

From coverage to quality: a careers system of continual improvement

Insight Report - progress and quality assurance 2022/23

Glossary

Gatsby Benchmarks - The eight aspects of high-quality careers provision based on international evidence.

1. A stable careers programme
2. Learning from career and labour market information
3. Addressing the needs of each student
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers
5. Encounters with employers and employees
6. Experiences of workplaces
7. Encounters with further and higher education
8. Personal guidance

Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)- The national body for careers education in England, supporting schools and colleges to deliver modern, 21st century careers education.

Careers education - A term used in this report to encompass all aspects of careers education - underpinned by the Gatsby Benchmark framework.

Careers Hub - Groups of schools, colleges, employers and providers within a local area working together to improve practice. Hub Leads oversee the work and target support to local priorities.

Careers Leader - A leadership role overseeing a college or school's provision. Careers Leaders implement and quality assure a careers strategy, network with employers and providers and coordinate the contributions of Careers Advisers and subject teachers.

Careers Adviser - A careers professional who provides personal guidance to students and may also have other roles in relation to the delivery of careers provision.

Compass - A digital tool used by schools and colleges to track careers provision against the Gatsby Benchmarks based on approximately 50 questions. The data from Compass forms the basis of this report. Compass+ is an upgraded version which allows Careers Leaders to track individual interventions and cohorts.

LMI - Labour Market Information - data, statistics, reports and insight about the composition of the labour market and how it is changing.

Special schools, SEND & AP - Special schools cater for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); Alternative provision schools (AP) settings provide education for students who can't go to a mainstream school.

Maturity Model - A tool that provides a shared and standardised language of continuous quality improvement that maps excellence in careers education and is aligned to institutional improvement and development priorities.

Acknowledgments

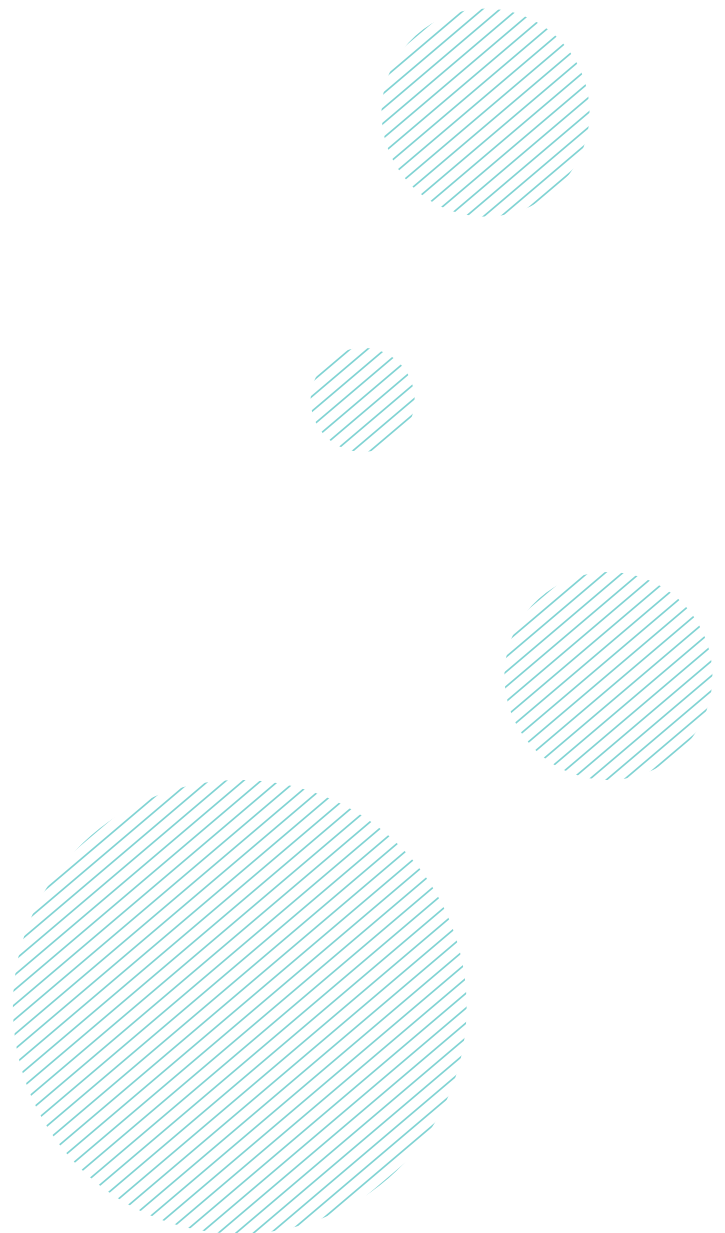
This insight report is based on the dedicated work and collaboration of education leaders including headteachers, principals of schools and colleges, members of SLT, teachers Careers Leaders, Careers Hubs and Enterprise Coordinators.

