and use of staff's professional and practical knowledge of the sector.

The majority of colleges (69% of those responding to the survey) had a link governor for careers education. Levels of governor engagement differed across the colleges. Some experienced high levels of engagement, commitment and support from governors, for example being part of careers working groups and providing employer links and local labour market opportunities. Colleges where governor relationships needed strengthening reported that the main barriers to a good relationship were Careers Leader workload commitments and a lack of desire from the governor to be involved and provide support.

Some of the challenges to effectively creating a whole college approach included a lack of staff awareness of the benefits of such an approach, their knowledge and understanding of the nature of careers education (rather than just a focus on personal guidance), capacity issues for the Careers Leader to drive strategy forwards and follow-up on progress, and also a lack of commitment from colleagues due to capacity and workload.

Engaging and supporting learners through wider college services

Colleges were implementing a range of approaches for promoting and marketing information and opportunities for potential learners, for example, virtual events and pre-enrolment interviews. For existing learners, information about careers support and opportunities were provided through their study programmes and college events such as careers fairs and visits from external speakers.

Vulnerable learners were identified early by colleges and provided with support by the careers team as required, such as one-to-one or group sessions with learners from similar curriculum areas. The careers team worked closely with the ESOL, SEND, ALS and Student Services teams, to support vulnerable learners in terms of their next steps and progression pathways.

Use of data and systems

Most colleges generally thought that current data systems met their needs. They used various tools for recording and monitoring the learner journey from enrolment and admissions through to their destinations. Multiple platforms from external providers were most commonly being used with just a few colleges creating systems in-house. Systems that were deemed to be most useful enabled the careers team to track the whole learner journey, and were compatible with other in-house systems such as their CRM or MIS. Data was used to measure progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks (sometimes included in KPIs) and to review outcomes (e.g. destination data). Some reported close working between the MIS teams and Careers Leaders, who would use the data provided to review progress and plan next steps. This was used to help shape the careers programme going forwards.

Impact of career leadership structure and driving forwards careers provision

Since the introduction of a careers leadership structure and role, there had been a positive shift in the focus of careers education, with higher prioritisation noted by 80% of Careers Leaders in the survey. In the majority of colleges, a dedicated Careers Leader role had elevated the position of careers education, driven provision forwards, helped to integrate it within colleges and been positively impacted by the implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks. Overall, 92% of Careers Leaders reported in the survey that the Gatsby Benchmarks had helped to improve their college's careers provision.

In response to Covid-19, most Careers Leaders did not feel that their role had changed substantially. For some it had temporarily become diverted, and it was more difficult to focus on integrating careers education within colleges due to prioritisation of other areas. Some of the Careers Leaders were now reportedly looking to the future and how to prepare learners for the new post Covid-19 labour market.

Many of the practical changes to careers education delivery, such as virtual personal guidance, had positively impacted provision, with some stating that aspects of delivery may continue in this way in the future.

Building expertise, Careers Leader training

Careers Leader training was viewed by 85% of survey participants as a positive experience in improving practice and supporting Careers Leaders in their role. Where there was criticism, it related to the training being too operationally focused, school centric or lacking understanding of the college context. Some Careers Leaders reported that the school bias was an advantage as it gave them an insight into the provision learners were experiencing prior to joining them.

Barriers to completing the training included: time commitment, perceived irrelevance and a lack of usefulness. The main benefits of the training included: access to useful information, resources and tools, networking and good practice sharing opportunities. The training was also reported to be useful for gaining buy-in from teaching staff and/or the SLT and it helped Careers Leaders gain confidence in their role. The main improvement to the training suggested by interviewees was to make it more relevant to the college context and to the different types of Careers Leaders (including roles/levels of seniority and levels of experience).

Connecting beyond the college

Overall Careers Leaders were positive about their engagement with Careers Hubs and Enterprise Advisers. The help, support and advice provided was valued, particularly through involvement in Hub Forums¹, sharing of resources and support with progression of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

The Hub Forums were praised for being a non-competitive platform to collaborate and discuss ways to progress careers education and support learners, for example via the sharing of good practice, training opportunities and networking. The strategic and operational resources provided by the Hub were useful for developing careers education programmes.

The main criticism of the Careers Hub offer was the lack of or limited relevance to the college context; some colleges already had similar networks and employer programmes in place and also thought that Careers Hubs were too school centric, and did not understand the issues facing colleges.

Several colleges spoke of Enterprise Advisers supporting with strategic careers education development. They helped the Careers Leader review their progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks and identified areas for careers education improvement. They also supported operationally for example, sharing resources and information, organising networking opportunities and providing labour market information. Some Careers Leaders reported that the support provided could be more tailored to the college context and Enterprise Advisers could provide more help with achieving benchmarks 5 and 7.

The research has highlighted a range of approaches to careers leadership and effective delivery of a whole college approach. Despite many challenges posed by Covid-19, the majority of Careers Leaders continue to be positive about the future of careers provision. Most reported increased prioritisation of careers education within their college, improved provision through use of the Gatsby Benchmarks and a positive impact of their role on learners' career and education outcomes. This emphasises the central role that Careers Leaders have in developing high quality careers education, from implementing the Careers Strategy² to delivery of the ambitions of the Skills for Jobs White Paper.³

1. The term Hub Forums refers to a community of practice and any meetings/groups (both formal and informal) that the colleges are engaged with within the Hub offer.

2. Department for Education (2017). Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's talents. DFE-00310-2017.

3. Department for Education (2021). Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth. CP338.

Key insights for effective careers education delivery through a whole college approach

This section outlines considerations based on the research for different stakeholder groups.

Senior Leaders in colleges

- Place careers education at the heart of the wider college vision and engage staff across the college.
- Ensure strategic careers leadership by having a dedicated Careers Leader on SLT or with clear route of access.
- Appoint a link governor for careers who works closely with the Careers Leader, joins working groups and brings labour market knowledge.
- Encourage regular reporting to the Governing Body on how careers education is contributing to the college's strategic priorities.
- Encourage participation in Careers Leader training.
- Review capacity and resourcing of the Careers Leader and wider careers delivery team.
- Use careers programme to drive Covid recovery.

Governors

- Encourage regular reporting to the Governing Body on how careers education is contributing to the college's strategic priorities.

Careers Leaders

- Build collaboration between staff, linking curriculum, employer engagement, student services and those responsible for vulnerable learners.
- Aim for a 'careers focused curriculum' by setting up curriculum leads and using wider college CPD opportunities.
- Set up a cross-college working group to review the college careers strategy and progress and drive action.
- Take part in Careers Leader training and embed regular careers CPD for staff.
- Support vulnerable learners by working with ESOL, SEND, ALS and Student Services teams.
- Make use of opportunities to connect and collaborate with other colleges through and membership of Connect: The College Careers Community.
- Identify ways for Enterprise Advisers to provide strategic support to improve careers provision.
- Use digital tools to plan and evaluate career programmes and support students.

Careers Hub Leads and Enterprise Coordinators

- Continue to promote college collaboration through cluster or network meetings, and communities of practice including Connect to promote good practice.
- Ensure the specific needs and requirements of the college inform the matching process with an Enterprise Adviser and support their engagement with the Careers Hub.

Enterprise Advisers

- Continue with supporting careers plans and programmes strategically, providing industry-specific connections, evaluation, and identifying areas for improvement.
- Work with Careers Leaders to identify opportunities to support operational delivery.
- Focus development on engagement with employers and education and training providers for progression.



1 | Introduction

1.1 Careers education in colleges

Employer engagement and career learning have long been integral to the fabric of Further Education as a result of the focus on vocational pathways and the proximity of students aged 16-19 years to the labour market. The introduction of the Gatsby Benchmarks provided a consistent framework for this provision and the Careers Strategy⁴ and subsequent guidance⁵ in 2018 encouraged adoption of the benchmarks in colleges. The same year, The Careers & Enterprise Company, together with the Gatsby Foundation, created a college-specific version of Compass, a self-evaluation tool for tracking progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks. Over 90% of the 240 Further Education and sixth form colleges in England are now using the tool.⁶

Evidence from Compass data as well as independent sources shows improvements in career guidance in colleges over recent years. In 2019, 81% of Further Education colleges were providing employer encounters for all or most learners every year (up from 67% the previous year) and 58% of providers were providing all or most learners with workplace experiences (up from 52%).⁷ Across the other benchmarks, most colleges were partially achieving the requirements with differences across type of institution and some particular challenges yet to overcome. The Department

for Education's 2019 omnibus survey of a wider group of post-16 providers noted improvements across most aspects of career guidance up to 2019, with almost all colleges reporting having a Careers Leader in place.⁸ Covid-19 has disrupted students' learning and their opportunities for employer engagement, making career guidance more important than ever.

Careers provision in colleges is also driven through other policy requirements. As part of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding requirements, Further Education colleges and sixth form colleges are required to provide access to independent careers guidance and include work experience and non-qualification activities within 16-19 study programmes.⁹ The 'Baker Clause' established that post-16 providers should have access to schools to promote their technical education provision¹⁰, which is to be enforced through the Skills for Jobs White Paper in response to insufficient progress.¹¹ Under the 2019 Ofsted inspection framework, colleges will be judged on the provision of an effective careers programme 'that offers advice, experience and contact with employers to encourage learners to aspire, make good choices and understand what they need to do in order to reach and succeed in their chosen career'.¹²

4. Department for Education (2017). Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's talents. DFE-00310-2017.

5. Department for Education (2018). Careers guidance: Guidance for further education colleges and sixth form colleges. DFE-00023-2018. The statutory guidance states that the Gatsby Benchmarks are not a statutory framework but that by adopting them, colleges can be confident that they are complying with the careers guidance requirements of their funding agreements.

6. Based on business intelligence data from December 2020.

7. The Careers & Enterprise Company (2020). Careers and enterprise provision in England's colleges: Detailed Gatsby Benchmark Results in 2019. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company

8. IFF (2020). Post-16 institutions omnibus Wave 7 findings. RR1007.

9. Department for Education (2018). 16 to 19 Study Programmes: Departmental Advice for Education Providers on the Planning and Delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes. London: DfE

10. 'An amendment was tabled to the Technical and Further Education Bill in the House of Lords in February 2017 by Lord Baker, to require schools to admit providers of technical education and apprenticeships to contact pupils to promote their courses. The provisions came into force in January 2018.' Long, R. and Hubble, S. (2018). Careers guidance in schools, colleges and universities, Briefing Paper Number 07236, House of Commons Library.

11. Department for Education (2021). Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth. CP338.

12. Ofsted (2020). Further education and skills inspection handbook. Reference no: 190021. Manchester.

1.2 Skills for Jobs

The *Skills for Jobs* White Paper, published in January 2021, set out a reform agenda for Further Education that is employer-led, skills-focused through technical education and that promotes lifelong learning with teaching excellence. The emphasis on technical education takes forward the reforms announced in the Sainsburys Review¹³ and Post-16 Skills Plan¹⁴. Careers education will continue to provide a strong underpinning to this agenda in three ways:

1.

Frameworks and infrastructure

Gatsby Benchmarks remain the framework for good career guidance.

Roll-out of Careers Hubs, Enterprise Adviser Network and high-quality Careers Leader training.

Data positioned as vital in careers information and guidance.

2.

Accountability

Duty to provide independent careers guidance from lower age of Year 7.

A three-point-plan to enforce the Baker Clause.

Ofsted to undertake a thematic review of careers guidance in England.

3.

Quality and consistency

Build careers awareness into every stage of teachers' professional development.

Alignment between The Careers & Enterprise Company and National Careers Service to provide all-age support.

NCS website to become single source of government-assured careers information for young people.

13. Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education (2016a). Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education – The Sainsbury Panel. London: DBIS & DfE.

14. Department for Business Innovation and Skills and Department for Education (2016b). Post-16 Skills Plan, Cm 9280. London: DBIS & DfE.

1.3 Effective approaches in colleges

Previous research details how the delivery of careers guidance in colleges is shaped to a large extent by the type and size of institution, the number and geographical spread of sites, the study programmes offered and the local labour market. Nevertheless, a review of careers work in colleges, carried out on behalf of The Careers & Enterprise Company in 2018 by the Institute for Employment Studies¹⁵ identified the following common features of effective practice:

- Well-resourced provision and visibility of careers teams and the support on offer.
- Effective careers leadership at a strategic level, holistic approach across the college and shared ownership.
- Evaluation and review to ensure that careers provision responds to student need.
- Use of technology for communication, accurate data and measuring impact.
- Tailored and targeted provision to address the individual needs of students.
- Collaboration with employers and local networks.
- Impartial guidance so that students are aware of all the options.

1.4 The role of Careers Leaders

Careers Leaders are responsible for ensuring that all 16-19 learners in colleges receive high quality careers support in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks. In December 2017, the Government's Careers Strategy set out the expectation that all colleges have a named Careers Leader in place by September 2018, and in July 2018 The Careers & Enterprise Company produced a guide detailing the role of careers leadership.¹⁶

One of the core objectives of The Careers & Enterprise Company is supporting Careers Leaders, and to be able to do that effectively they wanted to understand how leadership was being delivered in practice, what approaches were effective for embedding careers across a college, and how Career Hubs and Enterprise Advisers support them in the delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

To help meet this objective, in January 2021 The Careers & Enterprise Company embarked on a two-phase research programme. The first phase was conducted by The Careers & Enterprise Company and consisted of a survey of strategic Careers Leaders.

Following this, CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned by The Careers & Enterprise Company to carry out in-depth qualitative research with Careers Leaders.

