

## Briefing Paper

March 2025

# Quality assurance of careers education and guidance in schools and colleges: a briefing for careers leaders across the UK

*David Andrews*



## Introduction

This briefing is the second in a series of papers produced by the CDI to support careers leaders in schools and colleges<sup>1</sup>. The role of careers leader includes leading the school or college's approach to quality assuring the careers programme.

This paper seeks to:

- explain what quality assurance is, in the context of careers education and guidance;
- examine the purposes of quality assurance;
- discuss various approaches to quality assurance;
- introduce the frameworks, standards and tools for quality assurance currently available in each of the four UK countries.

Overall the aims of the briefing are to help careers leaders decide how they want to go about quality assuring their careers provision and to signpost careers leaders to further references and sources of information.

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1. The first in the series, [Work-based learning: A briefing for schools](#), was published in October 2024 and can be found here [Work-based learning briefing - Career Development Institute \(thecdi.net\)](#)





## What is quality assurance?

The term 'quality assurance' simply describes a process, or range of processes, that can be used to check what is being delivered and how it is being delivered (Hooley & Rice, 2018).

The foundation of quality assurance is being sure that the careers programme is meeting all the statutory requirements and additional expectations, but this in itself represents only a limited approach. Careers leaders will want their programmes to be the best, and most effective, they can be. This will mean setting their approach to quality assurance in the context of continuous improvement and asking questions not only about 'are we doing what we are required to do?' but also about 'are we providing what our pupils and students need?', 'how well have these activities worked?', 'what impact have they had on the pupils and students?' and 'what should we change for next time?' (Andrews & Hooley, 2025). In the best of practice the quality assurance process should result in a report on the current position and an action plan for further development.

A lot of the early thinking about quality assurance in careers education and guidance came from approaches used in manufacturing industry, where quality standards were set, and measured, for both the product and the processes by which the product was made. In the context of careers education and guidance in schools and colleges the 'product' can be viewed as the pupils or students and their career readiness and the 'process' is the careers programme which enables the pupils or students to become career-ready. Careers leaders will need to determine standards for both the careers programme and standards for what they want learners to achieve. The quality assurance process will then support the careers leader in assessing the extent to which the standards are being met and to identify what improvements they need to put in place.

Defining quality standards for careers programmes is a subjective process, although there is a general consensus about what good looks like. Fortunately there are a number of quality frameworks and tools that have been developed across the UK to assist careers leaders and details of these can be found in the country-by-country sections later in this briefing.

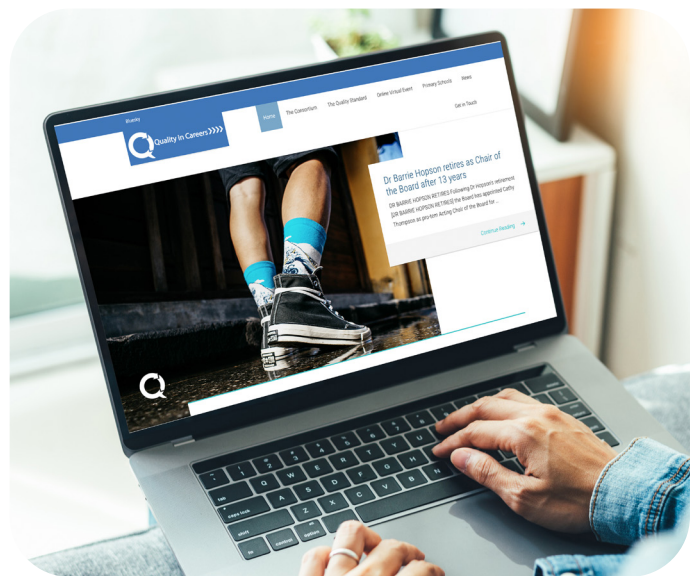
Quality assurance can be viewed as a continuous cycle of monitoring, review, evaluation and development. The three processes of monitoring, review and evaluation are often used inter-changeably, or elided into a single process, when they are, however, three different but related processes, each involving key questions of practice. Monitoring is about whether what was planned took place; review is about how the providers of the activities think, on reflection, the activities went; evaluation is about what impact the activities had on the pupils and students. Together they provide the foundation for identifying future developments.

Planning for improvement involves examining the results from the monitoring, review and evaluation phases of the quality assurance cycle and drawing on research and evidence-based practice into what works to determine what changes to put in place next.

## Purposes of quality assurance

There are a number of reasons why a school or college might invest time in quality assuring its careers programme. These include:

- Compliance – are we doing what we are required and expected to do?
- Coverage – are we providing what is considered best practice?
- Consistency – are we delivering the same universal and differentiated programme over time, and for each and every young person?
- Continuous improvement – what is the impact of our programme and how could we do things better next time?



In none of the four UK countries are schools required to quality assure their careers provision: it is for schools themselves to decide what approach to take. The CDI advocates a process that focuses primarily on continuous improvement but, at the same time, encompasses elements of compliance, coverage and consistency.

The situation for colleges is slightly different. In England, for example, all FE colleges are required to achieve the matrix Standard for IAG but colleges will adopt a wider approach to quality assurance that includes complying with the matrix Standard but set in the context of internal college processes.

Quality assurance can also serve other purposes, such as accountability. The careers leader may be expected to report to the senior leaders and governors who have responsibility for ensuring that the school or college is meeting its legal requirements and who determine the resources for the careers programme. This may not necessitate an additional, separate element to the quality assurance process but will require the careers leader to present reports to the senior leadership team and/or governing body.

Schools and colleges may also want to use quality assurance as a marketing or promotional device through seeking accreditation against an external standard.