It is also the result of the brilliant support provided by the networks of employers, enterprise advisers, local authorities and independent training providers who are working with schools and colleges across the country.

We would like to thank them all for their ongoing support and commitment to this vital work.

The careers performance data in this report is based on a national dataset of 4,534 state-funded secondary schools and colleges who completed Compass – the self-assessment tool - during the 2022/23 Academic Year. This equates to 91% of all state-funded providers.

The data on the Careers Impact System is from an independent evaluation by Chrysalis Research.



Introduction

From coverage to quality

As the careers system matures and the consensus around the Gatsby Benchmarks, Careers Hubs and Careers Leaders embeds, the next phase is to ensure continuous improvement.

This means a relentless focus on the quality of provision – at the institution and system level via the Gatsby Benchmarks – and the practice level via our new Careers Impact System - a peer and expert review process.

This report summarises how the system is progressing against the Gatsby Benchmarks and how we are assuring provision. Taken together this demonstrates an important shift – from coverage to quality – from universal support to excellence everywhere.

“For both young people and adults, government should have robust procedures to assure the quality of delivery of careers guidance.

“I recommend that government now looks at ways to increase the independence of quality assurance of careers guidance in schools and colleges. Effective quality assurance in education often involves peer and expert review. This approach is collaborative and, through challenge and support, can provide unique insights by identifying areas for improvement and capturing effective practice.”

Sir John Holman, Recommendations for the Future of Careers Guidance in England, December 2022

Context

Careers Education has been the subject of growing policy interest, including a very recent [Education Select Committee inquiry](#), an [Ofsted thematic review](#), Parliamentary debates and several reports from think tanks and interested parties. Collectively they reflect a growing consensus, including among the education community in England, that there is real progress, powered by data insight. There is also recognition that there is more to do to ensure all young people have the support they need to take their best next step.

The consensus is the right national infrastructure and framework is in place:

- More than 90 per cent of schools and colleges are in a Careers Hub.
- Schools, colleges, employers and local authorities are working in effective partnerships, supporting young people in their communities.
- Coordinated training and development for schools is consistently raising professional standards - with more than 3,000 Careers Leaders now trained.

The focus is now on building on what we know is working. Key to this focus is leveraging the scale and coverage of the careers infrastructure to drive a new system of continual improvement and assurance – The Careers Impact System – a system built round the disciplines of peer and expert review, as recommended by Sir John Holman in his [review of careers guidance for Government in 2022](#).

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC), supported by the Gatsby Foundation have taken forward this recommendation by developing the Careers Impact System, which has now been rigorously piloted and tested with 82 diverse schools and colleges across the country and independently evaluated by Chrysalis Research.

CEC have now published the latest [full data](#) and an [Insight Report](#) analysis of Careers Education progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks for the 2022-23 academic year. The [full independent evaluation report](#) on the Careers Impact System has also been published.

Gatsby benchmark performance 2022-23 at a glance

The latest evidence shows consistent improvement in the progress and performance of careers education nationally. More schools and colleges than ever are now reporting on the Gatsby Benchmarks – over 90% of the overall system.

- Progress is significant across all of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. On average 5.5 benchmarks are now fully achieved per institution – more than half a benchmark higher than last year (4.9).
- The fastest area of growth this year has been Benchmark 6 - Experiences of the workplace - which is up by nearly a quarter (23%) on last year.
- Careers education is having more impact on disadvantaged schools, despite facing more barriers they gain more benchmarks and sustain their performance.
- Sustained engagement with Careers Hubs and having a trained Careers Leader are both associated with higher benchmark scores, with those schools and colleges that have been in the careers system the longest showing the strongest performance. The difference is most marked in comparison with those schools and colleges that are not in a Careers Hub - highlighting the benefits for the 90 per cent of schools now in a Careers Hub. Those schools that have been in a Hub since 2018/19 and 2019/20 achieve on average 6 benchmarks and outperform those who are not in a Hub by 87 per cent.