15. Williams, J., Buzzeo, J., Spiegelhalter, K. and Dawson, A. (2018). Careers Provision in Colleges: What Works? London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

16. The Careers & Enterprise Company (2018). Understanding the role of the Careers Leader. The Careers & Enterprise Company & Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

1.5 Aims

The aims of this report are to provide up-to-date insight on:

- How careers leadership is delivered in practice, including the role of Careers Leaders, both at strategic and operational levels, and how this has changed over recent years.
- Effective approaches for embedding careers across a college and catering for the different needs of learners.
- How Careers Hubs and Enterprise Advisers can support the delivery of the Gatsby Benchmarks, including challenges and successes.

1.6 Methods

Evidence was gathered through quantitative and qualitative approaches.

1.6.1 Survey

The Careers & Enterprise Company carried out an online survey of Careers Leaders with strategic responsibility for their college's careers programme. Invitations were sent to the 240 Further Education and sixth form colleges on Get Information About Schools and 81 responses were received (approximately one-third). Respondents were asked if they were willing to be invited to take part in follow-up research and consent was sought for sharing their contact details.

The Careers Leaders taking part were representative of all colleges in terms of institution type and geographical spread. As might be expected, the colleges represented were somewhat more likely to be engaged with The Careers & Enterprise Company resources, tools and training.

Table 1: Survey sample breakdown by type and engagement with The Careers & Enterprise Company

	Survey sample	National data
General FE college	72%	71%
Sixth form college	17%	18%
Land-based college	5%	6%
Other	6%	5%
In a Careers Hub	65%	55%
Used Compass at least once	98%	92%
Participation in Careers Leader training	58%	49%
Total	81	240

1.6.2 Qualitative interviews

CGR conducted 27 in-depth qualitative interviews with a sample of Careers Leaders across a range of colleges. The interviews lasted up to one hour and were carried out online via MS Teams/Zoom or via telephone. Fieldwork was undertaken between February and March 2021.

The sample of colleges was selected from a database provided by The Careers & Enterprise Company. It comprised of those that had completed the Careers Leadership in Colleges Survey for The Careers & Enterprise Company in January and February 2021 and volunteered to take part in further research.

Introductory emails were sent to those that had expressed an interest in taking part in further research. The email introduced the CGR research team, the

project and requested their participation. Follow up emails and telephone calls were made as necessary to schedule the research at a convenient time.

The sample of colleges was selected to represent a range of contexts. The research team aimed to achieve a mix of colleges representing differences by college type: General Further Education College (GFEC), sixth form college and specialist colleges (land-based, art/design). There was also a reasonable spread of: size of college, those on multiple and single sites and college groups, Ofsted ratings and type of study programme offered. The sample was spread across all geographic (government office) regions.

The sample breakdown by college type and region is provided below.

Table 2: Interview sample breakdown by region and type of college

Region	GFEC	Sixth Form college	Specialist college
North	4	1	
Midlands	8	1	
South	8	3	2
Total	20	5	2

Those responding to The Careers & Enterprise Company Careers Leadership survey and taking part in the interview had described themselves as the nominated Careers Leader for their college. There was a mix of role of Careers Leader interviewees, for example: Vice Principle, Director, and Head of Student Services.

1.6.3 Case studies

Three case studies showcasing how effective careers leadership has worked in practice, are included in relevant sections of the report. The case studies focus on:

- A careers leadership structure which elevates careers education, provides clear lines of communication and ensures support structures are in place.
- Achieving a whole college approach through aligning the careers programme with strategic policy and collaborating via a strategic cross-college group.
- Working with a specific College Careers Hub to improve careers education and support achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

1.7 Methodological considerations

When considering the findings provided in this report it is important to note that responses to The Careers & Enterprise Company's online survey was voluntary, and as such the findings may be subject to self-selection bias. As the recruitment for the qualitative interviews was also undertaken through this survey, it is possible that this bias is replicated in the interview sample.

1.8 This report

This report is based primarily on the evidence from the qualitative interviews which explored the themes in depth. The survey data is included to indicate scale. Percentages are used in the charts and text and based on the responding sample which varied a little between questions. It should be noted that these percentages are based on a relatively small sample of 81 respondents. Where the text switches between the sources, this is made explicit, but otherwise the reader should assume that the evidence is drawn from the qualitative element.



2 | Careers leadership roles and responsibilities

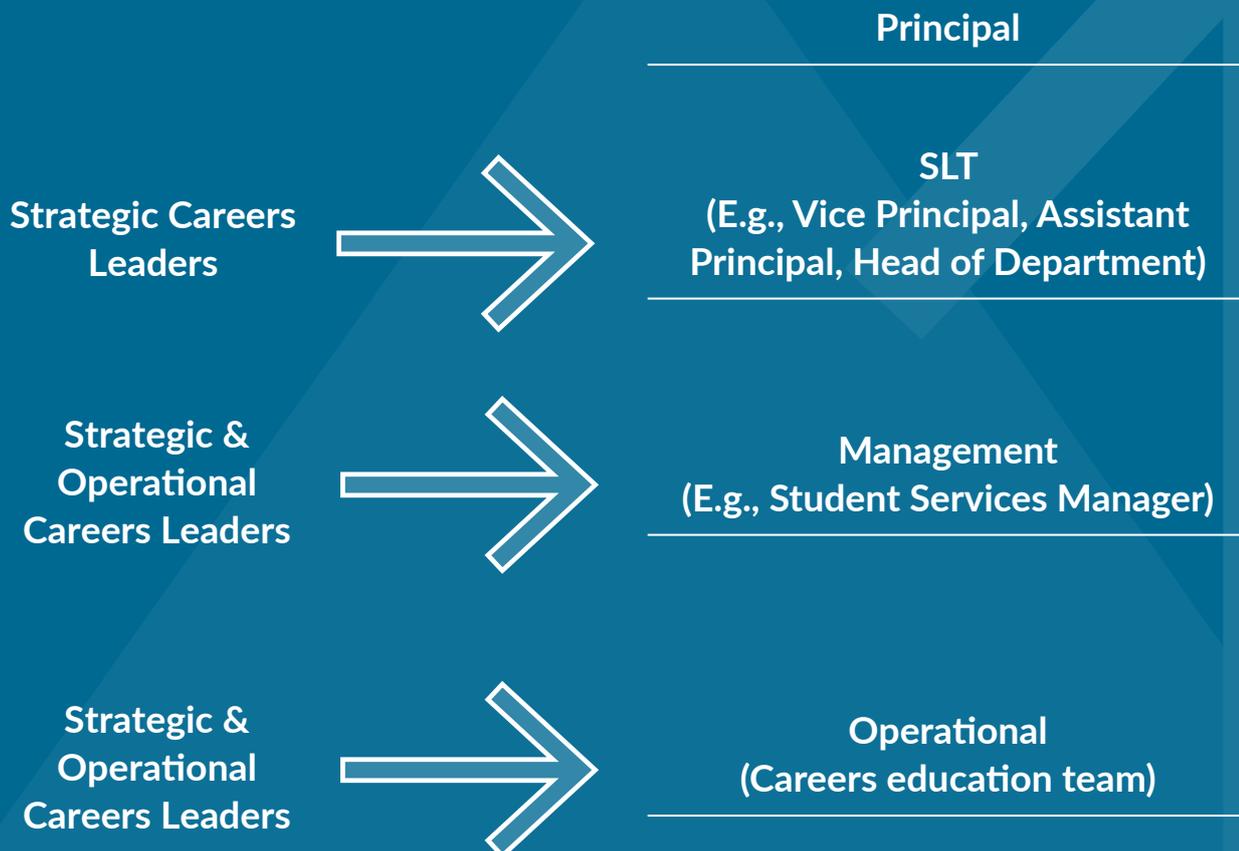
This chapter provides an overview of how careers leadership is delivered in colleges, the organisational structures that are in place and how roles and responsibilities are distributed. It also discusses the changes over recent years to the Careers Leader role, perceptions of careers education and how Covid-19 has affected this.

2.1 Careers leadership structures

The way in which careers education and careers leadership was structured varied across the colleges involved in the interviews. It was largely dependent on the college context including a number of factors relating to: the size of the college, whether it was on single or multiple sites, or part of a college group, and the type of college, for example, GFEC versus sixth form provision.

As shown in Figure 1 below, the positioning of Careers Leaders within the college structure varied throughout the colleges.

Figure 1: Positioning of Careers Leaders in colleges



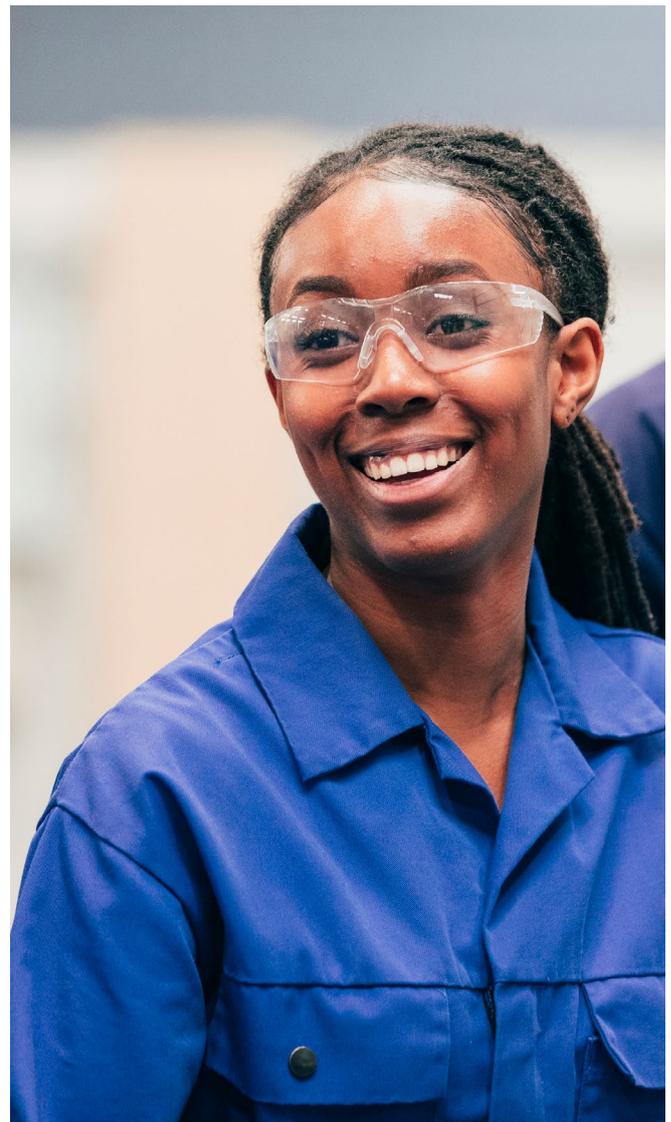
Three different strategic Careers Leader structures were identified in the research:

- Careers Leaders at Senior Leadership Team (SLT) level:
 - Approximately half of the Careers Leaders involved in the survey (53%) and in the qualitative research were part of the SLT and reported directly to the Principal.
 - Job/role titles included, e.g. Director of Student Support & Services, Director of Careers & Partnerships and Assistant Principal.
- Careers Leaders at management level:
 - Approximately a quarter of Careers Leaders were positioned at management level and reported to a member of staff who was on the SLT. This link was often the Vice Principal, Assistant Principal or a Head of Department.
 - Job role/titles included e.g. Student Services Manager, Careers & Employability Manager and Careers Education Manager.
- Careers Leaders at operational level:
 - In a few of the smaller colleges, the Strategic Careers Leader was positioned at an operational level as part of the careers education team, (some were also the Careers Adviser) and reported to a manager such as the Student Services Manager, who then reported to a member of staff (for example Head of Student Services), who was on the SLT.
 - Job role/titles included e.g. Careers & Employability Manager, Careers Consultant and Careers Manager.

A small proportion of the larger colleges involved in the interviews had both a Strategic Careers Leader and an Operational Careers Leader. The Operational Careers Leader reported to the strategic lead. The roles of which are discussed in section 2.2.

2.1.1 Differing Careers Leader structures across college groups

It was evident that in college groups with providers positioned across multiple sites, the structure of careers leadership could often vary within each college. The leadership structure was based on the size and type of each individual college and how best to meet the learners' needs. There were a few college groups that had the same careers leadership structure across all of the colleges within the group. In these cases, the Careers Leader tended to be on the SLT, would oversee careers across all sites and be supported by those at management level across the colleges. This was thought to offer leadership consistency and a more cohesive way of working.





I have responsibility for all colleges and there is a wider SLT team. I sit in the exec SLT, reporting to the CEO, with responsibility for careers for every student... I set the strategy and underneath me are the operational Careers Leaders. Each college has a Careers Leader in the role of Head of Student Services and under that we have careers teams, Careers Advisers. There are only five Careers Advisers across college who have level 6 and above. We also have additional staff trained to level 4 like pastoral managers.

GFEC, SLT Careers Leader

Differing careers leadership structures in a college group

This example shows how the Careers Leader structure within a college group can differ across the college sites according to the type and size of college.

A college group consisted of six different colleges. Within its large GFEC there was a three-tiered structure:

- The Careers Leader was supported by six Careers Advisers.
- The Careers Leader reported to a Student Support Leader.
- The Student Support Leader reported to the Assistant Principal (on the SLT).

Within the group's medium sized vocationally focused college, there was a two-tiered structure:

- The Careers Leader reported to the Assistant Principal (on the SLT).
- The Careers Leader was supported by two Careers Advisers.

