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## Advancing Careers Education for Learners with SEND Through the Gatsby Benchmarks

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## Advancing careers education for learners with SEND through the gatsby benchmarks

Live Online Webinars and Communities of Practice

### Introduction

ETF's Centre of Excellence, Oldham College has a thematic focus of Careers. Through this focus, it looks at bringing together providers to share and learn from each other on how best to support young learners to achieve their career ambitions as they move into adulthood. A key theme throughout is Preparation for Adulthood (PfA).

This case study looks at how responsive webinars promote sector-led inclusive practice and high-quality teaching that is adapted and personalised to meet the individual needs of young people with SEND and support them to develop ambitious, fulfilling careers. It illustrates how the webinars lead to the Communities of Practice – an opportunity for deeper professional development and learning.

**Ensuring that young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are well-prepared for ambitious careers is a key priority in careers education. While the Gatsby Benchmarks provide a framework for all young people, Oldham College's focus was to ensure that the specific needs of learners with SEND are addressed at a national level.**

To support this, Oldham College developed a webinar series aimed at equipping educators and careers professionals with the knowledge and resources needed to implement the Gatsby Benchmarks effectively for learners with SEND. The launch of this series was particularly timely, aligning with Gatsby's recent updates to the benchmarks, providing the opportunity to spotlight the SEND perspective at an early stage in the national conversation.

The intended audience for the webinar series was nationwide, with a particular focus on reaching professionals in the Northwest. This initiative aimed to enhance understanding, share best practices and ensure that careers education for young people with SEND is ambitious, inclusive and impactful.

### Implementation

The webinar was structured to provide both expert insights and practical application. The CEO of The Gatsby Foundation opened the session, setting the stage for the discussion, followed by a presentation from a senior advisor to provide further clarity on the updated Benchmarks. Additionally, an education consultant from the Careers and Enterprise Company shared key resources, training opportunities and support available to enhance careers education for learners with SEND.

## Implementation (continued)

To ground these insights in real-world practice, Oldham College presented their experience of implementing the Gatsby Benchmarks, offering a practical example for attendees. The webinar also included interactive breakout room discussions, allowing participants to collaborate, share experiences and explore strategies for effective implementation in their own settings.

To address this and building on the momentum of the webinar, we have established a Community of Practice, facilitated by the education consultant from the Careers and Enterprise Company. This ongoing forum will allow attendees to explore the resources introduced in more depth, exchange ideas and collectively drive forward their implementation efforts. Participants will have the chance to trial the resources in their own settings before reconvening for follow up sessions, where they can provide feedback, share experiences and continue to shape effective careers education for learners with SEND.

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## Outcomes

**The webinar drew a strong turnout of professionals from a variety of educational settings across the country - 77 attendees representing different and diverse organisations. The level of engagement during the session, particularly in the breakout discussions, demonstrated a clear appetite for further collaboration and resource-sharing in embedding the Gatsby Benchmarks for learners with SEND.**

Recognising the need for ongoing dialogue and support, as outlined above, we developed a Community of Practice as a next step to provide an opportunity for deeper learning. This smaller forum allows participants to explore the resources in greater depth, trial implementation strategies within their settings and reconvene to share insights and best practices. The first session had representatives from 14 different providers. We aim to measure the impact of implementation through feedback from community attendees whilst generating a richer understanding of how the Gatsby Benchmarks can be effectively embedded in different contexts. which already has.

Moving forward, we plan to work closely with individual providers to assess the practical application of each benchmark, gathering case studies that highlight successful implementation. These insights will be shared to support the broader community in delivering high-quality careers education for learners with SEND.

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## Impact and Next Steps

*The initial impact of this work has been seen in the high level of engagement from educators and careers professionals, demonstrating a clear demand for guidance in embedding the Gatsby Benchmarks for learners with SEND. In the short term, the webinar provided attendees with key insights, resources and real-world examples to enhance their approach to careers education. The opportunity for collaboration in breakout discussions also allowed participants to exchange ideas and best practices, strengthening their understanding of how to apply the benchmarks effectively.*

To build on this momentum, our next steps focus on deepening engagement through the Community of Practice. Over the coming months, we will work closely with providers, offering tailored support to help them implement the benchmarks in their settings. Additionally, we aim to facilitate collaboration between providers, enabling them to share experiences, challenges and solutions to further strengthen their practice.



## Impact and Next Steps (continued)

Following the Community of Practice sessions, we intend to establish a permanent, ongoing community dedicated to shaping, refining and embedding the Gatsby Benchmarks over the next year. This long-term initiative will provide a structured platform for continuous professional dialogue, resource-sharing and collective problem-solving, ensuring that careers education for learners with SEND continues to evolve and improve at both a local and national level.

## Impact and Next Steps

The visit reinforced the need for culture change within the department and highlighted suggested good practice and areas of focus. Planned next steps are to continue to develop pedagogy and the shared focus on quality improvement from staff at all levels. More vocational tasters will provide learners and their families with a greater understanding of future opportunities and progression routes. Increased links with more employers will provide greater work experience. The department plans to add significantly to the number of supported internships.

Sustaining the classroom visits and drop-ins will ensure any noted areas for development are swiftly addressed and good practice is celebrated and shared. Involving staff in attending and, in some cases, delivering training will continue to drive improvement. Regular contact between the two campuses will ensure better consistency of the curriculum offer and delivery are maintained.

## Key learning

This case study has highlighted several learning points in supporting the implementation of the Gatsby Benchmarks for learners with SEND:

- **The demand for targeted support** – There is a strong appetite among educators and careers professionals for resources, training and guidance tailored specifically to embedding the Gatsby Benchmarks for learners with SEND. The high engagement in the webinar and the development of the Community of Practice reinforces the need for ongoing support in this area.
- **The power of collaboration** – Bringing together national experts, education consultants and practitioners created a dynamic space for sharing knowledge and best practices. Facilitating discussions through breakout rooms and ongoing community engagement has proven valuable in driving meaningful conversations and action.
- **Sustained impact requires ongoing engagement** – A one-off webinar can spark interest, but long-term change comes from continuous collaboration. The establishment of a Community of Practice ensures that careers professionals can trial resources, reflect on their effectiveness and refine their approach with peer support.
- **Encourage real-world application and reflection** – Giving practitioners time to trial resources, reflect on their implementation and share feedback fosters deeper engagement and meaningful improvements in careers education.

By continuing to build on these key learnings, we aim to strengthen careers education for learners with SEND, ensuring that all young people have access to ambitious and meaningful career pathways.