23%

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87%

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Introducing the Careers Impact System

The development of the Careers Impact System was based on tried and tested educational models and principles. Peer to peer and expert review methodologies across education were used in the pre-development research¹. Throughout the development of the maturity model, methodologies were tested through continuous consultation with education leaders including headteachers, principals of schools and colleges, members of SLT, Central Strategic Careers Leaders, institutional Careers Leaders, Careers Hub Leads and Enterprise Coordinators.

The Careers Impact System is deliberately developmental in approach and creates a safe and supportive environment to facilitate continuous improvement for both individuals and institutions with the support of peers and experts. This has been positively and unequivocally well received across the pilot with high levels of engagement and repeat engagement in reviews.

What is the Careers Impact System?

The Careers Impact System assures the quality in the careers system using three approaches:

1. **Peer to peer reviews** administered regionally at scale through trained Careers Hub facilitators, providing a mechanism for standardisation at a local level. Three or more Careers Leaders come together in a local area, supported by a trained Hub facilitator, to reflect on and share their progress against the Benchmarks. This drives standardised practice, improvement and excellence at a local level.
2. **Expert review** samples enacted through central coordination to enable systemic moderation of careers guidance. Centrally trained national facilitators, who are experts in careers guidance in schools and colleges, visit a school or college and meet with the Careers Leaders, Headteacher and the wider team to discuss the Benchmarks, review practice and provide stretch and challenge to plans and practice. This enables system wide moderation of career guidance.
3. **National reviews** which explore themes and interrogate priorities at a whole system level. Through a series of themed visits to schools and colleges, system-wide explorations of good practice and shared challenges are surfaced.

“I think it was about having robust discussions with other careers specialists... I think it was around an opportunity to really sit back and evaluate what we do... [The Careers Impact Maturity Model] makes you think slightly differently in terms of, what is a progressive careers learning journey? What does that actually mean?”

Vice principal, FE College (expert review)

Furthermore, the system empowers continuous improvement of careers provision in the wider context of school improvement and development. In effect, it pushes careers up the school agenda.

The Careers Impact System is underpinned by a maturity model which:

- Supports education leaders to achieve the Gatsby Benchmarks and strategically and meaningfully link them to school/college improvement priorities.
- Enables Careers Leaders to approach achievement of the Gatsby Benchmarks through a lens of continuous improvement.
- Uses a scaled and systemic approach which enables robust judgements and confidence to be made and assures confidence in the quality of provision of careers guidance across individual Careers Hubs and nationally.
- Offers a development pathway for education leaders to understand excellent practice.

Key findings - independent evidence of effectiveness of the Careers Impact System

The Careers Impact System has long-term impacts - increasing confidence of improved outcomes for young people

Education leaders believe the Careers Impact System will have distinct benefits and long-term impacts:



96% say the process will in the longer-term lead to improved careers provision in their school, special school or college.



86% think it will in the longer-term lead to improved student outcomes.



72% say the programme has established stronger links between careers and schools improvement.

Evidence from education leaders shows the impact goes beyond individual schools and colleges to the wider system

The Careers Impact System has potential to:

- Strengthen assurance of quality of careers provision at both the level of both local schools and colleges and the education sector as a whole.
- Consistently raise the quality of provision throughout the careers system.
- Act as a powerful driver for elevating the status of Careers Leaders and professionalising the role.
- Provide a strong mechanism for capturing and communicating evidence at system level.

"I'm very, very passionate about ensuring that every child has high aspirations, and they are prepared for the future. And I think the only way we can do that is to make sure that careers is embedded throughout everything that we do here. It's not a bolt-on, it's inter-weaved with our curriculum, it's inter-weaved with our form time learning, it's inter-weaved with literally everything we do. Because careers is such an important part of what we do here, I am the first to jump at any opportunity like [the Careers Impact System pilot] because it's part of our school vision, it's part of what we do here, and we really value the careers opportunities we already have but we want to see where our next stages are. [Our Careers Leader] did an amazing job this year of ensuring that our Compass [score] is at 100%."

Principal, secondary school (peer-to-peer review)

There is strong support for the approach, content and value of the Careers Impact System among education leaders

Education leaders in the schools, special schools and colleges that took part in the Careers Impact System pilot say the process is a positive experience, striking the right balance between challenge and motivation:

- Nearly all (98%) say the review process is a positive experience – with the discipline of the peer and expert review approach particularly valued as supportive, while bringing real insight in identifying positive performance and areas for improvement.
- More than nine in ten (94%) say the process is of high value to their institutions and their Careers Leaders – enabling them to readily identify strengths and where new focus was needed.
- 93 per cent say they would get involved in it again, with 95 per cent saying they would recommend it to other schools, special schools and colleges.