The Careers Leader at the college group's Sixth Form College had a combined strategic and operational role:

- The Careers Leader reported to the College Management Officer (on the SLT).
- The Careers Leader was also the college's Careers Adviser.

2.1.2 Positioning of careers education within colleges

Structurally it was common across the colleges involved in the interviews for careers education to be part of the Student Services department, the remit of which included safeguarding, health, welfare, tutorial and pastoral programmes, and careers. Careers Leaders in some GFEC colleges that were predominantly offering vocational only courses, were positioned within work placement teams, responsible for work experience, apprenticeships and employer engagement.

Some colleges within the last three years, to give greater prominence, had restructured the positioning of careers education within the college structure. One college, for example, had moved careers education out of their marketing department and into their school engagement programme where it was thought to have a better fit and greater emphasis amongst other areas such as 'public relations'.

A few colleges were in the process, or were planning to move careers education further into the curriculum, as it was reported that in order to successfully achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks, careers needed to be embedded and focused on the curriculum.

2.2 Distribution and effectiveness of roles and responsibilities

Most colleges had one Careers Leader role, the scope of which varied across the colleges and was dependant largely on the structure of careers leadership and the size and type of the institution.

Careers Leaders employed by large colleges, often on multiple sites, tended to have a strong strategic focus to their role. They were often on the SLT and were responsible for driving through the careers education strategy and benchmarks. The role also involved overseeing the managerial aspects of careers education and maintaining relationships with external providers and partnerships with schools.

It was deemed important by many Careers Leaders interviewed that in order to effectively move strategy forwards they should be on the SLT. Those on the SLT were able to directly communicate with college decision makers such as the Principal and Vice Principal of other areas, and resultantly any changes to policy and careers education practice were efficiently made. This was much quicker and easier compared to those that were not on the SLT and did not have a direct line of communication.

Many of Careers Leaders at SLT level, were responsible for a number of other remits such as: marketing, public relations, finance, welfare and mental health, safeguarding, tutorials and pastoral care. Multiple responsibilities for some were problematic when trying to balance responsibilities and allocate sufficient time or focus to careers, and there was a desire for more management support. Others commented that a multifaceted role which included responsibility for areas such as marketing and pastoral care was beneficial as the needs of these aligned well to careers education, and it allowed best practice and solutions to challenges to be shared across the areas.



I am responsible for moving forwards the strategy, and ensuring quality and implementation of careers across the campuses. Strategically we work together with the Director, to move strategy forward, we agree budgets and now we have merged it is about re-establishing our strategy and policy and aligning it to be group-wide so it doesn't feel or look different on each of the different campuses.

GFEC, SLT Careers Leader

Within the Careers Leader role, I am a bit operational but I am also strategic, which is good in some ways because I think it is really useful to have a handle on what is happening operationally. You can really advise and think whether it would work. But I don't really have the clout to move things through strategically.

GFEC, Non SLT Careers Leader

In a few of the largest colleges there were two Careers Leader roles, a Strategic and an Operational Careers Leader. The operational lead was responsible for the effective management of the careers education team and ensuring quality careers provision was delivered to learners. They reported to the Strategic Careers Leader who was part of the SLT, fed back on progress and were able to focus on ensuring development plans were continually moving forwards.

2.2.2 Careers Leaders at management level

Careers Leaders in smaller colleges, sixth form colleges and those on single sites were often responsible not only for directing and driving forwards the strategic plan or vision but also for operationally managing and ensuring the day-to-day elements of careers education were taking place. They had a combined strategic and operational management role which was sometimes difficult to manage.

Some reported that it was difficult to effectively strategically lead careers education when much of their time was taken up with managing the team and delivery. Ensuring high quality delivery of careers education was often prioritised versus time spent strategically planning.

For effective careers leadership at management level it was important for there to be support provided from other careers education staff for the managerial element of the role, and to enable a good line of communication, a strong relationship with their link to the SLT.

2.2.3 Careers Leaders at operational level

In approximately a quarter of colleges involved in the interviews, and as mentioned above, predominantly in the smaller colleges, Careers Leaders were actively involved in 'hands on' practical careers education delivery such as undertaking personal guidance sessions with learners or conducting workshops.

There were mixed reactions from Careers Leaders to the effectiveness of an operational focus. Some thought that this was beneficial to the role as they were able to really understand what was happening at ground level and how strategic decisions or plans were actually impacting on the careers education team and learners. Others however, believed that by not being part of the SLT, nor having a direct line of communication with the strategic decision-makers, they were unable to influence change and effectively drive through progress of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

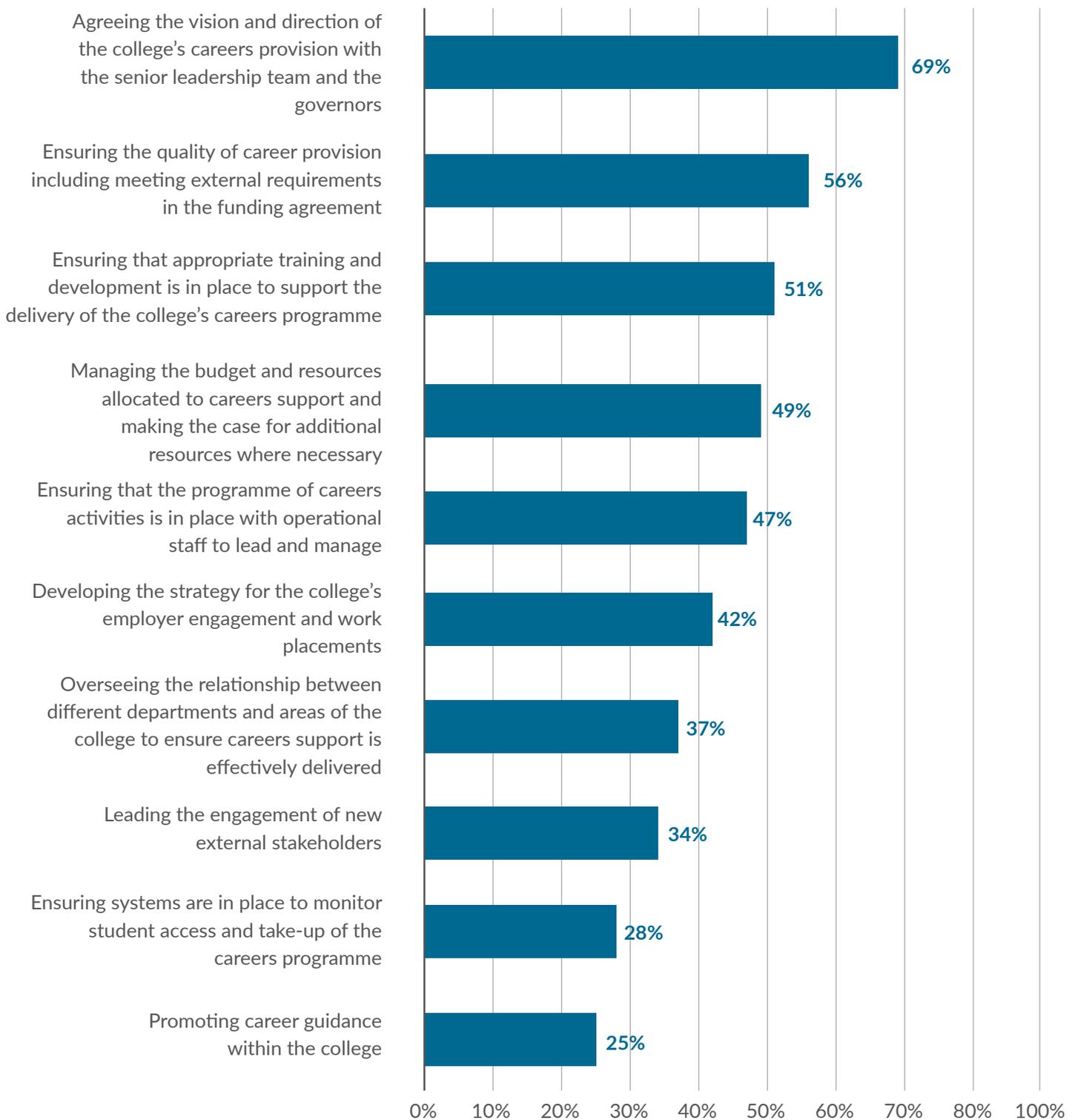


Strategically in the long term I am responsible for meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks. Operationally I am responsible for the day-to-day, face-to-face, group work, online support for all students, and for our local community to help get individuals back into work.

GFEC, Non SLT Careers Leader

The variation in roles and responsibilities was evident in the survey data. Between 25% and 69% held the main responsibility for tasks identified as strategic roles in ‘Understanding the Role of Careers Leaders in Colleges’ guide. In other cases, these tasks were either devolved to the operational Careers Leader or were overseen by a combination of staff, including other SLT members.

Figure 2: Proportion of colleges with strategic Careers Leader holding main responsibility for tasks



2.2.4 Role of the careers education team

Most (69%) survey respondents either agreed (45%) or strongly agreed (24%) that their college had the right combination of staff delivering careers provision to support learners well.

All of the colleges involved in the interviews had a dedicated careers education team. Most commonly this consisted of a Careers Manager (sometimes the Careers Leader), Careers Advisers/Officers (level 6+) and Careers Assistants/Administrators. Some of the larger colleges also had specialists that focused on particular areas such as, work experience, higher education progression, skills development and apprenticeships.

The number of dedicated staff within the careers education team varied by the size of the college. It was common for smaller colleges to have between one to three full time members of staff, and for medium to large colleges to have four to six. Careers Advisers were primarily responsible for responding to referrals, delivering personal guidance and meeting learners, and dealing with enquiries from parents/carers.

Careers leadership structure in practice

A careers leadership structure which elevates careers education, provides clear lines of communication and ensures support structures are in place

Halesowen College, West Midlands

Halesowen College is a medium to large Further Education college in the West Midlands, with approximately 6000 learners. Two thirds of courses available are vocational and a third consists of A levels, adult learning and apprenticeships. They have achieved gold in the Quality in Careers Standards and are IAG Matrix accredited.

The structure of careers leadership at the college is an example of how an integrated and considered model elevates the position of careers education within the college, whilst also ensuring effective communication and support is provided throughout the hierarchy and there are clear lines of communication, from careers education practice level on the ground to the strategic management at the top.

The Careers Leader is the Director of Learner Services, and joined the college three years ago. Shortly after joining, they instigated a re-structure of the departments that they were responsible for, which included careers education. This was to improve the management structure of the departments, which were difficult to effectively manage due to the high number and the crossover of areas between them. It was also to ensure there was support for staff at each level and a line of communication throughout the college, ensuring progress and any challenges were not overlooked.

Careers leadership structure in practice continued

There are 12 departments under the Careers Leader's remit, including: marketing, careers, safeguarding, schools and outreach. The departments are amalgamated into four clusters: Partnerships, SEND, Safeguarding and Wellbeing, and Learner Experience. Within each cluster, a role for Head of Division was established. The Heads are supported by Student Support Managers, followed by personal coaches and teaching staff. In the curriculum teams there are also Heads of Division who are supported by Student Support Managers. This structure allows for excellent collaborative working between curriculum and support.

To ensure a strong focus was on careers and it was not 'lost' within other areas of the college, the Careers Leader decided not to place careers within any of the four clusters such as Learner Experience or Partnerships, but to position it as a standalone area, just for careers education.

Within careers, roles were created for an Operational Careers Lead and two Careers Advisers. The Strategic Careers Leader who they report to, works closely with the Assistant Principals who are in charge of each of the curriculum areas, ensuring careers and the curriculum are linked, they are then supported by the Heads of Division and the Careers Operational Lead.

The Careers Leader is a strong believer that within an effective careers education structure, the operational lead should report to the strategic lead who should then report to the governing body and the College Leadership Team (CLT). This ensures a clear line of communication from the Careers Advisers, through to operational management, strategic leader and to the CLT. Importantly this structure elevates the position of careers education, it aids decision making and the ability of all levels to be involved in operational and strategic change.

Careers at the College is fully integrated with the wider strategic responsibilities, as a CLT they meet fortnightly and careers and employability are always a standing items on the agenda. There is the full support of the governing body and a dedicated Careers Governor who acts as a 'critical friend', challenging but also supporting the work they do within careers education.



Careers is incredibly integrated across the college, everyone is linked in and there is an effective direct referral structure.

Careers Leader and
Director of Learner
Services

3 | Whole college approach

This section of the report focuses on notion of ‘whole college approach’ to careers leadership and how this is created and embedded in different types of colleges. It provides insight into effective whole college approaches and also covers some of the challenges colleges face when trying to develop and implement the approach within their context.

3.1 Whole college strategy

It is evident from the interviews that an effective whole college approach to careers education is created via the collaborative working of college members across an entire college. This includes not only those on the SLT, with decision making authority, but also those at management and operational level, within both the traditional careers education remit and also, those within curriculum and wider college services.