## Quality assurance processes

Clarifying what purpose, or purposes, the school or college wants its quality assurance process to serve is the first step towards designing the approach in detail. There are then further issues to consider.

### Internal v. external

It is possible to rely solely on external processes of quality assurance. All schools and colleges are subject to formal inspections and the various frameworks used across the UK include scrutiny of the careers provision. Such inspections will provide some feedback on the quality of the programme but it is unlikely that this will be sufficient in scope, or frequency, to be used as a basis for a detailed development plan. Schools and colleges may choose to seek assessment against one of the external quality standards, which would provide a more comprehensive report on the provision, and there is evidence to show that the use of such standards does lead to improved practice (Hooley, Matheson & Watts, 2014).

However, the quality assurance process for careers education and guidance is likely to have the greatest impact on improvement if it is integrated into the school or college's own internal processes for quality assurance. By this we mean not only developing an internal quality assurance process but also building it into the mainstream quality assurance processes in the school or college. Examples include: making sure that the delivery of careers education, whether planned as discrete lessons or within other subjects, is monitored in the same way as other lessons and activities; making sure that the careers team prepares a review and development plan at the same time as other departments prepare their plans, and that the plan feeds into the whole school or college improvement plan; making sure that the careers leader has access to professional development for the role, including how to quality assure provision; making sure that the careers leader is included in the regular cycle of reporting to governors.

As well as enhancing the potential for continuous improvement, establishing an internal process will help the school or college prepare for inspections and for assessment against any external standard or framework.

### Scope

The next thing to determine is the scope of the process. Should the focus be on the inputs and activities provided (i.e. the programme that the school or college puts in place), the outputs and outcomes (i.e. what the programme sets out to achieve for the pupils or students), the processes (i.e. how the programme is planned, delivered and evaluated) or, ideally, all of the above?

A quality assurance process that concentrates only on inputs, and processes to a certain extent, addresses issues of compliance, coverage and consistency but provides no feedback on impact. In terms of future development such an approach can lead to improved delivery but it will still not be possible to tell whether this has any more impact on pupils and students. To explore the effectiveness of the careers programme the quality assurance process has to look at outputs, such as student destinations, and outcomes, such as the achievement of intended learning outcomes.

A further consideration is whether the quality assurance process looks at only the activities provided by the school or college staff, or also those inputs provided by other partners such as the careers adviser and employers. Certainly in England, where schools are buying in the services of a careers adviser to provide independent career guidance, we would expect the school to want to check the quality of service it is paying for.

In the paper cited earlier, Hooley and Rice offer a typology of six domains that quality assurance can focus on. The table below gives examples of quality assurance activities in each domain when considering the context of careers programmes in schools and colleges.

Domain	QA activity
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking compliance with statutory duties</li> </ul>
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspection of provision</li> <li>• Evaluating provision against a recognised quality standard</li> </ul>
Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing internal QA processes</li> <li>• Regular review and development planning</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining a relevant professional qualification</li> <li>• Identifying, and planning to meet, staff training needs</li> </ul>
Outputs and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessing pupils' and students' career-readiness</li> <li>• Reviewing destinations</li> </ul>
Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting feedback from pupils, students, parents, employers</li> </ul>

Thinking about which domains to focus on should both aid the design of the quality assurance process and help to decide which of the available frameworks and tools to use.

### Depth

A further issue is the depth of the process. Referring back to the earlier distinction between monitoring, review and evaluation, each part of the cycle requires a different level of action. There is a general view that all aspects of the programme should be monitored, to check that they have taken place. Ideally every activity should also be reviewed by the people involved in delivering it. Evaluation requires a greater investment of time, as it involves assessing what the pupils and students have gained from the activity in order to inform judgements about impact. Therefore, while the whole of the programme should be monitored and reviewed at least annually, a school or college may choose to evaluate only a part of its programme each year or, if they are to evaluate the entire programme, to do so once every two or three years.

Quality assurance should be proportionate. Rather than try to do everything, careers leaders should concentrate on areas that they feel are priorities for attention and scrutinise them well.

## Standards and frameworks

There is no single, agreed international standard for what constitutes good quality careers education and guidance in schools and colleges. Different countries have developed their own guidelines of good practice, although they generally promote similar activities and outcomes. As long as schools and colleges follow the statutory requirements set by their respective governments, and the criteria set out in any standard they are required to work to (such as relevant sections of the applicable inspection framework), they are free to set their own quality checklists and use whatever external standards are available to them.

The CDI represents career development professionals across the UK. Each of the four countries has its own frameworks, standards and tools. The following pages describe what is available and provide links for further information.

Please note that these various resources change over time, as quality assurance policies, processes and materials are frequently reviewed and subsequently revised or replaced. The sections that follow on each of the four countries will be updated when new frameworks, standards and tools are introduced: it is important therefore to check the date at the front of this Briefing to make sure that you are reading the latest version.

## Footnote on professionalism and professional qualifications

Some countries take a different approach to quality. Instead of requiring, or least encouraging, schools and colleges to adhere to sets of standards, the emphasis is on professionalising the roles of people leading the programmes. The key professionals are required to hold a designated qualification and then trusted to follow the good practice promoted in their training and continuing professional development. Often frameworks and standards are still used, but as supportive documents rather than the main driver of quality.

## Using this Briefing

The whole quality assurance system is complex, with different organisations offering standards, frameworks and processes for schools and colleges to use. These tools are complementary but can sometimes seem to be in competition. While more could be done to bring them together, this paper should help careers leaders to navigate their way around the system.