“I've been teaching 27 years, I've been in and out of careers and PSHE quite a bit over that time, but I've never had that thorough a review. Somebody to actually sit down with me and have that process.”

Assistant principal and Careers Leader, Secondary school (expert review)

“I've never had that much time spent sat going through and being challenged in a positive way. [The review team] was brilliant, so supportive. Even when we've had Ofsted and they've asked to go through careers, I've never felt really challenged or an opportunity to really have that deep thinking.”

Assistant headteacher and Careers Leader, Secondary school (expert review)

“It was a psychologically safe environment, so you could be really honest. And it was really supportive in the fact that you've got this feedback, and you've got these people giving you ideas, saying, 'Well, you should try this.', or, 'I'll send you this resource.', which was excellent. “

Deputy headteacher and Careers Leader, Secondary school (peer-to-peer review)

Katy Tibbles, Trust Head of Careers, Turner Schools Trust, Folkestone, Kent

If you'd asked teachers in my school about careers before the CIS review, they'd have said: "Oh, careers run lots of activities: speakers, careers days, university visits." But very few people had an idea of the overview or intent behind it.

One of my priorities for CIS was getting staff to understand the purpose, breadth and rigour behind the careers programme.

Since our review, they now understand that careers can be embedded across the curriculum. When young people are in a lesson – particularly if they're in a subject they don't naturally enjoy – you can use careers to make it more relevant, so they can see the purpose and benefit of it.

For example, if you're developing skills such as communication or problem-solving, you tell pupils: "This is a skill you'll use in the job market."

Young people don't go to school to leave with a certificate. They go to school to prepare for the rest of their lives. So why wouldn't you embed careers?

I've worked in careers for a long time, so I have a lot of knowledge and experience. I've come away from Ofsted meetings disappointed, because inspectors didn't have the level of knowledge to ask challenging questions.

Taking part in an expert review meant bringing in people who could genuinely challenge my thinking and elevate my practice and provision.

I wanted to be stretched. I wanted people to ask meaningful questions: "Actually, why are you doing that?" Can I really justify what I'm doing and why?

CIS forced everyone to reflect. The trust executive principal is now looking at how careers supports our trust-wide priorities: how we can use careers to support attainment-raising and parental engagement.

We have a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils in our schools – at one of them, 47 per cent of pupils are on free school meals. Talking to our pupils and their parents about careers is definitely an easier conversation than: "What grades are you going to get for GCSE?" But we can create interest in exam grades by putting it in the context of careers.

We're very much trying to move from careers being a standalone product to something that runs like a thread through everything we do.

But if we want careers to be recognised and valued within the school system, we've got to be prepared to stand up to challenge and questioning, just as any other subject would.

The Careers Impact System helps schools, special schools and colleges see a more complete picture of careers education, linking to wider education purpose and enhancing focus on support for disadvantaged groups

Education leaders say the Careers Impact System has improved their understanding of what good looks like in careers education.

- 83 per cent say the Careers Impact process has helped improve their understanding of good practice in careers education – bringing together a closer connection between the role and purpose and reasoning behind each of the Gatsby Benchmarks, how progressive provision is linked to whole school improvement and strengthening outcomes for young people.
- There was a strong consensus among education leaders that, as a result of going through the process, they had developed a deeper understanding of the Gatsby Benchmarks and the practice surrounding how they are used, prompting a sharper focus on student outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

“Why would you not want the best [for your students]? We live in an area where socioeconomic challenges are significant, and if we don't champion that and don't think about how this can make such a difference then no-one else is going to, and we're just failing our communities.”

Vice principal, FE College (expert review)

“The review highlighted the need [for us] to link the outcomes for students to the overall career plan.”

Assistant headteacher and Careers leader, Secondary school (expert review)

“We're going to put something together so that the students can write down what they want to leave with. And we're going to do the same with parents and ask them what they want their children to leave with. That would then give us a really good indicator of what we should be aiming for and also [something to measure our work against]. That's been the most powerful thing that I've taken away from the review.”

Principal, special school (expert review)

Lou McManus, Assistant Principal, Shotton Hall Academy, County Durham, and Careers Lead for North East Learning Trust

Being a careers leader can at times be one of the loneliest jobs in education. A lot of the time, you come against the “not my job” barrier: “I’m a maths teacher – it’s not my job to talk about careers.”

So I relished the extended opportunity that CIS gave me to sit around the tables with experts and discuss the provision. It was as intense as any Ofsted I’ve gone through – but that was what we needed.