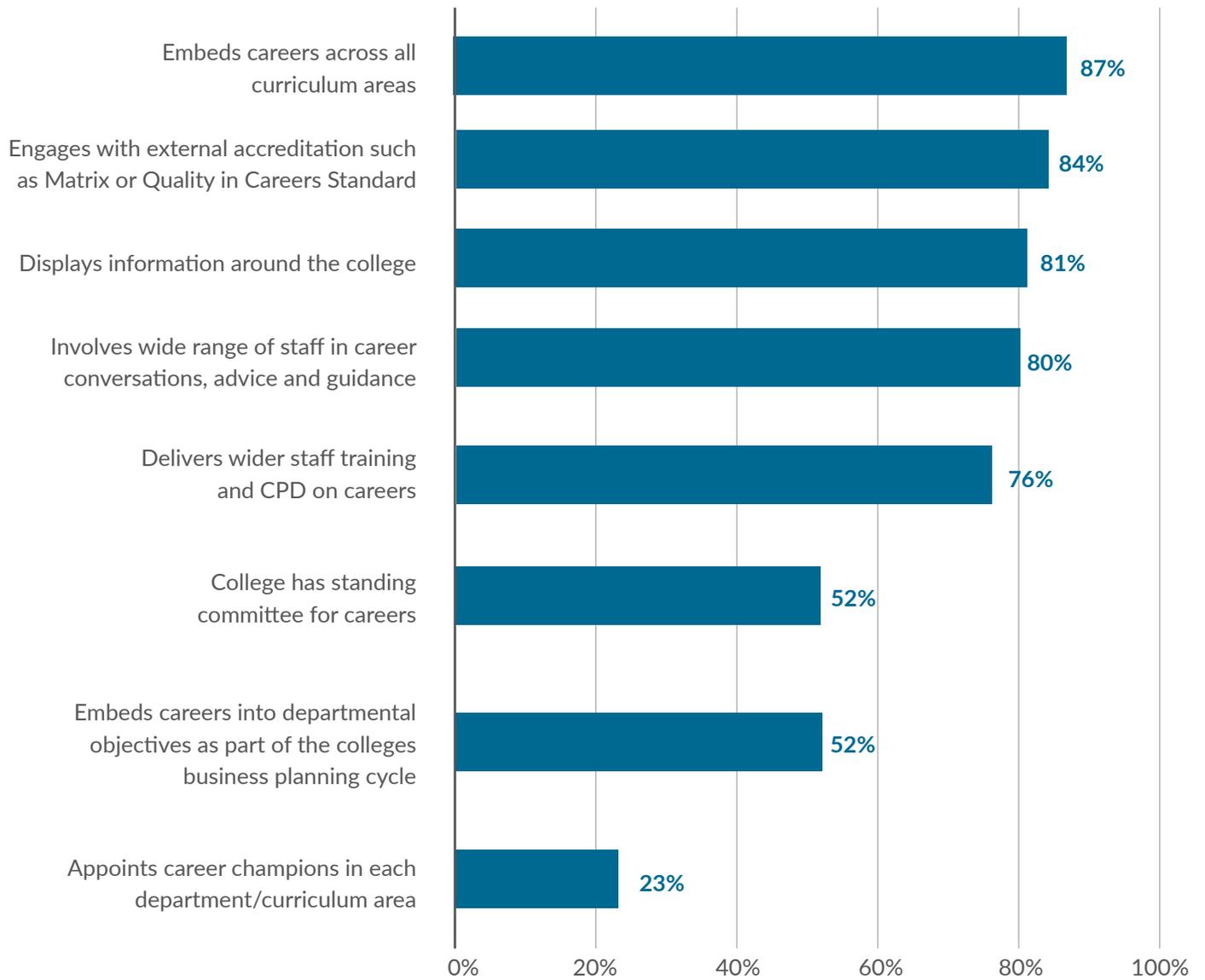
As discussed in section 4.2.1, some colleges’ overarching strategic plans and missions were grounded in their careers education strategy and this was being used as the basis of the whole college approach. This was driving forwards progression with careers plans and uniting all staff members in one college vision. Developing this whole college vision around the learner journey (see discussion of use of data in section 3.6), with for example, a ‘careers not courses’ ethos, and focusing on career destinations, was an important element of the whole college approach.

In the survey, Careers Leaders reported deploying a range of strategies to embed the careers programme across the whole college. The most frequently cited route (87%) was through the curriculum. External quality frameworks¹⁷, involving staff in career conversations and staff CPD were also cited by over three-quarters of respondents.



17. 77% of respondents were working towards or held Matrix and 25% were working towards or held the Quality in Careers Standard.

Figure 3: Proportion of colleges using strategies to embed the careers programme across the whole college



3.1.1 Collaboration and strategic planning

Intrinsic to whole college approaches was collaborative working, sharing of responsibility and ownership of careers across college. To achieve this, Careers Leaders would work strategically with the SLT members and management teams to plan careers development activity across different areas of the college. A careers strategic plan was central to this, and 96% of survey respondents reported having a strategic careers plan that aligned with the mission of the college.

Strategic careers leadership, therefore, was seen as an inclusive approach and key to this was developing an understanding across college that 'careers is everyone's responsibility'. Collaboration on strategy development and cross-college planning helped to embed careers in all areas.

Careers plans or strategy were often aligned to or integrated within wider college development plans. Careers Leaders spoke of conducting self-assessments for the QIP (as part of the remit for their department) which is then shared with the SLT. A few said they were involved in the self-assessment process, allowing them to see how careers education is delivered in the curriculum and to identify any gaps, or that they sat on scrutiny groups. Others mentioned that the careers strategy was embedded within, for example, the marketing plan and curriculum strategy.



It is about clarity, now we have a direction of travel, we put it in the strategic plan and everyone else plays their part.

G FEC, SLT Careers Leader

We talk a lot, with Deputy Principals, in terms of our calendar of business...we build in drop down days for progress reviews and then make sure that within tutorials, it is aligned with other careers events for parents and students. At a whole college level, it is being able to plan all interlocking events that is important.

Sixth form college, SLT Careers Leader

3.1.2 Whole college careers working groups

One of the successful approaches mentioned by half of Careers Leaders in the survey and approximately a quarter of Careers Leaders in the qualitative research, in both small and large colleges, was the bringing together of colleagues to form committees, strategy or working groups, focused on careers education. These groups helped to formalise the collaborative and strategic working that was integral to a whole college approach. The groups were used to advance the whole college approach to careers education strategy, and to focus on achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

They tended to involve a range of strategic and operational positions and levels of seniority or management roles across the college, including representatives from curriculum and wider areas. The groups met regularly to review and monitor the careers strategy and review progress with development plans.

Whole college careers working group

A Careers Leader from a multiple site GFEC, two years ago, set up a careers working group. This was created to ensure progress was being made throughout the college on the Gatsby Benchmarks and to also increase levels of engagement and commitment with the careers education strategy from staff across the college.

The group included members of the Deputy CEO, Vice Principal of Curriculum, Vice Principal of Learner Services, Directors of Faculties, including Marketing and Digital Technology and the Director of Apprenticeships. It also involved cross college managers such as, work experience, 14-16 provision, learning support, and learner services.

Each month, the Careers Leader asked members of the group to report back on their actions and on the progress that had been made. For example, feedback was gathered from the Head of Apprenticeships and Work Experience, about levels of employer engagement.

A group of this nature was deemed by the Careers Leader as the best way within the college to ensure that all the relevant staff were on board and working together to achieve the aims of the careers education strategy. They said that everyone now takes responsibility for actioning their elements of the strategy and the Careers Leader can effectively keep track of progress within the curriculum and wider areas of the college.

By bringing together those at a management and senior level, the Careers Leaders were able to give careers education a level of strategic importance and prominence across all college departments. In some cases, Careers Leaders talked of generating actions for members and reviewing progress against these at later meetings. This helped to share responsibility for careers education across the whole college, and ensured that each member would take some ownership by developing practice in their specific area and reporting back to the group. The construct of the group ensured there was accountability across the college.

The whole college careers working groups were therefore designed to update members on careers strategy or plans, to discuss the progress that was being made with the benchmarks, any challenges and potential solutions. Their role was particularly important in ensuring that careers education and careers leadership was integrated within the college's wider strategy and that all individual members from across the college were accountable for its progression.

It was considered that for groups to be effective, they should involve staff members from all levels of seniority and across the breadth of the college; this ensured that careers education was fully integrated and everyone understood its value. Including members of the SLT was particularly effective for pushing forwards developments in careers education and if SLT members were not involved in the whole college groups, a clear line of communication to the SLT needed to be in place.

The whole college careers groups were particularly useful for:

- Careers Leaders generally, because they could have regular strategic planning and review sessions with wider college senior or management staff who would then cascade information, actions and developments for practice back to their respective teams. This was seen as an effective forum with key people involved in strategic action planning.
- Those Careers Leaders who were not part of the college SLT, because the meetings would allow direct communication with those at a more senior level. It provided a formal arena to engage a wide range of college services and departments in careers education development activity.

3.2 Engaging governors

Levels of governor engagement with careers education differed across the colleges involved in the interviews. Approximately two-thirds of colleges experienced high levels of engagement, commitment and support from governors, whereas a third had limited contact.

3.2.1 Relationship of Careers Leaders with link governors

The majority of the colleges (69% in the survey and all but two in the qualitative research) had a link governor for careers education, and there were positive levels of engagement.

Most interviewees said they tended to meet at least four times a year to discuss ways in which governors could provide support. Approximately two-fifths of Careers Leaders reported termly within governors' meetings, updating on strategy, progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks and highlighting challenges. The relationship between the Careers Leader and the link governor in some colleges was very strong and they worked effectively to drive forwards the careers strategy with the SLT.

Other colleges reported that the relationship with their link governor was in need of strengthening and nurturing with greater levels of communication needed. They thought that the support provided by the governors could be better, and in some colleges having a named link governor was merely viewed as a 'tick box' exercise.

In a small number of colleges involved in the interviews, work commitments had prevented the Careers Leader to build a governor relationship because they were too involved with operational duties.

Effective governor engagement

A specialist college had two link governors.

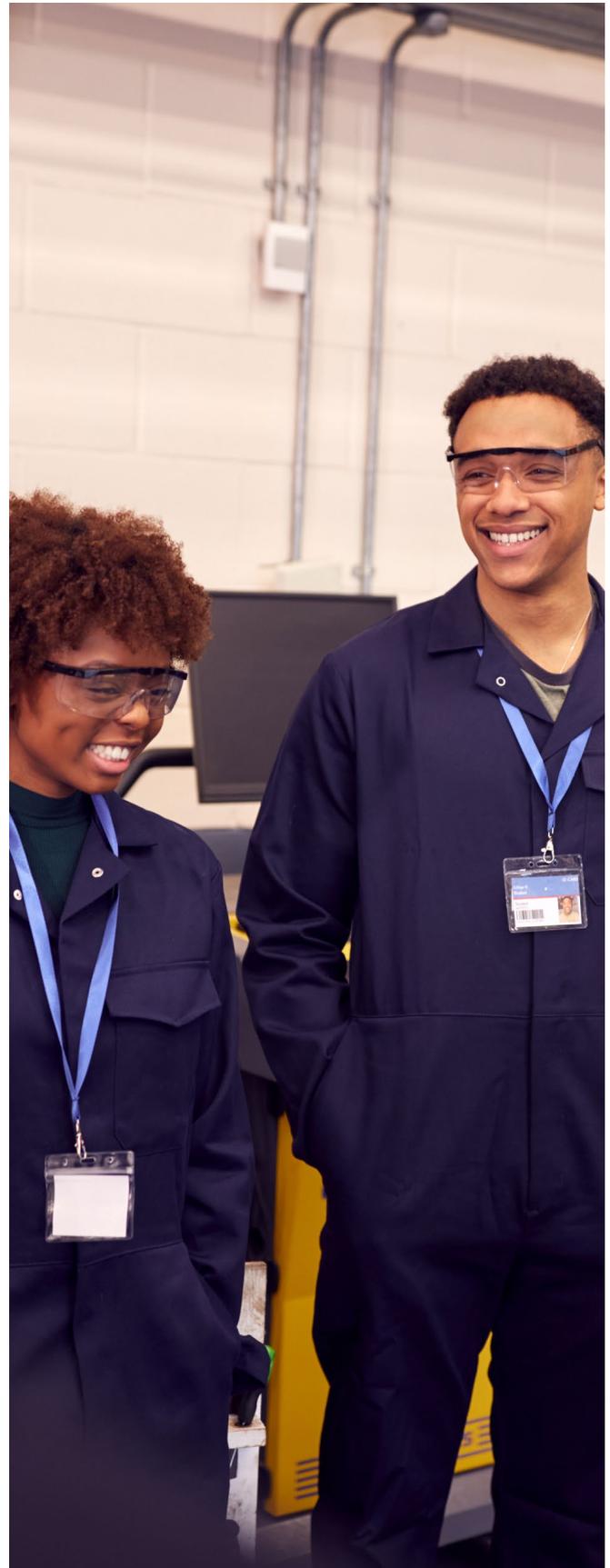
There was a strong supportive relationship between the governors and the Careers Leader, built from the sharing of knowledge and experience. To keep the governors fully embedded in the careers strategy, the Careers Leader had carried out regular training sessions to the governors on the Gatsby Benchmarks and presented termly progress.

One of the governors was the college's Enterprise Adviser, their strong careers education background, and understanding of the needs of the college and its learners, really aided the work of the Careers Leader and careers education team.

The other governor was responsible for employability. Using their industry experience had provided valuable insight into the local labour market and increased employer engagement. Practically the governor had also worked directly with learners running workshops and mock interview practice.

