



Interpreting the Gatsby Benchmarks for students with special education needs and disabilities

The Gatsby Benchmarks provide a world-class framework for career guidance, outlining the experiences and information each and every young person should have access to so that they can make an informed decision about their future.

As schools and colleges begin to work towards the Benchmarks, the Gatsby Foundation and The Careers & Enterprise Company have been asked how the Benchmarks should be used in special schools and with students with special educational needs and disabilities.

We recognise that the Benchmarks set a high bar, but we believe that aspirations should be high for special schools, as they should be for mainstream schools.

Young people attending special schools have a very wide range of special educational needs and disabilities, from behavioural and learning difficulties to physical and sensory disability.

After consultation with representatives from different types of special schools (including Pupil Referral Units), together with SEND specialists from mainstream schools, we received a clear recommendation that it would not be appropriate to define a separate set of Benchmarks for these circumstances.

We recognise that some of the Benchmarks need different interpretation in special schools, and for some SEND students in mainstream schools. We believe that in interpreting the Benchmarks it is the role of the professionals within the school or college to assess whether or not their young people will be able to access employment, training, further education or higher education. For example, for students with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan this judgement should reflect any relevant information in the Plan.

It is the intention of the Benchmarks to give young people a framework for high quality encounters not a set of inappropriate encounters, and we believe that teachers and professionals are best placed to design and deliver appropriate careers programmes, underpinned by the Gatsby Benchmarks, for these young people.

The Gatsby Foundation, The Careers & Enterprise Company and Disability Rights UK, along with other partners in the sector, will work together over the next year to develop further best practice and interpretation of the Benchmarks in these settings. In particular we will be building on The Careers & Enterprise Company SEND toolkit to capture a wider range of contexts, for example in hospital schools.

We also recognise that some special schools have been concerned that their Compass reports do not reflect the excellent work that they are carrying out.



Compass has always been designed to help and support the development of a careers plan, and therefore Careers Leaders working in special schools, or with cohorts of SEND students in mainstream schools, should use their professional judgement to decide what is appropriate for these young people. We will build guidance into Compass to make this as clear as possible.

This joint statement from The Careers & Enterprise Company, the Gatsby Foundation and Disability Rights UK is also supported by: the CBI; the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and members of the North East SEND careers working group (Ascent Academies Trust, Catcote Academy, Cleaswell Hill School (chair), Epinay Business & Enterprise School, North East Autism Society and the Percy Hedley Foundation); and members of The Careers & Enterprise Company SEND advisory group (Melvin Ruff, Enterprise Coordinator and Strategy Manager at Norfolk County Council, Greg Kirkman, Enterprise Adviser and Managing Director of Ensafe Consultants, National Grid, GrowthMesh, iCould, and Talentino).