# Requirements and quality frameworks, standards and tools in England

## Legal requirements and additional expectations

There are two main statutory duties placed on schools in England with regard to careers education and guidance. Firstly, under the provider access legislation, all schools and academies are required to provide opportunities for a range of education and training providers to access all pupils in years 8 to 13, to inform them about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. They are required to provide a minimum of six such encounters: two in years 8 or 9; two more in years 10 or 11; a further two in years 12 or 13. Secondly, all schools and academies must secure access to independent careers guidance for pupils in years 7 to 13.

Further education and sixth form colleges similarly have two legal requirements. Firstly, under their funding agreements, colleges are required to provide students with access to independent careers guidance. Secondly, they must provide all students with guidance materials and a wide range of up-to-date reference materials relating to careers education and guidance opportunities. These duties apply to all students in college up to and including the age of 18 and students up to the age of 25 with a current Education, Health & Care Plan. In addition, all FE colleges in receipt of funding for adult education are required to be matrix accredited.

The Department for Education (DfE) requires maintained schools, and expects academies and colleges, to publish details of their careers programme on their website, including the name and contact details of the careers leader.

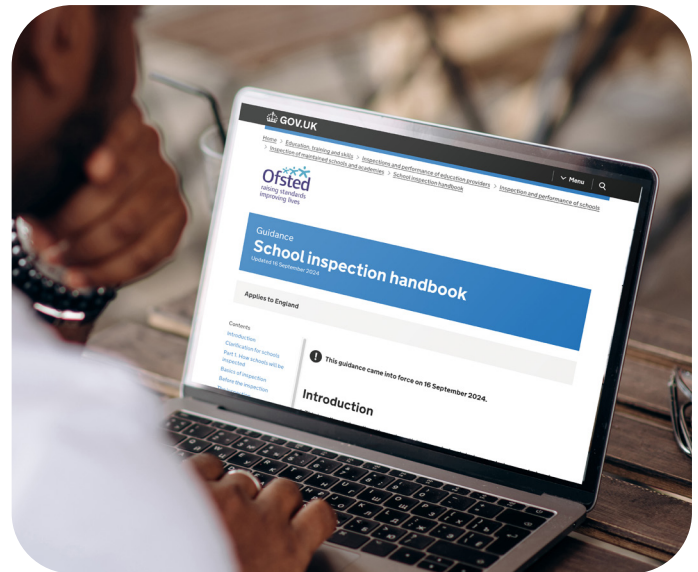
In addition to these statutory requirements, the DfE expects all secondary schools and colleges to use the Gatsby Benchmarks as a framework to review and develop their careers programme. The Benchmarks are at the heart of the system in England. The overwhelming majority of schools and colleges measure regularly their progress against them and in the inspection process Ofsted looks at how schools and colleges use the Benchmarks. The Benchmarks support the fulfilment of the legal requirements but extend beyond them to cover the full range of activities that should be included in a good careers programme. Within Benchmark 1 there is an expectation that schools and colleges should have in place a quality assurance process. They are encouraged to invite feedback from young people, parents, teachers and employers which should feed into the regular evaluation and development planning.

The DfE also strongly recommends all schools and colleges to work towards the national quality award, the Quality in Careers Standard. The Quality in Careers Standard looks for evidence of the impact of the inputs promoted by the Benchmarks in securing career-related learning outcomes for students.

All FE colleges in England are required to achieve the matrix Standard accreditation for information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. This requirement is waived for sixth form colleges unless they are in receipt of funding for adult education. Additionally, schools and colleges that commission personal career guidance are advised to check whether the organisation from which they are proposing to purchase services is matrix accredited, as an indicator of quality.

Full details of the above requirements and expectations of schools and colleges can be found in the DfE's Statutory Guidance [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers). The current version is January 2023 but we anticipate that it will be reviewed again in spring 2025.

The requirements and expectations listed here do not apply to independent schools but many such schools choose to follow the suggested good practice. It is also worth noting that the handbook for the inspection of independent schools encourages inspectors to look at whether the school engages with the Gatsby Benchmarks.



## Inspection frameworks

Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework [\[Education inspection framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)\]](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-inspection-framework) sets out how Ofsted inspects maintained schools, academies and colleges. Inspectors make graded judgements on four key areas:

- quality of education;
- behaviour and attitudes;
- personal development;
- leadership and management.

Although the main focus on careers comes as part of the personal development judgement, aspects of careers education and guidance are considered in other areas as well. For example, when making a judgement on the quality of education, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which “learners are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training”. When making a judgement on the personal development of learners, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which “at each stage of education, the provider prepares learners for future success in their next steps.”

The inspection handbooks for each type of provider give more detailed guidance on what inspectors look for. The school handbook [\[School inspection handbook - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)\]](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-inspection-handbook) states that assessing the quality of careers provision will include looking at:

- the quality of the unbiased careers advice and guidance provided

to pupils;

- the school's implementation of the provider access arrangements to enable a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils in years 8 to 13;
- how the school provides good-quality, meaningful opportunities for pupils to encounter the world of work;
- the school's use of the Gatsby Benchmarks;
- the school's published information about its careers provision.

The handbook for further education and skills [[Further education and skills inspection handbook - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)] states that when forming judgements about personal development. Inspectors will focus on the most significant dimensions, including:

- providing 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;
- supporting readiness for the next phase of education, training or employment so that learners can make the transition to the next stage successfully.

While Ofsted inspectors are interested in how a school or college uses the Gatsby Benchmarks they will look in particular for evidence of impact.

Independent schools in England are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Its inspection framework [[Inspection framework: Independent Schools Inspectorate \(isi.net\)](#)] requires inspectors to report under four main headings, which are preceded by a summary of findings and followed by a final section on safeguarding. The four main sections are:

- leadership and management, and governance;
- pupils' education, training and recreation;
- pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- pupils' social and economic wellbeing and contribution to society.