3.2.2 Governor involvement in whole college committees/working groups

Some colleges involved in the interviews had the presence of a governor on their careers education committees and working groups. Their role was to progress strategy through at SLT level and to also provide knowledge and support in their areas of specialism. For example, many of the governors were local employers and some colleges had governors linked to particular local labour market specialisms such as manufacturing and engineering. These governors were actively involved in providing support to help achieve Gatsby Benchmarks 5 and 6, and helped to build links and networks in industry. One governor was said to have worked for a telecommunications company and offered a lot of support, work experience opportunities and networking.



Governors with a previous background in careers education were deemed by Careers Leaders to be particularly supportive as they had a keen interest and were knowledgeable in the area. Some had previously worked, for example as Ofsted inspectors, as part of the Careers Hubs or as Enterprise Advisers.



We are very fortunate in that the governor that has got the main responsibility for careers, I actually knew them previously. We worked in the Career's Hub together, so they have got a really solid background in careers and I know that they are really invested in it. They are really enthusiastic so that in itself is a massive benefit.

G FEC, SLT Careers Leader

3.3 Quality assurance

Reviewing and development of the careers offer was mentioned by a few Careers Leaders during the interviews. This came in the form of:

- Learner voice and feedback, using evaluations of, for example, work experience, employability skills and preparedness work.
- Self-assessment (see section 3.1.1) against the Gatsby Benchmarks (which was a strong feature of the whole college careers working groups). This also included building careers into Heads of Department self-assessment reporting.
- Audits, for example, of curriculum delivery to identify good practice or gaps, which the careers teams would support curriculum areas to address (by upskilling curriculum delivery teams in their knowledge and understanding of careers and progression routes). One mentioned having an external audit of careers and employability whereby all staff across college were involved and had 18 months to prepare.
- Input into college quality assurance processes, where Careers Leaders worked with quality teams to ensure careers featured in learning walks / observations of curriculum and tutorial programmes.

3.4 Embedding careers into the curriculum

One of the most common strategies cited by Careers Leaders for ensuring that a whole college approach is effective was to integrate careers into the curriculum (mentioned by 87% in the survey). Having well established links with curriculum areas was considered to be essential, as was engagement and commitment of teaching staff and senior leaders. Careers Leaders reported a number of effective strategies for achieving this, including:

- Inclusion of 'a careers focused curriculum' as part of the careers strategy, measuring against the benchmarks, including the use of KPIs across curriculum areas (e.g., set for attendance, destinations, achievement).

- Building up relationships with staff to 'get them on board', which in turn has helped to engage learners in careers activity. This included close working for those responsible for curriculum (Vice Principal, Deputy Principal, Curriculum Managers) to explore how careers could be contextualised in delivery and to give responsibility to senior staff and those at management level to operationalise plans.
- Working with curriculum teams on curriculum planning to ensure they are up-to-date with requirements regarding careers learning, giving a framework or objectives to guide planning (e.g., the CDI framework) and to show them how to build careers into their schemes of work.
- Collaborating with teaching staff to develop joint strategies, such as an employability strategy, which helped one sixth form college in 'getting everybody to see the value of careers education' (Sixth form College, non SLT Careers Leader).
- Integration of 'embedding careers into the curriculum' into wider college strategic policy, which helped to raise the status and importance of careers. This provided an impetus to respond to action plans and motivated curriculum staff to engage. It also helped to share the ownership and responsibility of careers education with curriculum staff.
- Use of professional development for teaching staff to raise the profile of careers across college, and to ensure they have a good understanding of what the careers offer entails, of the work that careers teams do and how they can support curriculum areas. This included inviting employers to conduct professional practice updates.

Engaging staff to embed careers in the curriculum

A Careers Leader from a sixth form college had observed that although there was evidence of good practice in the college in terms of tutors embedding careers in the curriculum, this was not always recognised or recorded by staff. This was reportedly due partly to a limited awareness amongst staff of the need to record careers activity and embed it more effectively.

In response to this, the Careers Leader developed a strategy which included engaging staff in CPD and highlighting what was happening across the college in terms of embedding careers. The strategy was successful in raising staff awareness and understanding and had the added effect of increasing their engagement.

The outcome of this was some good examples of embedding careers into the curriculum across different curriculum areas. These included conferences by the science, business and English departments, with the English department bringing in speakers throughout the day and learners were taken off their usual timetables to allow them to attend. The conferences were effective in engaging learners and increasing attendance at subsequent careers events.

The Careers Leader attributed these successes largely to the CPD and raising staff awareness about what the careers staff were doing and showing them how their work was effective.



One really good thing that's happened is that they've actually put embedding careers in the curriculum into our SAR so curriculum areas have to report against that and I think that makes a huge difference.

Sixth form college, non SLT Careers Leader

3.4.2 Engaging learners through curriculum delivery

Strategies used by colleges for engaging learners included:

- Embedding careers within teaching and learning, through curriculum planning, for example, mapping course content against relevant criteria such as skills development and employability. Delivery would therefore include, for example, discussing labour markets and employability with learners, signposting to LMI and career opportunities.
- Ensuring that careers underpins learners' wider activity through coaching and personal tutorial or pastoral systems and this links with curriculum areas. This was achieved through cross-referencing what is taught between curriculum areas and pastoral or tutorial programmes, and by teaching and pastoral/tutorial staff being aware of what is being delivered in others' departments.
- Involving employers in curriculum design and delivery (e.g., as guest speakers, conducting interviews or for work experience).

A strategy highlighted by colleges was the utilisation of tutors' professional and practical knowledge. This helped to provide learners with an insight into career opportunities in a particular workplace. It worked particularly well in the case of vocational courses where tutors were able to draw on their expertise and experience in industry. Some explained how learners were benefitting from this in terms of gaining an understanding of the labour market within a particular sector. One college explained how they employed industry experts who were required to 'go back to industry' periodically as part of their role in order for them to keep abreast with changes and developments in that particular sector. The Careers Leader at the college explained that this benefits learners in terms of enhancing their understanding of the industry and opportunities in the labour market.

The practice of recruiting teaching staff who are also practitioners in their areas of expertise was evident in other colleges too and these tutors' knowledge and understanding of careers opportunities within a specific sector was highly valued.



Every one of our lecturers would have held a job in the industry they are teaching in whereas in schools the teachers are teachers, if that makes sense...So I feel that there's a whole different emphasis to careers information, it's not just imparted by people who have got careers guidance in their job title.

G FEC, not SLT Careers Leader

3.5 Supporting learners through careers and wider services

3.5.1 Supporting vulnerable learners

Early identification of learners who might be vulnerable or 'at risk' (e.g. learners with SEND, care-leavers, those from disadvantaged backgrounds) was said to be key during the interviews. Examples were given of working with schools to identify relevant learners and to support their decision-making and transition (planning their longer term progression):



The careers team have worked closely with them to provide careers guidance early on to help them make sure they are making the right choices – so working with the younger age group has worked well.

G FEC, SLT Careers Leader

For those in college, the aim was to identify relevant learners and provide support from an early stage so that they had access to support services as required. Once identified, bespoke support was provided by the careers team, either via a one-to-one sessions or by working with a group of learners in specific curriculum areas to explore their aspirations and progression pathways. This included the careers teams, tutorial teams and learning support teams, for example, to develop confidence, resilience and to help learners make appropriate choices. Specific programmes were sometimes put in place, for example, one Careers Leader mentioned a programme aimed at learners who might not be ready to enrol on a full course or might want to follow different career options.

Working closely with and developing good relationships across a range of college services and departments was seen as an effective strategy by those interviewed. This included the careers team working closely with the ESOL, SEND, ALS and Student Services teams, to support vulnerable learners in terms of their next steps and progression pathways, to prioritise access to careers interviews, and to offer information, advice and guidance for these learners. Monitoring and review of progress was used to ensure that the support was resulting in appropriate choices and destinations.

Other examples included promoting widening participation schemes, liaising with external providers of employer mentoring, providing masterclasses and work placements. This kind of support was reported by one college to be targeted at learners who might have previously been eligible for Pupil Premium, those who receive a college bursary or lived in certain postcode areas.

3.6 Use of data and systems

This section explores how colleges record and monitor the learner journey from enrolment and admissions through to their destinations. Colleges' recording of careers activity and interventions, including progress towards achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks is also considered. Discussions with Careers Leaders revealed that a wide range of systems are used for recording and monitoring the different stages of the learner journey and that they are generally satisfied with these systems and their effectiveness. However, a small number of small colleges, including sixth form colleges, did mention that use of data was a challenge and data tracking was an area of weakness when reviewing the benchmarks due to the more disparate learner body and college context.

3.6.1 Recording and monitoring the learner journey

The majority of colleges reported using multiple as opposed to single platforms and a wide range were mentioned. Commonly, these platforms were used for recording applications, enrolments, careers interventions, and destinations, whereas Compass was said to be used to record progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks. Other systems were used to track learner progress and destinations, work placements and work experience. Moreover, some said they had an external provider and a small number had systems that have been created in-house.

3.6.2 The strengths and limitations of data systems

Both strengths and limitations were identified in the interviews in relation to the various data systems and their effectiveness. The most useful packages were perceived to be those that:

- Enabled careers staff to track the whole learner journey.
- Performed multiple functions (e.g. psychometrics, testing, LMI).
- Were compatible with other in-house systems (e.g. the CRM, MIS.)

Key challenges mentioned during the interviews were:

- The limitations of sharing data posed by GDPR and safeguarding protocols, which has implications for colleges in terms of working towards Gatsby Benchmarks and the requirements to share data between organisations.
- The incompatibility between systems and systems 'not talking to each other'.

Careers Leaders spoke positively however about the potential or use of data, to measure progress against the benchmarks (sometimes included in KPIs) and to review outcomes (e.g. destination data). Sometimes, this involved close working with MIS teams with feedback provided to the Careers Leader, which was used to help shape the careers programme going forwards. One example of this was in a college where the systems were being overhauled. The Careers Leader had liaised with the MIS lead to discuss the most effective and efficient ways of tracking destinations data. They discussed the importance of that data for monitoring individual learners, and for informing their careers education and study programmes, 'to make sure that what we are delivering is actually allowing students to go out and get jobs' (Specialist college, not SLT, Careers Leader). A Careers Leader in a General Further Education college also reported that they had been consulted by their MIS team on what support they might need to enhance their tracking and monitoring systems.

Overall, however, the systems and tools in place seemed to be meeting the colleges' needs in terms of recording and monitoring the learner journey. Only a few suggestions were made in terms of further support:

- A need for a system for recording transferable skills: one college is planning to develop a digital badging system to be used throughout school. The college would like support with developing this badging system and a way of recording the transferrable skills that learners gain, which are not currently captured in monitoring systems that focus on day-to-day interactions.

- A need for a system that can track learners through different phases of their learning journey: one Careers Leader proposed that it would be helpful if learners could be tracked through different phases and all careers interventions and training could be recorded in one place.
- Digital resources and data systems that are more specific to further education colleges: some thought that current digital systems and tools are more appropriate for schools and that these could be tailored more to colleges.

3.7 Challenges to achieving a whole college approach

This section examines the challenges to effectively embedding a whole college approach and the barriers faced by Careers Leaders. Challenges were identified, in terms of:

- A lack of knowledge and understanding amongst some staff about the nature of careers education and the roles and responsibilities associated with that. A few explained that careers was often associated with advice and guidance, rather than education, and that some teaching staff did not see careers education as their responsibility.
- A lack of awareness amongst some staff of what a whole college approach is and what it entails, which inhibited the effective embedding of careers education across college. This was sometimes the case even when the SLT was supportive.
- Engaging staff in the delivery of careers education was reported by many as a significant barrier. The need for commitment from wider staff teams was seen as crucial to embedding the whole college approach. Where colleges had merged in the past, cultural challenges were mentioned. Some reported that the ability of staff to fully engage had been limited due to issues such as capacity, or workload. Another commented that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on staff workload and thus reducing the time they can spend on embedding careers in the curriculum, leading them to go 'back into their own little camps'.

- Capacity of the careers team, was an issue for colleges of all sizes and was particularly an issue for Careers Leaders with multiple responsibilities. Offering to a wider range of learners (beyond 16-19) put pressure on careers teams when working to the benchmarks. The collaboration and sharing of responsibility for careers, (as mentioned earlier in this section), did help to share the workload somewhat, however, several mentioned that their capacity to put a strategy in place and follow this up, was limited.
- Ensuring consistency and compliance in careers delivery, particularly across large colleges proved to be difficult for Careers Leaders. Integration of careers into quality assurance procedures helped to manage such issues but all said this was work in progress.



Whole college approach

Achieving a whole college approach through aligning the careers programme with strategic policy and collaborating via a strategic cross-college group

North East Surrey College of Technology (NESCOT), South East of England

NESCOT is General Further Education college that provides vocational courses for 16-19 year olds and adult learners, as well as university level courses and apprenticeships. It has a population of approximately 9,000 learners.

The college has developed and implemented a holistic approach to careers leadership that has brought together the previously disparate elements of careers education which were 'in pockets around the college'. The careers structure is clearly aligned to the college's strategic plan and corporate objectives and sits within a wider strategic structure. The Careers Leader, who is also on the SLT, has ensured that the careers programme is at the centre of this, 'To give it prominence of being at the heart of what we do. So as a strategy it's got to be a core part of our overarching strategy'.

The college has a working group that meets monthly and this group is tasked with taking the strategy forward and embedding it. The group comprises of members who are also involved in the delivery of careers provision at an operational level, including Careers Advisers who are trained to level six and level seven. Also involved is the Director of Personal Development, Welfare and Behaviour who also leads a team of personal development coaches and a work experience delivery team. The working group has been effective in ensuring that careers education is embedded across the college, in learners' wider study programmes, through the use of personal development tutorials and in coaching and work experience programmes.