My view of careers has always been destination-driven. I would look at careers as a journey that begins in Year 7, and then destination data shows how successful we’ve been.

CIS prompted me to look at careers through a lens that I hadn’t before. It really forces you to delve deeper into your provision.

And, actually, I realised that careers isn’t just an A to B journey. I really need to look at the skills they’re gaining between A and B – how that makes a positive contribution to curriculum performance and positively affects students as individuals.

What also came out during CIS was that our student-facing communication could be clearer – what skills they’re building up through the curriculum, and how it links with what’s been previously learnt. For example, in English: “Here you’re practising your soft skills for interview – how to communicate effectively.”

Careers sits behind everything we do at Shotton Hall. Where you’re dealing with challenging behaviour or disaffected young people or attendance problems, careers sits behind those conversations – it’s a motivator for the academic side of school.

But across the trust, we’re not there yet. We really need to feed the ethos of: we’re all careers educators. A student in an English classroom might not glow, but they might glow in the science classroom. So careers information has to link with what they’re doing in every lesson.

Careers is my baby. I’ve been heavily involved in the development of the programme here. But sometimes you need to be able to step back and engage in critical decisions and evaluate what you’re doing, your role, what provision you have.

The CIS team gave us their understanding, their knowledge, their expertise and their objective eye.

I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend CIS for any careers leader, in any school. If you want to give careers the credence that it deserves, this is something you should be involved in.

Rigorous testing and assurance through the Careers Impact System of the planning, development, execution and self-assessment of careers programmes increases confidence in performance judgements, continuing improvement and quality

There was strong evidence from the pilot that that the process provides assurance and confidence in the accuracy of the judgements schools make when reporting progress and performance through the on-line reporting platform Compass. Those taking part also report a positive impact on the planning and refinement of careers programmes and increased confidence in their practice.

- Nearly nine in ten (89%) say the Careers Impact System helps them plan further developments in their careers provision. This is further enhanced by the way the process helps them identify gaps in provision and focus on the areas that matter most and the key drivers to deliver results.
- More than four in five (84%) say the process helped them recognise strengths in their provision with 79 per cent saying it helped them identify actions to further strengthen their careers programmes – two thirds say they have already started implementing these changes. The top three changes identified were:
 - Strengthening the evaluation of careers programmes (59%)
 - Bringing parents into the careers conversation (54%)
 - Raising the profile of careers by involving all teaching staff (53%)
- Participants also say the Careers Impact System highlighted the best ways in which to evaluate careers programmes and how to use evidence to monitor effectiveness and shape further development.

59%

Are strengthening the evaluation of careers programmes

54%

Are bringing parents into the careers conversation

53%

Are raising the profile of careers by involving all teaching staff

Julie Ilogu, Enterprise Coordinator, West of England Combined Authority

For me, the most enjoyable part of doing a peer-to-peer review is the face-to-face meetings.

My colleague and I both went into our first CIS meeting as facilitators with a little bit of trepidation. These were senior leaders – people strapped for time – and we didn't know which way it would go. But we both came out of that meeting saying: "Wow". There really was an epiphany moment there, and we felt quite buoyed up and excited by it.

It was a group of SEND schools, and one had a careers leader who was very hardworking, getting lots done, but also very operational. She was putting on all these events, but there was no strategic overview or plan or process behind it.

What came out of the challenge from other schools – a very gentle, positive challenge – was: where's the strategy behind this? How are you building it into whole-school improvement? It wasn't until the challenge came from other careers leaders that she saw it for herself.

A constant question was: how do you evidence this? How do you evaluate it? How does it link to other things it will improve, such as attendance and attainment? This isn't just about careers improvement – this is whole-school improvement.

One of the senior leaders talked about mapping careers priorities against the overall priorities of the school-improvement plan – matching where there are crossovers. For example, student destinations are a measure of outcome for careers, but also for the whole school. The careers leads needed to put the key points of their evaluation into a plan, and match them with whole-school priorities.

They should be saying: "These are the outcomes and values we have as a school – how can we link careers to that?" It's about looking at it in the context of the bigger picture.

Peer-to-peer reviews are about getting people to talk. Sometimes they just needed to get stuff off their chests.

If you're hearing from someone else in the same position as you, they've got a bit more credibility. You're on the same wavelength; you're going through the same challenges. When you're embedded in something, you can't always see the wood for the trees. Someone from the same background but another school brings a little distance.