The evaluation of careers provision comes in the fourth section. Inspectors look at the extent to which the school "gives pupils of secondary age access to accurate, up-to-date, impartial careers guidance so that they are able to make informed choices about a broad range of careers options and which helps them to fulfil their potential." Information about the sources of evidence that inspectors will consider in relation to careers guidance can be found in [ISI's inspection handbook](#)

## Quality standards, frameworks and tools

In England there are six main frameworks, tools and standards to support quality assurance processes for careers education and guidance in schools and colleges. With the exception of the matrix Standard in FE colleges, none are compulsory: it is for careers leaders to decide which to use, and when, to best serve their purposes. The brief descriptions that follow are to help careers leaders with those decisions but in each case we recommend that you also use the links provided to find further information.

## The Gatsby Benchmarks

The Gatsby Benchmarks were developed by The Gatsby Charitable Foundation in 2014 and are based on international research into good practice in careers education and guidance. The framework of eight Benchmarks sets out the recommended elements of a good quality school or college careers programme, designed to have a positive impact on the career-readiness of young people. The Benchmarks were incorporated into the DfE's Careers Strategy in 2017 and are now used by the vast majority of schools and colleges in England. There is also growing interest from other countries.

The Benchmarks have recently been reviewed and the revised and updated framework can be found at [Updated Benchmarks Overview | Gatsby Benchmarks](#)



## Compass and Compass+

Compass is a free digital tool, developed by The Careers & Enterprise Company in partnership with the Gatsby Foundation, which enables a school or college to self-review its careers programme against the Gatsby Benchmarks. Although it can be completed by the careers leader on their own, greater benefit can be gained if a small team comprising, say, the careers leader, the careers adviser and the enterprise adviser, work through the tool together. The tool is useful for reviewing what is in place and progress towards the Benchmarks over time.

The tool has been integrated into Compass+, a free management information system available from The Careers & Enterprise Company, which enables a school to track pupils' and students' progress through the careers programme at an individual level [Compass+ | CEC Resource Directory \(careersandenterprise.co.uk\)](#). This opens up the potential to move from review to evaluation.



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# Career development framework

*How to have the career that you want*

Career describes our journey through life, learning and work. We need to actively develop our careers to make the best of them. This process of career development takes skill as well as knowledge and the right attitude. You will need to work on these career development skills throughout your life.

The Career Development Institute has undertaken extensive research and consulted with career development experts and practitioners to identify the six career development skills that you need to have the career that you want.

**Work on your career development skills**

Whether you are in education, in work, unemployed or involved in caring or voluntary activity there will always be opportunities to work on your career development skills.

Career development skills can be improved by taking courses, trying new things, learning through doing, reading and engaging with the media and by reflecting on what you do well (and not so well).

Try and talk about your career with as many people as possible and take the opportunity to see a registered career professional when you can.

*"We've consistently advocated the use of the CDI Framework in our national assessment and accreditation criteria for the Quality in Careers Standard."*

Paul A. Chubb MBE  
Director, Quality in Careers



## Career Development Framework (CDI)

While schools and colleges are expected to use the Gatsby Benchmarks as a framework for planning their careers programme, they are also encouraged to link these 'inputs' and activities to a set of learning outcomes. It is for schools and colleges to determine their own learning outcomes, taking into account the needs of their pupils and students and the communities they serve. But without looking at learning outcomes it is impossible to make any judgements about impact.

The CDI has developed a recommended framework of learning outcomes for each key stage [CDI Framework - Career Development Institute \(theccdi.net\)](https://www.theccdi.net). The outcomes set out the suggested knowledge, skills and attitudes pupils and students should be developing under six broad aims as they progress from age 4 to 19. Schools and colleges can use the framework as a starting point for determining the learning outcomes for their programme. It is much easier to take someone else's list and modify it than have to start with a blank sheet of paper. Once the intended learning outcomes have been clarified, the careers leader can begin to assess pupils' and students' achievement of those outcomes and evaluate the impact of the programme, using the audit tools that accompany the framework.

## Careers Impact System

Over the past two years The Careers & Enterprise Company has developed and piloted an approach to evaluating the impact of a school or college's careers programme. The tool is based on a 'maturity model'. The Gatsby Benchmarks are at the core of the Impact System. There are six themes, which cover the eight Benchmarks, and for each element of each theme there are four statements which represent levels of progress towards full maturity in leadership of careers. [Careers Impact System | The Careers and Enterprise Company](https://www.thececompany.com/careers-impact-system)

The system has been developed to support the process of continuous improvement. The focus is on self-evaluation and facilitated peer-to-peer reviews. At an individual school or college level, the process of self-evaluation, which is being referred to as an internal leadership review, results not in a report but a plan of action. Only a limited number of external ('expert reviews') will be conducted each year to a small sample of schools and colleges, as part of the moderation process for peer-to-peer reviews.

The system is being rolled out nationally through the careers hubs. There is no cost to the school or college.

## Quality in Careers Standard

The Quality in Careers Standard is the national quality award for careers education and guidance in schools and colleges in England [Quality in Careers](https://www.qualityincareers.org/). It has been developed over the past ten years or more, building on the previous local standards and awards which originated in the 1990s. The award is owned and managed by a consortium comprising the main professional associations for school and college leaders, and two careers sector bodies, the CDI and Careers England.