NESCOT has also been successful in embedding careers in the curriculum. It has teaching objectives concerned with careers education 'and that focuses on giving the learners the skills they need for employment'. Tutors are involved in careers education by embedding it in their core modules, signposting learners to relevant opportunities and teaching transferable skills. One example of where this has been effective is developing vocational units with some workplace requirements built in, which 'engages them straight away because they have to do it as part of the course'.

Having the support of the SLT has proved to be effective in a number of ways, particularly in elevating the status of careers across the college and in forging strong links with employers. The Principal, for example, chairs the Local Enterprise Partnership skills board. Building these connections has had a positive impact on learners, enabling the college to bring in various employers to talk to the learners and in some cases offer workshops. Another successful method of engaging learners has been through workplace visits arranged as part of the curriculum, so they have experience of real workplaces.

4 | Impact of Careers leadership on quality of provision

Overall, the implementation of a careers leadership structure within the colleges had a positive impact on careers education.

4.1 Prioritisation of careers education within colleges

Although the approach to careers leadership differed across colleges within the interviews, all reported that the existence of a dedicated careers leadership role and for some, greater involvement in the SLT, had positively elevated the position of careers education and driven provision forwards. The prioritisation of careers education was reported to have increased over the past 3 years by 80% of the survey respondents (with the remaining 20% saying it was about the same). It was brought to the forefront and was no longer sharing space amongst other areas or departments.

“

The Careers Leader role has worked well here, it's given us more direction, given more oversight to the SLT as to how careers is actually progressing. It is back on the agenda again, before there was a Careers Leader, there was no representation at management level, now where I sit on the college management team, I can raise issues and can drive forward plans and projects.

GFEC, Non SLT, Careers Leader



4.1.1 Careers leadership role and working with the Gatsby Benchmarks

The majority, (92%) of survey respondents reported that implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks had helped to improve their college's careers provision. This was echoed by the interviewees. In the qualitative research:

- The benchmarks were thought to provide focus, structure and an evaluative approach to the Careers Leader role and responsibilities.
- The measures in place had supported changes or plans that had been made by Careers Leaders to internal structures and ways of working within the colleges. The national implementation of the benchmarks had aided acceptance from college staff to the leadership and strategy changes.
- The benchmarks were reported to have given careers and the Careers Leader role a heightened importance, and recognition that careers education needed its own space within the college structure, clear strategic direction and management.
- For Careers Leaders the clarity of the benchmarks was praised as a simple and clear model to follow, particularly for those that were less familiar with careers education.



I think the benchmarks make things consistent. So, I think because I understand all of the things that underpin the careers program that helps me to want to improve and develop it and review and evaluate it and make it better and better.

GFEC, Non SLT, Careers Leader



There was also evidence that some colleges had benefitted from additional funding due to the implementation of the benchmarks. They reported that the Gatsby Benchmarks had been the driving force behind raising the careers education profile which had helped the college build a case for more investment in careers education and the need for additional funding.

A minority of the Careers Leaders in larger colleges thought that implementation of the benchmarks had hindered their strategy and approach to careers education and they had increased workload. The framework was considered to be too constraining, not allowing for colleges to develop their own plans or formulate ways to monitor progress.



Careers leadership has added to the weight of it, the professionalism, some validity, I suppose. Before careers was just a bit of an add on. But I also think that Ofsted placing more emphasis on careers in their framework has helped to raise the status too and if it's something that people have to do they'll do it.

Specialist college, Non SLT Careers Leader

4.2 Changes in Careers Leader role and perceptions of careers education over the past three years

As discussed previously, many of the colleges involved in the research reported that over the past three years, careers education had been given higher priority, brought to the forefront by the introduction of a Careers Leader, and was being taken more seriously by the SLT.

Careers Leaders who were now part of the SLT, thought that their role had been elevated and they had been given the opportunity to be more involved at a strategic and senior level. Previously they had been more operationally focused, had not been part of SLT or involved with decisions at a high level within the colleges. Now that they were in the Careers Leader position this was an integral part of their role.

Some Careers Leaders interviewed, who were not themselves on the SLT, had witnessed greater support from the SLT in recent years and had for example, been allocated a governor solely focusing on careers education. For those not on the SLT this was an effective direct communicative link.

4.2.1 Integration of careers education into the college vision

Through the introduction of the Careers Leadership role and specific strategic plans for careers education, it had reportedly become much more integrated within colleges and in some, careers education was the foundation and driving force behind the overall college strategy and mission. It was no longer just about finding jobs for learners but rather ensuring that they were on the right course to enable them to reach their intended career path. A number of colleges had developed their 'visions' in line with this way of thinking and examples of these included; 'right people, right courses' and 'careers not courses'.

4.2.2 Widening aspirations of learners

In the survey, 95% of Careers Leaders agreed (61%) or strongly agreed (34%) that their role in careers leadership has a positive impact on learners' career and education outcomes, suggesting a strong sense of efficacy.

Many of the Careers Leaders interviewed reported that over the past three years, learners' progression and aspirations had widened. Learners were looking at a greater range of opportunities in their chosen field and focusing on where their career path could take them in the long term rather than just settling for a 'job' and not progressing with a career.



Our health and social care students are now moving forwards into things like midwifery, nursing et cetera which they never would have done before. We are developing and building momentum into aspirations and outcomes.

G FEC, Non SLT Careers Leader

4.3 Changes in Careers Leader role and perceptions of careers education in response to Covid-19

Although 2020/2021 had been a challenging and difficult period due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of Careers Leaders interviewed did not feel that their role had significantly changed. In the first national lockdown in March 2020 the role for some became more operational as they looked at ways to continue careers education delivery, but in the second lockdown in January 2021, the focus returned to strategic planning, looking to the future and how to prepare for the new labour market. Some said there was a greater focus now on careers education and this was due to changes in the labour market, higher levels of unemployment and the uncertainty of what the effect of Covid-19 would be.



Covid's not had a huge impact on our strategy. We had already introduced new systems and so we just continued in our roles. Largely we just switched to online instead of in person.

G FEC, Non SLT Careers Leader

4.3.1 Diversion in Careers Leader focus to Covid-19 related priorities

Some Careers Leader interviewees reported that it had become harder to focus on the 'whole college approach' to careers education and to push actions through as Covid had taken precedence and other things had to be deprioritised. The focus of the Careers Leaders and SLT in some colleges was on how to re-open safely, and how to continue to deliver the curriculum virtually whilst also ensuring the wellbeing of learners. Those Careers Leaders whose remit included areas such as safeguarding and learner welfare had been diverted from their careers education role and were spending time on how best to support learners with anxiety, mental health issues, and also supporting vulnerable learners.

Careers Leaders also reported that due to the pressures of virtual home learning, it was difficult to retain engagement from teachers where many focused solely on curriculum delivery.



I think it's one of the things that has really suffered during lockdown because I think that everyone's just gone back into their own little camps. Teachers are just focusing on teaching so it's been a real challenge and we're getting stuff back from curriculum areas to say we don't have time to do this and they're too stressed.

Specialist college, Non SLT Careers Leader

In addition to the move to virtual learning, careers education and particularly personal guidance sessions had also been delivered virtually to meet social restrictions and college closures.

Many thought that the pandemic had actually created a positive change in the way in which colleges were practically delivering careers education. Moving forwards, it was anticipated that some of the virtual practices currently in place would continue.

- The attendance rate of personal guidance sessions had increased with fewer drop-outs and missed appointments. Many learners preferred the virtual sessions on Teams/Zoom versus having to attend an appointment in person. Practically a virtual meeting was more convenient and also for some, less daunting and intimidating than meeting with a Careers Adviser face-to-face.
- The move to virtual employer sessions/talks and speakers had increased learner attendance, as they could easily attend from home, and it had also created opportunities for engagement with employers who would not normally be able to support the college due to their geographical location.

Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19, 89% of Careers Leaders responding to the survey either agreed (42%) or strongly agreed (47%) that they felt positive about the future of careers provision in their college.



Although it has created challenges, it has also created opportunities, people are more willing to give time to do talks or advice in a virtual world, hopefully that will continue.

Specialist college, Non SLT, Careers Leader

4.4 Building expertise, Careers Leader training

In the survey, 47% of respondents had either completed Careers Leader training (43%) or were currently participating (4%). Of those that said no, 45% were intending to take part in the future, demonstrating continuing interest. Those that had taken part were positive about the experience. 85% said it had helped them to be more effective in their role and 82% said it had helped to improve careers provision in their college. These findings resonate with the wider evaluation of Careers Leader training.¹⁸ 44% of the respondents reported that their colleagues had also taken part in the training.

Of the Careers Leaders interviewed, 11 had completed the Careers Leader training, two had plans to and 15 had not completed the training.

On the whole, the Careers Leader training was seen as a positive experience in improving practice and supporting Careers Leaders in their role. Where there was criticism, it tended to relate to the training being too school centric or lacking understanding of the college context. The benefits of training, suitability of the training and possible improvements, are outlined below.

4.4.1 Barriers to undertaking training

Careers Leaders who said in the interviews that they had not completed the Careers Leader training, cited four key barriers:

- Lack of clarity in the focus and content of the training. Careers Leaders who had undergone other training (formal higher-qualification careers training and non-careers training or informal ad hoc sessions), questioned the usefulness of the Careers Leader training because they thought it would not add to their current knowledge and understanding.
- Understanding the target audience. A small number of Careers Leaders did not think that the training would be relevant to them, either because they erroneously thought that it was aimed at those delivering one-to-

one personal guidance, or because whilst they were the Careers Leader, they were not technically the strategic lead for careers.

- Perceptions of the training. Some Careers Leaders were relying on colleague feedback to form opinions regarding the usefulness of the training. This was particularly an issue where colleagues had completed the training two to three years ago and reported that it had been too school focused and therefore of less value to them as college practitioners.
- Time commitment. An issue for a minority who thought that the training would be very time intensive.

4.4.2 The benefits of Careers Leader training

Of the Careers Leaders who had completed the training, the benefits cited during the interviews did depend partially on whether they were on the SLT or not and also on how established they were in the Careers Leader role. This is discussed further below.

Information, resources and tools

The main benefit realised through the training for the majority of the Careers Leaders was access to information, resources and tools, including explanations regarding how the tools could be used and who could further support their use. In most cases Careers Leaders were able to take this back and implement these in their own colleges. Implementation was either in terms of setting up new practice, or developing and evaluating current practice, according to where the careers programme was in its journey. Examples included: practical guidance for writing policy used by a Careers Leader new to the role, and information and resources. This included a self-evaluation tool for a more experienced Careers Leader, which supported reflection on progress in embedding careers education in departments, ways to further develop this and how to measure the effectiveness of practice. Some commented that it was easy for them to see how they could fit resources and tools into their current structures, as everything was organised by and related to the Gatsby Benchmarks.

18. Williams, J., Akehurst, G., Alexander, K., Pollard, E., Williams, C. and T. Hooley (2020). Evaluation of the Careers Leader Training. Institute for Employment Studies.

Networking opportunities

Networking opportunities (local and national) and membership of a community of practice were mentioned during the interviews as a benefit by the majority of Careers Leaders. In a few instances this led to members working collaboratively on careers education. One Careers Leader commented that it was an advantage to be able to work with people across the country in similar roles whilst they were finalising their careers strategy. It enabled them to access a broader range of ideas and suggestions for best practice, not just those already in place in colleges locally.

Sharing good practice

Training supported careers delivery for several Careers Leaders interviewed who said that it was an opportunity to share good practice. Good practice was shared either formally by the trainers or more informally from other schools and colleges. New Careers Leaders thought that this was especially useful to them as it gave them ideas that they could immediately implement at their colleges.

Sharing of good practice could be formal, such as resources or templates for setting up new practice or developing existing structures. It could also be informal. For one Careers Leader, this was a discussion around how learners' transferable skills could be developed. When fed back to the college, the SLT decided that these softer skills would be beneficial to learners in all areas of their development, both personally and academically. They identified engaging activities to develop these skills, which were adopted across the college as a whole.

Engaging with college staff

Half of the interviewees who completed the training said that it enabled them to gain buy-in from teaching staff or the SLT (where the Careers Leader was not on the SLT). For a new Careers Leader who was establishing a new careers programme at the college, having the theory behind careers education was hugely important in this respect:



The theory behind careers education, for some teaching staff, that will be their hook. That will be what I need to get them on board with careers, the theory. Because that is how their brains work, they will see the value in it because it has come from this theoretical knowledge.

Specialist college, Non SLT Careers Leader

Upskilling the careers team

A Careers Leader who was also an SLT member, decided that all members of the careers team should complete the Careers Leader training. This was an important strategic decision as it allowed them to ensure that there was a strong careers team who were aware of the strategic direction of careers education in the college, and therefore, were able to articulate and support this with curriculum teams. The aspiration was that this would help embed careers in curriculum areas as curriculum staff would be more likely to buy-in.

From this, a curriculum careers plan was written and has been embedded across all departments of the college. The careers team was able to support curriculum areas when developing their schemes of work. Careers education was therefore integrated within departmental schemes of work, where the benchmarks are monitored in the same way that activities would be monitored for such things as impact on diversity.

Confidence in the role

Almost half of interviewees who had undergone the training (a mixture of both SLT and non-SLT) said that they had gained confidence and momentum to fulfil their role and to push for the changes that were needed in the college.