To be able to sit in a room, relatively uninterrupted, and really discuss the careers programme – that was very helpful.

The Careers Impact System is driving greater ownership by senior leadership teams (SLT), anchoring careers programmes to whole school improvement strategies and plans

Education leaders say their involvement in the process improves the visibility and appreciation of the value of careers education across the whole SLT and demonstrates its relevance and utility to the whole school improvement agenda.

- More than four in five (83%) say their SLT now give a high priority to careers education – compared with 53 per cent prior to the programme.
- Three in five (60%) say the same about governors – compared with 38 per cent prior to the programme.
- Nearly three quarters (72%) say the programme has established stronger links between careers and schools improvement.
- The impact spread right across and throughout the school with nearly half (48%) saying teaching staff now give a higher priority to careers – more than double the 20% prior to the programme – bringing teams together a greater shared understanding and appreciation of purpose.

“In every school in our trust, what we’ve got is the strategic [careers] leads are all members of the senior team, and they are at least assistant principal level. So we’ve always got that senior team involvement.”

Multi-Academy Trust Careers Lead

“It was great because it’s been supported not just from the headteacher but the executive principal, the curriculum, the trust. I think it’s just thrown spotlights on careers which is what we’re trying to do.”

Assistant headteacher and Careers Leader,
Secondary school (expert review)

Michelle Royle, Head of Student Services, Oldham College

We deliver technical and vocational education at Oldham College, and our courses look towards future careers and employability. And yet one of our biggest challenges is how we demonstrate that we embed careers in the curriculum.

A high percentage of our learners have to resit maths and English GCSE, so we need to ensure that careers is linked to those subjects – that students realise that not having those qualifications will become a barrier to progression. For example, in electrical and plumbing courses, if you haven't got a good level of maths, you won't progress to the next stage. It's about getting careers in at every stage of the journey.

But to do that, we need to get people round a table – to get heads of faculties together and articulate what we provide for learners.

That's what CIRS does: it brings people together. It was a deep dive that we never normally have the luxury to do.

It also brings in the students. Obviously, we talk to students all day long. But we're not usually asking them to reflect on their careers learning journey. To have the luxury to listen to them and how they felt was really beneficial, because ultimately we're here to provide those learners with the skills they need for work.

Since the review, there's more emphasis on working as a whole college. There's been a real acceptance at senior level that careers has to be part of the strategic plan. Everything comes back to this: building their future, building their dreams, giving them careers.

Another change is that we've now made it mandatory to collect parents' email addresses when students enrol. Our students are young adults, so their parents aren't as involved as they were when their children were younger. But when students are making choices and need support, we still think it's important that we should involve parents as well.

At every stage of the careers journey, we will make sure parents are involved and communicated with.

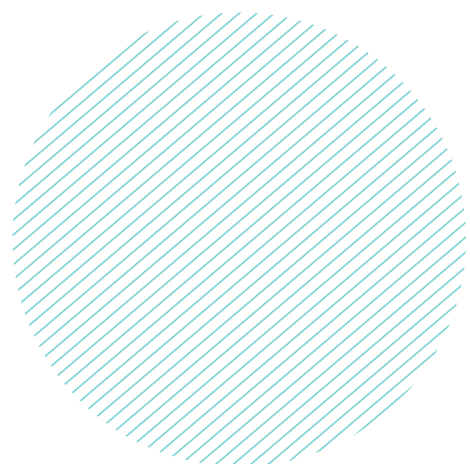
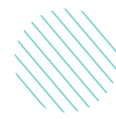
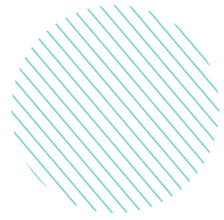
CIRS involved a lot of coordination, but the end results were very satisfying. Sitting around a table and talking, you realise that there's all this positive work going on, but we don't always celebrate it and reward it.

You should never say no to an opportunity to look at what you do and how you can do it better.

The Careers Impact System is further professionalising the role of Careers Leaders and placing Careers Leadership more front and centre of school and college development

Education leaders say the System is having a positive effect on the learning professional development and growth of Careers Leaders:

- More than nine in ten (93%) education leaders rated their Careers Leader's ability to plan and deliver careers provision as high – up from 79 per cent prior to the pilot.
- 88 per cent had high levels of confidence in their Careers Leader's ability to drive improvements in careers programmes – up from 67 per cent before the pilot.
- More broadly, the Careers Impact System has prompted schools to fuse the Careers Leader role more closely with the overall strategic conversation of SLT.



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