The award seeks to recognise and celebrate good quality careers education and guidance in schools and colleges. The national accreditation criteria are closely aligned to the Gatsby Benchmarks. The award is voluntary but the DfE strongly recommends that all schools and colleges should work towards the Standard. Careers leaders seeking accreditation need to approach one of the licensed awarding bodies. The process typically involves compiling a portfolio of evidence, followed by an assessment visit by an external assessor, and culminates in a final report and recommendations for development. The school or college is charged a fee to cover the cost of assessment.



The award contributes to the process of continuous improvement, both through preparing for the assessment and acting on the recommendations in the report. And there is nothing to prevent a school or college downloading the national accreditation criteria and using them for self-evaluation or a peer-to-peer review.

There is a lot of synergy between the Quality in Careers Standard and the Careers Impact System. Schools and colleges that discover through the Impact System that they are performing well may decide they want to gain national recognition for their programme. Similarly, schools and colleges seeking accreditation through the Standard will find the Impact System invaluable both when preparing for the assessment and planning ongoing improvement following accreditation.

The Quality in Careers Standard is used in both the state and independent sectors and beyond England it is also used in Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

### matrix Standard

The matrix Standard is the UK standard for information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. [Main home - The matrix Standard](#). It is owned by the DfE and delivered under contract by the Growth Company. The DfE requires all FE colleges, plus any sixth form colleges in receipt of funding for adult education, to hold the Standard. Because matrix is generic for all IAG services, many

colleges also use the Quality in Careers Standard to support the quality assurance of their careers provision for 16-18 year-old students. The two standards are mutually supportive, with matrix's focus on IAG and the Quality in Careers focus on careers education.

### Professionalising the role of careers leader

England has made some moves in this direction. There is a centrally-funded, national programme of professional training for careers leaders, managed by The Careers & Enterprise Company and delivered by a number of providers, including the CDI, working to a common specification, but there is no single professional qualification for the role. Although all schools and colleges must have a careers leader, the professional training is not mandatory but over 4,000 careers leaders have completed the programme in the past six years. [Careers Leader training | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)



# Requirements and quality frameworks, standards and tools in Northern Ireland

## Legal requirements and additional expectations

The careers system in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of both the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for the Economy (DfE). DE has responsibility for the policy and delivery of careers education in schools, while DfE has responsibility for the policy and delivery of an all-age careers guidance service provided by qualified careers advisers who work in partnership with schools.

Careers education is a statutory part of the curriculum in post-primary schools – it is part of the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) area of learning. The minimum content for each area of learning in the statutory curriculum, from foundation stage to key stage 4, is specified in [The Education \(Curriculum Minimum Content\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2007](#). One of the core objectives of the curriculum is to develop young people as contributors to the economy, and employability is a key element underpinning this objective. Making young people aware of career opportunities arising from specific disciplines and how to apply aspects of their learning in the world of work is a specified requirement in each area of learning and subject strand.

While schools may choose how to deliver LLW, they must ensure that the specified minimum requirements are met. At key stage 3 these requirements cover:

- work in the local and global economy;
- career management;
- enterprise and entrepreneurship;

At key stage 4 pupils should be enabled to:

- explore self-employment and identify relevant sources of support;
- examine the impact of globalisation on employment;
- investigate the recruitment and selection process, taking into account the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers;
- consider how employees might maintain an effective working environment;
- investigate the increasing social responsibility of business in the community;
- develop a personal career plan based on relevant information and guidance.

DE expects schools to continue to provide careers education in the post-16 phase, although schools are free to decide how this is delivered.

DE is currently working with the Northern Ireland Schools & Colleges Careers Association (NISCA) to develop a recommended curriculum framework for careers education, to support schools with planning a good quality programme that not only meets the minimum requirements but extends beyond them.

## Inspection frameworks

Schools and colleges in Northern Ireland are inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). The ETI's new inspection framework ([Empowering Improvement: New Framework for Inspection](#)) covers nine contributory areas, one of which is Environment, Society & Economy: this in turn includes 'impactful CEIAG and work-related learning'. Inspectors look at the extent to which meaningful CEIAG and work-related learning is provided along with opportunities to develop and apply skills, capabilities and dispositions.



## Quality standards, frameworks and tools

Northern Ireland does not currently have its own quality award or standard for careers education and guidance in schools and colleges. However, some schools choose to seek accreditation for their careers provision through the Quality in Careers Standard developed in England.

Careers guidance for young people is delivered through DfE's Careers Service, which has a statutory duty to provide careers guidance that is impartial and in the best interests of the person receiving it. To ensure quality, the Service is accredited with the matrix Standard

Schools are required to provide details of the steps taken in relation to careers education, and the provision of careers guidance, in the annual report from the board of governors to parents.

## Professionalising the role of careers leader

There is currently no national programme of accredited professional training for careers leaders in Northern Ireland. This is an area for development.



## Requirements and quality frameworks, standards and tools in Scotland

Scottish Government is currently taking forward reform consultation and analysis of the skills landscape. It is expected that an understanding of the direction of travel following this period of consultation will be known early in 2025. This section of the briefing is therefore a note of the current position and understanding, and will be subject to updating in 2025 as the career strategy 2020 and subsequent career review recommendations and reform are progressed.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills body delivering Scotland's career service in schools, in centres, community venues and online/telephone. The career services SDS provide are shaped by the Scottish Government's Career Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) Strategy and the refresh of the Youth Employment Strategy, which aligns with the recommendations of the Commission on Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (DYW).

Scottish Government published its second Career Strategy in February 2020. To take this strategy forward as part of the Young Person's Guarantee, SDS was tasked with undertaking a comprehensive, evidence-led, review of career services for young people in Scotland. This review was led by an independent programme board with members drawn from a wide range of key stakeholders in the career system and a specific focus on those with protected characteristics. The review concluded with a set of recommendations to be taken forward by the career eco-system under the support and direction of a Career Collaborative.