Some of those who were not part of the SLT specified that training gave them the confidence to work with SLT, and sometimes this was described as giving them the confidence to challenge SLT. Due to the training, they felt able to discuss with SLT how any strategic and operational changes they wanted to make fitted with the Gatsby Benchmarks and with the Ofsted Framework. They thought that this made SLT more inclined to listen to their suggestions.



It has given me a bit more impetus and a bit more clout.

Specialist college, Non SLT Careers Leader

The process of guidance is the same, but the outcomes are different. It is a journey, it is the understanding that guidance continues through the phases.

GFEC, Non SLT Careers Leader

Other benefits

Other benefits mentioned by a few of those that undertook the training included:

- Refreshed knowledge and an objective perspective.
- Awareness of new developments in careers education.
- Confirmation of their approach and careers education work.
- They felt incentivised in their roles.

4.5 Suitability of Careers Leader training for the college context

Careers Leaders who had undertaken training responded to this interview question along with those who answered based on feedback from their department. The responses were evenly split between those on the SLT and not on the SLT.

4.5.1 Relevance to the college context

The majority of interviewees responding, thought that the training was broadly suited to the college context. In most instances they identified that colleges were vastly outnumbered by schools attending; usually two or three colleges at most, with the rest being schools. However, they thought that the trainers were conscious of this imbalance and were skilled enough to adapt the training, making it relevant.

Of the Careers Leaders who commented that it was appropriate for their context, several thought that the imbalance in terms of schools and colleges attending, was an advantage. As careers education in schools is quite different to careers education in colleges, they reported that it was useful to have such a mix of staff from different contexts - feeder schools, special schools as well as other colleges - as it gave them an overview and chance to reflect on provision that learners had experienced prior to joining them.

Five Careers Leaders interviewed did not think that the training was suitable to the college context. Some of these commented that the training was too school centric, with one feeling like an outlier. They accepted that this reflected colleges being vastly outnumbered by schools on the training. These leaders would have preferred the training to be tailored to the college context and vocational needs, reflecting the different kinds of careers programmes and delivery that exist in schools and colleges.

4.5.2 Tailoring training to the role/leadership structure

In terms of relevancy to role, a few of the Careers Leaders thought that the training was too operational whilst others found the training to have expanded the breadth of their thinking by being more strategic and less focused on day-to-day delivery.

Two Careers Leaders commented that the training was not tailored enough towards the different levels of the role, including those new or more established. They suggested that training should be mindful of the careers leadership structure in place in colleges and the different roles or level of responsibility of those in the strategic leadership position.



If it takes into account people's different roles, so careers leadership sometimes sits with SLT, in a school it can sit with a librarian. Maybe it could really hone in on your level of role to make it more useful.

G FEC, SLT Careers Leader

Some colleges have addressed the necessity to tailor training of staff in wider roles (both within the careers team and outside it, such as pastoral managers). In-house annual CPD programmes were mentioned by a few interviewees. For one college, this included training governors in the Gatsby Benchmarks in house. CPD events were held throughout the year, one college ran theirs for governors as part of a summer school of CPD courses.

4.6 Improvements to Careers Leader training

A small number of improvements were suggested by a few interviewees. The comments mainly focused on training being more relevant to the college sector. They included more representation of Further Education in sessions and materials; and developing a college-based version of the training, to aid sharing of good practice between those working in similar contexts. However, one raised the issue of there being a small number of colleges within a given region making this request logistically difficult.

Other improvements mentioned by individual Careers Leaders were:

- Raising awareness and availability of training available (including for governors), increasing access through webinars and broadening invitations to a wider body of college staff.
- More training on how to embed careers in the curriculum. The Careers Leader thought that this was much harder for some sectors than others.
- A review of Compass for use by colleges.
- Training on SEND, EHCP opportunities and entitlements for careers staff who have no previous experience of delivering careers education to this group of learners.

5 | Connecting beyond the college

This section of the report discusses the ways in which Careers Leaders and colleges engage with Careers Hubs and Enterprise Advisers. Two-thirds of the colleges represented in the survey (65%) were part of a Careers Hub (compared to 55% nationally) and 78% were matched to an Enterprise Adviser. The report discusses the ways in which they support careers education in colleges and improvements that Careers Leaders felt would be helpful.

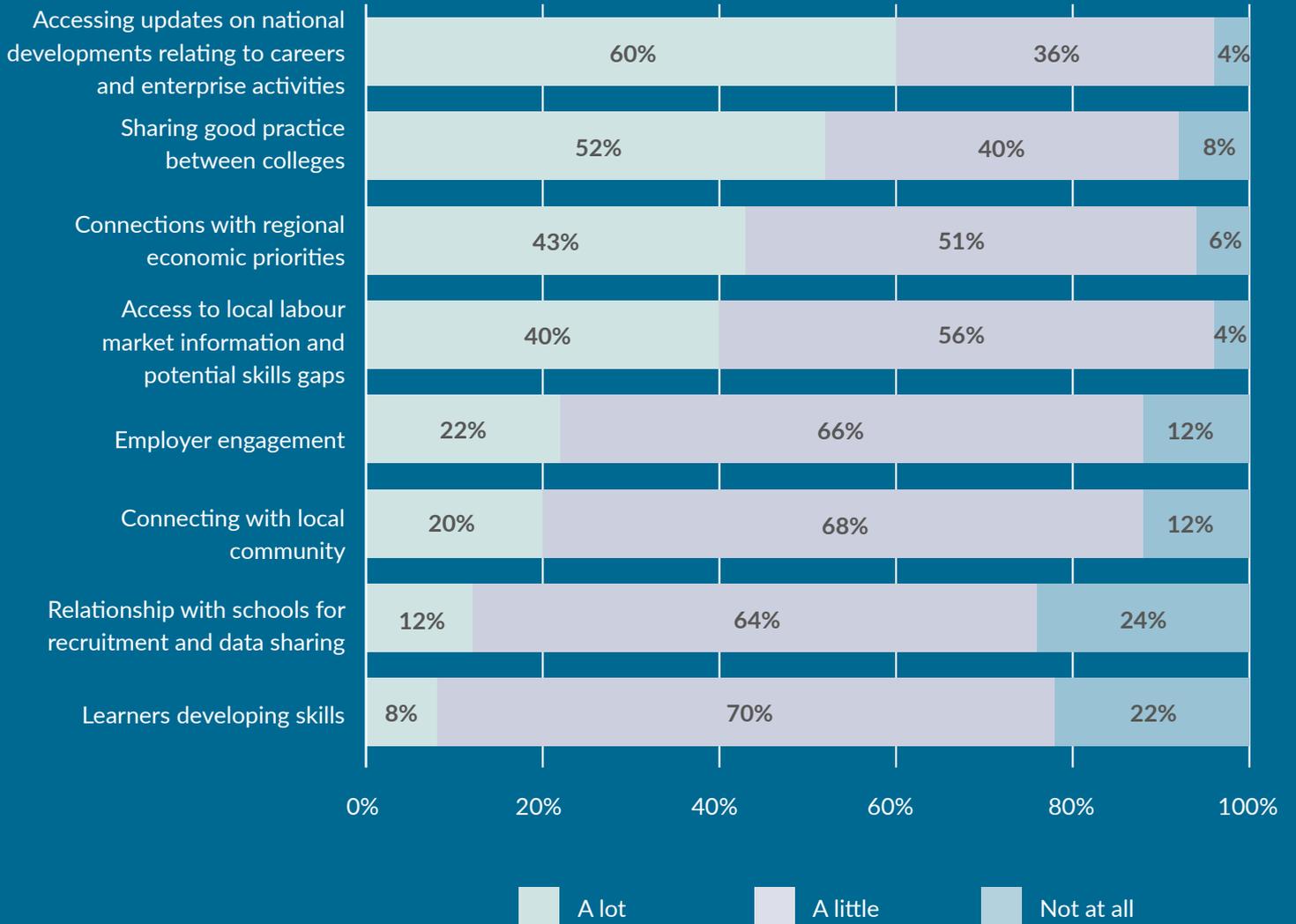
5.1 Supporting collaboration and careers education with Careers Hubs

In the survey, the strongest benefits to being part of a Hub were identified as keeping up-to-date on national developments, sharing good practice between colleges, connections with regional economic priorities and access to labour market information. The Careers Hub had the least impact on learner skill development (which was probably too indirect to identify) and relationships with schools for recruitment and data sharing, the focus of a separate piece of work.¹⁹



19. Wilson, P., Murphy, L. and J. Owens (2021). Review of local destinations data. London: The Careers & Enterprise Company.

Figure 4: Extent to which Careers Hub has supported college



In the qualitative research, Careers Leaders were generally positive about Careers Hubs. They valued the input of the Hubs and the availability of help and advice when it was needed. There were three key areas where they thought the Careers Hubs were contributing positively, including through involvement in Hub Forums, sharing of resources and supporting with the Gatsby Benchmarks²⁰.

5.1.1 The Careers Hub as a forum

A strong message from the interviews was that Careers Leaders appreciated engagement through the Hub Forum. They spoke of the Forums meeting regularly and providing school and college Careers Leaders with a non-competitive platform to discuss ways to progress careers education and support learners. They reported that the meetings encouraged collaboration and supported schools and colleges on their journey towards achieving several of the Gatsby Benchmarks. The Forums enabled:

- Good practice and ideas to be shared within a community of best practice. Gatsby Benchmarks, challenges, school engagement, school to college transition, work placement and employer issues were discussed. Often Careers Leaders were able to take back ideas to their own college to inform and develop their own practice.
- Training opportunities, gaps in provision and LMI to be shared, mapping education with local economic priorities. Examples included agenda items regarding new businesses that might be recruiting, new openings and issues in the region.
- Discussion of national updates regarding strategic direction, policy and progress of the Careers Hub in relation to the national picture.
- Networking opportunities, informally with other attendees and formal opportunities created by the Hub. This included encounters with further and higher education and events with local employers which encouraged support with work experience

and apprenticeships, and helped to raise college profiles with employers.

- Hands-on activities and events for colleges and their learners such as, careers fairs and employer events. In one example the Hub set up an employer event in each college curriculum area, with a subject specialist employer delivering a virtual workshop to learners.

Relevance of the Hub to the college context

A few Careers Leaders interviewed thought that the Careers Hub offer was not relevant to their college context because they had an employer engagement process in house and well-established connections for work placements and work experience. They mentioned that employers were already participating in the college on programme or course design and were helping the colleges to work out the strategic direction that they needed to move towards based on local economic priorities. Furthermore, they did not value the Hub in terms of a network because it was too school centric, as was any information or training and they thought that the Hub lacked a full understanding of the issues facing colleges.

This is an issue that has been acknowledged and addressed for Careers Leaders by some of the Hubs, which have started to develop more specialised Hubs. Some colleges are now able to access a distinct College Hub, where they can set their own agenda and discuss concerns central to colleges. The ability to share best practice and collaborate on college specific events and issues has been valuable to them. One Hub is focusing further by bringing together people who work in careers education in the SEND arena to form a dedicated Hub.

20. The term Hub Forums refers to a community of practice and any meetings/groups (both formal and informal) that the colleges are engaged with within the Hub offer.

5.1.2 Developing and sharing resources

Resources that the Careers Hub had developed were both operational and strategic and were rated very highly by a quarter of the Careers Leaders interviewed, enabling them to further develop careers education programmes in their colleges. For example, operational resources included forms to address safeguarding issues that could be used when young people attended work placements virtually and templates that Careers Leaders could take back and adapt for use in the college. Strategic resources included surveys that Careers Leaders could use to identify where gaps were in provision within departments. This was especially valuable to new Careers Leaders and those who did not have a careers specialist background.

Where resources and templates are on a virtual platform, Careers Leaders appreciated that they were updated regularly and were easy to access and adapt for their contexts. One non-careers specialist thought that the resources and templates allowed them to identify in a more guided way, what it was important for the college to focus on.

5.1.3 Reviewing progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks

Only a small number of Careers Leader interviewees identified that the Hubs were involved in reviewing the Gatsby Benchmarks with them; for several colleges, this was the role of the Enterprise Coordinator or the Enterprise Adviser. Where the Hubs were involved in review of progress towards the benchmarks, Careers Leaders worked with someone from the Hub to complete the review via Compass and had extensive conversations around the data that was produced. Careers Leaders thought that these conversations were challenging in that the adviser from the Hub held them to account for the data, but were productive as they were able to make suggestions for how to progress forwards. A Careers Leader commented that this process was helpful because it meant that they could keep the benchmarks firmly on the college's agenda.



The Hub are great in terms of helping with the Compass report and helping [us] understand how we can improve on the back of the report and analysis. [We] look at the challenges and share ideas for how to be more impactful.

Specialist college, Non SLT Careers Leader

5.2 Enterprise Adviser support for colleges

Careers Leaders discussed the most impactful ways in which Enterprise Advisers collaborated with them. During the interviews, the Careers Leaders particularly highlighted a range of ways in which the Enterprise Advisers supported progress towards and achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks. They also discussed the suitability and fit of Enterprise Advisers for the Further Education sector and their college context.

5.2.1 Enterprise Adviser support at a strategic level

For around half of the Careers Leaders, the Enterprise Adviser was particularly supportive in terms of strategic careers work. In several colleges, they helped the Careers Leader review their progress towards the Gatsby Benchmarks, in some cases training the Careers Leader in using Compass effectively. The Enterprise Adviser was part of the conversation following the review, helping to identify areas for improvement and revising the strategic plan collaboratively with the Careers Leader. Over half of the colleges which are not part of a Careers Hub used the Enterprise Adviser in this way.