Education Scotland (ES) is a Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education/ Curriculum for Excellence. As an executive agency ES conducts inspection and reporting.

### Curriculum for Excellence – Career Education

The Career Education Standard (3-18) is one of a suite of three documents, along with Work Placements Standard and Guidance on School/Employer Partnerships. The standard clarifies expectations and provides helpful support and guidance [Career Education Standard 3-18](#). It is built on the comprehensive advice and guidance presented in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and throughout the Building the Curriculum series. It is designed to meet the entitlements of CfE. There is a particularly strong association with key messages contained in Building the Curriculum 4: skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

The standard recognises the journeys children and young people make as they learn about the world of work from the early years to the senior phase. It sets out what children and young people will learn and what parents/carers, teachers/practitioners, employers and SDS will do to support their learning. Implementation of the standard is expected to improve the quality and consistency of learning about work and careers.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced the establishment of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) for Scotland in December 2023. ES was commissioned by the Scottish Government to lead the work in April 2024. Career education is within this curriculum improvement cycle.



### Current Quality Arrangements and Inspection Frameworks

ES is the main inspection body in Scotland, and they developed the external quality arrangements for the review of CIAG services delivered by SDS. SDS career services are aligned with the local authority (LA) structure in Scotland: external reviews by ES are therefore carried out at local authority level. All 32 LA reviews were carried out between 2014 and 2021 and included an 18 month follow up to determine if sufficient progress had been made against main points for action.

It is likely that a revised approach will be developed and agreed in conjunction with the Career Collaborative which includes SDS along with other partners that deliver career services in Scotland. <https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/frwk14-external-quality-arrangements-review-of-ciag-services.pdf>

All schools within Scotland are subject to inspection by ES. The Career Education Standard and school career services delivered by SDS have been incorporated within school inspections [https://education.gov.scot/media/2swjmnbs/frwk2\\_hgios4.pdf](https://education.gov.scot/media/2swjmnbs/frwk2_hgios4.pdf).

SDS has agreed protocols in place with ES for input to school inspections.

Every secondary school inspection team has a post-16 HMI (His Majesty's Inspector) looking at the school's response to DYW and the impact this has on children and young people.

Using quality indicators and themes from *How good is our school?* 4th edition, the HMI will focus specifically on progress in areas such as:

- learning pathways;
- the types of vocational learning experiences available in the senior phase;
- the development of children and young people's career management skills;
- progression onto sustained positive destinations;
- the links with external partners, such as employers and colleges.

The focus of the inspection is clearly on the school, but discussions with the SDS local leadership is a critical component in helping the ES team to ascertain progress in all of the areas above.

The HMI also hold discussions with the local college(s), employers and other partners engaged in helping children and young people develop their career aspirations.

## SDS - Internal Quality Arrangements

SDS has adopted the EFQM model as its overarching excellence framework. This allows external assessment against the framework and benchmarking with other organisations across the globe. SDS secured 7-star recognition against the EFQM framework in March 2021.

SDS has developed a bespoke Delivering Excellence Framework that aligns fully with the ES Inspection Framework and the EFQM framework. All CIAG teams are required to carry out a self-evaluation against the Delivering Excellence Framework every three years (depending on risk). This was previously every two years until 2023 when a review concluded that excellent progress had been made in all teams e.g. all scored over 500 points. A risk-based approach was introduced against which each team is assessed annually to determine their level of risk, which in turn determines the frequency of their self-evaluation.

In preparation for self-evaluation, the team completes a Team Evaluation Document (TED) which sets out what and how they do things, and how well they do things. This is linked to the team's results report therefore showing a causal link between results and enablers. Through self-evaluation, teams identify areas for improvement and agree priority actions and owners to take forward those actions. Progress against these actions is tracked via the team's continuous improvement action plan (CIAP).

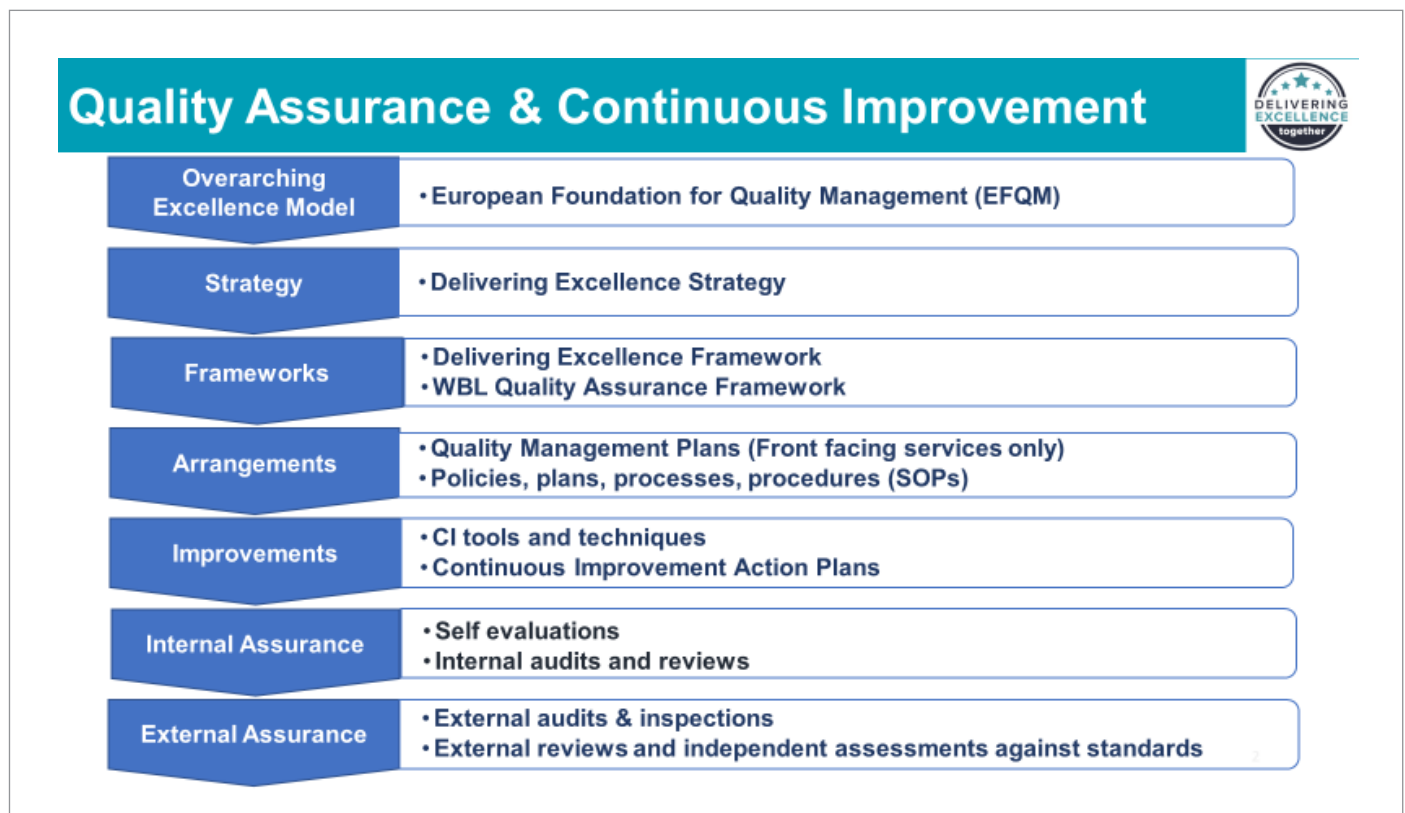
A Quality Management Plan (QMP) is in place for CIAG services and outlines governance, assurance and improvement arrangements. This plan is owned by the CIAG leadership team.



The Quality Assurance & Improvement (QA&I) team within SDS are responsible for carrying out effectiveness reviews of the QMP e.g. is the QMP delivering what is intended in terms of driving quality, consistency and improvement?

The most recent QMP review (April 2023) recommendations have been embedded within the CIAG Delivering Customer Excellence (DCE) programme. All SDS services are subject to internal audit and topics are agreed with the CIAG leadership team.

The QA&I team also provide Continuous Improvement (CI) training for staff and support CI projects using CI tools and techniques.





# Requirements and quality frameworks, standards and tools in Wales

## Legal requirements and additional expectations

The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act) established the Curriculum for Wales in law and replaced the national curriculum. Within the Curriculum for Wales careers and work related experiences (CWRE) is a mandatory, cross-cutting theme.

Guidance on how to develop a school or setting's curriculum to incorporate CWRE is contained within the 'designing your curriculum' section of this Framework guidance, as well as for each area of learning & experience. The guidance for CWRE is statutory and is issued under section 71 of the Act <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/summary-of-legislation#careers-and-work-related-experiences>. Those responsible for designing and developing CWRE must read and have regard to this guidance when designing their curriculum. Under the Act, this guidance is statutory for the following:

- the head teacher of a maintained school or a maintained nursery school;
- the governing body of a maintained school or a maintained nursery school;
- a provider of funded non-maintained nursery education;
- the teacher in charge of a pupil referral unit;
- the management committee for a pupil referral unit;
- a person who provides teaching and learning for a child, otherwise than at a maintained school, maintained nursery school or pupil referral unit (EOTAS)
- a local authority in Wales.

## Inspection frameworks

Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, launched their latest framework in 2024. In the framework for maintained schools and pupil referral units, whilst there is no specific reference to how careers or CWRE will be inspected, this element falls under the second of three inspection areas, 'Well-being, care, support and guidance'.

This inspection area asks: "How effective is the care, support and guidance the school/PRU provides in ensuring that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to progress?" and also seeks to identify if pupils:

- are safe and secure;
- attend school regularly;
- are respected and fairly treated;
- develop leadership skills and take on responsibility;
- receive any additional guidance or support they require relating to the next steps in their development.

Within this inspection area, inspectors should evaluate how well teachers and other practitioners:

- co-ordinate suitable support for pupils with additional learning needs, including working in partnership with external agencies when appropriate;
- provide pupils with effective and impartial advice relating to the next steps in their development, for example in relation to:
  - opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life;
  - their transition to the next phase of learning.



<https://estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2024-07/What%20We%20Inspect%20-%202024%20Maintained%20Schools%20and%20PRUs.pdf>

In the framework for further education colleges, careers provision falls under the second of three inspection areas, 'Well-being, care, support and guidance'. More specifically, there is a section on 'the effectiveness of learner support, advice and guidance to help learners develop as individuals and overcome any disadvantage they may face'. Colleges are assessed to the extent to which they:

- provide impartial guidance and advice about the full range of education and training pathways available to students, including before they join the college and as they prepare to progress to further education, higher education or training;
- provide impartial guidance and advice, either directly or via external agencies, about their career options and the world of work;
- guide them as they prepare to transition to the next phase of learning; employment, and independent living where relevant.