The colleges which were using the Enterprise Adviser strategically valued having an external opinion on careers education that was non-judgemental. The Enterprise Adviser challenged why certain decisions had been made, why the Careers Leader was operating as they were and gave advice and support where needed.

Enterprise Adviser supporting a Careers Leader to challenge the SLT

A Careers Leader who was not on the SLT had difficulties developing the careers programme in the college as the SLT had not fully engaged with the importance of careers education.

The Careers Leader did not feel confident in pushing the changes necessary with SLT, to progress careers education towards the benchmarks.

Supporting the Careers Leader with careers strategy meant that the Enterprise Adviser and the Enterprise Coordinator had discussions with the Careers Leader about effective practice, policy and the theory to evidence this. They helped the Careers Leader present the case to the SLT, attending SLT meetings to reinforce their strategy.

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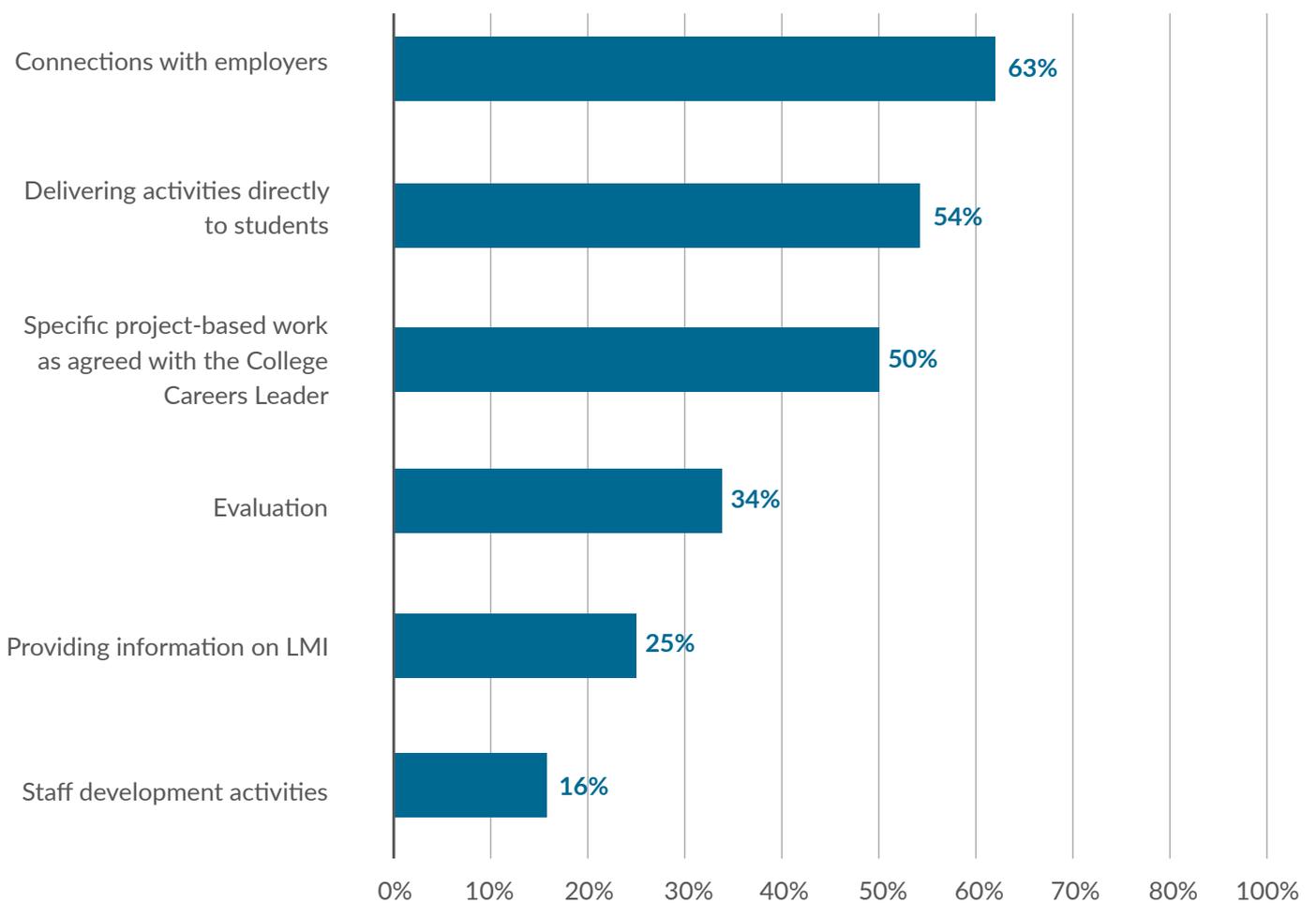
As a group I didn't feel I was on my own, so it didn't seem so personal when I challenged them.

G FEC, Non SLT Careers Leader

5.2.2 Enterprise Adviser support at an operational level

Most Colleges used the Enterprise Adviser for operational aspects of careers education. In the survey, the most frequently cited activities were making connections with employers, delivering activities directly to students and project-based work.

Figure 5: Operational activities that the EA engages in



5.2.3 Suitability of the Enterprise Adviser model for the FE context

In some colleges, the role of the Enterprise Adviser had been developed to have more strategic input. This included, moving from working across several curriculum areas where it was thought they could have minimal impact due to the scale of the college, to working within a careers management team or in specific departments identified as needing particular help.



Adapting the Enterprise Adviser role to suit the college context

A large GFEC college found that using the Enterprise Adviser within curriculum areas to try to embed careers education did not work. Despite the Enterprise Adviser working within departments, they had not moved forwards towards a whole college strategy, embedding careers effectively in departments.

The Careers Leader felt that the Enterprise Adviser had struggled to engage Curriculum Managers and get them on board. They acknowledged that the priorities of the college Curriculum Managers lay more in day-to-day events within their department, rather than working to embed careers.

The Careers Leader decided to change the way that the Enterprise Adviser operated within the college, instead using them as a member of the central careers core working group. This has allowed them to maximise the use of the Enterprise Adviser in a more strategic way, gaining additional support with strategic planning in careers education.

“

[within the careers core working group] ... [they have] been great for us, [they have] really helped us along, [they've] challenged us and asked us, 'well why are you doing that'? Because sometimes we assume we know what young people want and we don't always. So we make good use of [them].

GFEC, SLT Careers Leader

Enterprise Adviser knowledge, experience and expertise appeared to be a significant factor in determining the success of the Enterprise Adviser model. A few Careers Leaders commented that their Enterprise Adviser was not particularly helpful, not providing anything beyond what the Careers Leaders could source themselves, was not proactive enough or lacked an understanding of careers education.

It was considered important that the Enterprise Adviser was well-suited to the organisational culture of the college and was able to embed the role within the college.

Other important factors highlighted by Careers Leaders during the interviews were:

- College size and study programme profile. Several thought that the Enterprise Adviser model was not suited to large colleges where there are a range of subject areas (compared to schools where students do not specialise to the same extent).
- Vocational nature of colleges, particularly where employers have been involved in curriculum design and there is an established employer engagement process.
- College involvement in wider groups, such as an employment and skills board or skills improvement council. Where this was the case, it was reported that Enterprise Advisers could not add significantly to strategic guidance and employer engagement which was already being undertaken by these groups. An example was given where, the Enterprise Adviser role had been changed to maximise their input by focusing on supporting employability work, advice on opportunities and resources for foundation level and EHCP learners specifically.



But it completely depends on the person, they may be an expert in technology or whatever it is, but they may not know much about education or the challenges we have when they first start.

Sixth form college, Non SLT Careers Leader

Students in FE don't want to talk to a hairdresser CEO if they are doing engineering, so creating the parity across [curriculum areas] is difficult. It is one thing in a school, bringing in a couple of your mates from business but trying to do that on a wider scale in college is difficult.

GFEC, SLT Careers Leader

5.3 Improvements around Careers Hubs and Enterprise Adviser support

There were a few key areas around which Careers Leaders interviewed thought that Hubs and Enterprise Advisers could improve their support for colleges.

Benchmark 5: Encounters with employers and employees. Half of the Careers Leaders interviewed identified this as the area with the largest gaps in support. Large colleges with many curriculum areas said that they would appreciate increased help from Enterprise Advisers to engage employers with the college across a range of fields. This was said to be particularly difficult in sectors such as: film and media; science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM); women in science, engineering and computing. They commented that it would include finding employers capable of offering placements for foundation level learners and those with SEND.

A few Careers Leaders commented that it would be helpful to define where the Enterprise Adviser role fits with employer engagement in colleges since there is already an established process in place in most colleges. One suggestion was having panels of employers working with colleges rather than a small number trying to work across the college.

Benchmark 7: Support with encounters with further and higher education. This included: Careers Hubs championing a range of routes with schools, students and parents/carers; supporting college access to school sixth forms; and ensuring Enterprise Advisers have wider experience and understanding of colleges.

Resources and training. Around one-fifth of Careers Leaders interviewed highlighted resources and training as an area for improvement. This included resources and training that are specific to colleges, for example, with the development of College Hubs. A few suggested broadening training available to those more widely involved in careers education (the wider careers team, supporting teams and teaching staff) and delivery of more sector specific careers training.

Other improvements that were mentioned by a small number of Careers Leaders were:

- Sourcing Enterprise Advisers with SEND and foundation learners as a specialism.
- More focus on alignment with local economic priorities.
- Opening Careers Hubs in areas where they do not currently exist.
- Involvement of Enterprise Advisers with governors to help drive careers forwards.
- Improving data sharing between schools and colleges, and across areas, to support student transitions.



Working with the Careers Hub

Working with a specific College Careers Hub to improve careers education and support achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks

City of Sunderland College, North East England

City of Sunderland College is a large General Further Education college, comprised of three colleges spread over eight sites. Study programmes cover many sectors and are delivered from entry level to higher education.

The development of a College Careers Hub

The College Careers Hub was developed from a pilot within the Local Enterprise Partnership areas. The ITPs, colleges and sixth forms are geographically close which means that in the past they have been extremely competitive with one another. A specific College Careers Hub was established to provide a productive working forum whereby competition could be 'parked at the door'. The College Careers Hub is now part of the Careers & Enterprise Company's model and works alongside other Careers Hubs within the North East LEP area. Having a college-only Careers Hub allows the focus to address the distinct needs and challenges of the college context; such as LMI, aligning provision to local priorities and work placements.

There is a balance of strategic and operational level careers staff and leaders in the Hub which gives a strong informative foundation for debate, sharing ideas, knowledge and resources. The college ensures that all careers staff can attend College Hub meetings, giving team members a broad overview of careers education and a greater understanding of the challenges. It has become a community for sharing best practice which can often be transferred back to the college and embedded in current college practice.



The [College] Hub Coordinator is great, they are passionate about it [careers], nothing is too much to ask; they say 'what do you want?' and sorts it. They always come back with solution focused approach.

GFEC, SLT Careers Leader

Working with the Careers Hub continued

Strategic support from the College Careers Hub to raise standards

The College Careers Hub organises wider stakeholder events to look at strategy within the region. Enterprise Advisers are involved and Careers Leaders have an opportunity to network, raising the profile of colleges and their offer with employers. They have discussed and actioned matters such as the advantages of engaging with one another on youth unemployment and new pathways such as T-levels. By talking with employers, careers education can be anchored back to employment issues for relevant to them. During Covid-19, the Hub redirected the use of their advisers who are no longer able to visit schools, to increase strategic support in colleges.

Access to school students is something that did not consistently happen previously for colleges, even with the Baker Clause. The College Careers Hub hosts meetings and shares information with schools, especially those with their own sixth forms, to increase the reach of tertiary colleges and raise understanding of the different pathways through further education for staff and learners. In the same way, the Hub has links with a local university to support transition work and to facilitate encounters with higher education providers.



6 | Conclusions

Careers Leaders were largely positive about the impact of the Careers Strategy on careers education within their college. The introduction of a specific Careers Leader role, and in those colleges which did not already have one, a clear leadership structure, elevated the position of careers education. It helped to drive forwards the careers strategy and to integrate it with the colleges' wider responsibilities and development plans.

Structures of careers leadership varied across colleges and were influenced by the type and size of college. Careers Leaders were positioned either at SLT, management or operational levels. Some Careers Leaders had a strategic focus to their role, driving forwards provision and strategy progression, whereas others were more operational and involved in the day-to-day delivery of careers education. A multifaceted role was challenging to balance in terms of focus, time and resource.

Some of the Careers Leaders who had a more strategic focus to their role and were part of the SLT thought that they were more effective in influencing careers education change, compared to those at management or operational levels. That said, if there was a clear line of communication to the SLT, and strong 'buy-in' from staff to support the Careers Leader role, positioning these leaders at management or operational levels was considered to be effective in driving strategy forwards.

Collaborative working, embedding and integrating careers education throughout levels of seniority and across wider areas of the college, including curriculum, united college members and raised the profile of careers across college. To enable collaboration to take place, some colleges were using strategic working groups to report on progress and generate actions to drive plans forwards. These involved staff across all levels of seniority and areas of the college.

The training and support provided by The Careers & Enterprise Company has aided the Careers Leader role. Most who had experienced it, thought the training had improved practice and supported Leaders in their role. The help, support and advice provided by Careers Hubs and Enterprise Advisers was also appreciated, of particular value was that in support of achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks. However, some questioned the relevance of training and support offered, to their role and college context.

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