[Guidance handbook for the inspection of FE colleges - 2018](#)

## Quality standards and frameworks

### Careers Wales Quality Award (CWQA)

Careers Wales is currently piloting the CWQA with 47 schools and settings across Wales <https://careerswales.gov.wales/education-and-teaching-professionals/careers-wales-quality-award-pilot>. It has been designed to align with the Curriculum for Wales for 3-16 year olds and aims to support schools to create high quality careers and work-related experiences (CWRE).

Each school has ongoing support from a Careers Wales CWRE curriculum coordinator who provides bespoke consultancy and training. Careers Wales also provides a moderation role in assessing all criteria submitted for the CWQA.

The CWQA has 3 stages, each with a different focus:

- Stage 1 – Leadership

This stage is about formulating and maintaining the commitment to lead the development of CWRE.

- Stage 2 – Development

This stage is about realising CWRE in the curriculum through professional learning, stakeholder engagement and effective teaching and learning.

- Stage 3 – Impact

This stage is about demonstrating impact in CWRE.

### The Careers Development Award (Post 16)

Starting in 2010, Careers Wales supported secondary schools, settings, and FE colleges to achieve accreditation of the Careers Wales Mark (CWM), an improvement-based award linked to the 2008 Careers and World of Work (CWOW) framework. With the launch of the Curriculum for Wales from September 2022, careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) statutory guidance replaced the existing CWOW framework for learners aged 3-16: however, the CWOW framework is still statutory for 16-19 year old learners.

In order to continue to provide a framework and quality standards for learners aged 16-19, Careers Wales has updated the Careers Wales Mark and renamed and relaunched the award as “The Careers Development Award for FE colleges and 16-19 providers”. <https://careerswales.gov.wales/education-and-teaching-professionals/careers-development-award>. This award has been designed by Careers Wales to recognise an educational establishment’s commitment to continuous quality improvement.

The Award contributes to:

- the ‘learning core’ of the 14-19 Learning Pathways;
- Estyn’s drive to build capacity for self-evaluation and improvement;
- aspects of the Common Inspection Framework (CIF).





### Welsh Government Information and Advice Quality Framework (IAQF)

The IAQF Wales <https://www.gov.wales/information-and-advice-quality-framework> has been developed by the Welsh Government in recognition of the important role that information and advice play in supporting the delivery of two of its strategic goals:

- tackling poverty and promoting financial inclusion;
- promoting equality and building cohesive communities.

All services and organisations that deliver information and advice are encouraged, but not required, to consider IAQF accreditation. Accreditation covers a period of three years, after which any information and advice service that wishes to maintain its accreditation is required to undertake a full audit.

The matrix Standard for IAG services, owned by the DfE in England and used to accredit the quality of IAG in colleges, has been approved by the Welsh Government. Colleges in Wales that are matrix accredited can achieve the Welsh Government's Information and Advice Quality Framework (IAQF) provided that they also meet the additional requirements such as a commitment to provide bilingual services.

### School Improvement

The Welsh Government has published formal guidance on school improvement in Wales [School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability - Hwb](#). The approach to school improvement is based on:

- robust, evidence-based self-evaluation leading to individual school and system wide improvement;
- accountability through governing bodies, local authorities and ultimately through the inspection process described in the guidance framework (see earlier);
- transparency through the publication of relevant data and information at a national, sub-national and school level to secure public confidence.

As a mandatory, cross-cutting theme in Curriculum for Wales, there is an expectation that CWRE is included in this approach.

More recently, Welsh Government has published statutory 14-16 learning guidance [14 to 16 learning guidance - Hwb](#). This guidance introduces a learner entitlement based on four components:-

- qualifications in literacy and numeracy;
- qualifications to encourage breadth;
- wider learning and experiences across the curriculum;
- reflections on learning and progress and post-16 planning.

CWRE is identified as a critical aspect of ensuring that learners are prepared for their next steps post 16 and schools are specifically asked to self-evaluate learner progress across all four components of the learner entitlement.

### Professionalising the role of careers leader

The Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance highlights that schools and settings should ensure their staff engage in appropriate and relevant professional learning opportunities to help CWRE become effectively integrated in their curriculum.



Practitioners are also encouraged to undertake training opportunities offered by employers and other organisations, to help them learn about the latest developments in the world of work. In order to support schools and settings with this, Careers Wales offers a range of professional learning opportunities for careers leaders and other school staff.

### Level 6 Careers Leadership Qualification

Careers Wales annually delivers an accredited Level 6 qualification in careers leadership to support practitioners embed careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) across their curriculum [Level 6 Careers Leadership Qualification | Careers Wales \(gov.wales\)](#). Delivered by Careers Wales, and endorsed by the National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales, the qualification supports schools as learning organisations and the professional standards for teaching and leadership.

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## Acknowledgements

This briefing was produced by the CDI's Community of Interest for Careers Education (COICE).

The CDI is grateful to colleagues in the Northern Ireland Schools & Colleges Careers Association (NISCA) and officials from the NI Department of Education and the NI Department for the Economy, for help with drafting the section on quality assurance policy and practice in Northern Ireland.

We are also grateful to COICE members Sandra Cheyne, National CIAG Policy & Professional Practice Lead Skills Development Scotland, and Sacha Davies, Operational Development Manager Careers Wales, for drafting the sections on QA policy and practice in, respectively, Scotland and Wales.

## About the author

David Andrews is a Life Member of the CDI, a Fellow of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) and co-author of *The Careers Leader Handbook*.





Ground Floor,  
Cophall House,  
1 New Road,  
Stourbridge,  
West Midlands  
DY8 1PH

e: [hq@thecdi.net](mailto:hq@thecdi.net)  
t: 01384 445627

[thecdi.net](http://thecdi.net)