EDUCATION OBSERVATORY

Deep dive on Career Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and employer education/provider relationships in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

Summary of Stage 2 report: review of employer, education provider and adult and young people engagement

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EDUCATION OBSERVATORY

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Stage 2 - Aims

- Investigate how employers are working with education, training and skills providers across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire particularly in relation to work experience and work placements; identifying any issues or concerns; and considering examples of best practice.

- Explore the effectiveness and appropriateness of CEIAG in relation to how young people and adults use this information when making choices about their career pathways.

- Engage three stakeholder groups: employers; education, training and skills providers; young people and adults.

Stage 2 - Method

Mix of interviews, surveys and forum group discussions across stakeholder groups:

5 x in-depth interviews with employers (including Cornerstone organisations) plus 16 x employer participants via survey

12 x in-depth interviews across education, training and skills providers plus 2 x Career Leads from schools via survey

232 x students across schools and colleges via survey

23 x student participants via forum groups (Years 11-13, SEND, at risk of NEET, gifted and talented, deprived/FSM)

53 x student participants via forum groups (Level 3 vocational pathways at college level)

15 x young people and adults via forum groups (study programmes, Kickstart scheme, apprenticeships)

Employment sectors engaged

- Banking and Finance
- Business Support Services
- Charity Work
- Construction
- Education and Training
- Group Function – Agriculture, Modular Construction and Property Investments
- Hairdressing
- Health and Social Care
- Housing
- Manufacturing
- Medical Communications (Professional Services)
- Property Investment

Headline research questions: employers

- What are the challenges faced by employers in their ability to work with education providers?

- At what level of education do employers want to engage and for what purpose, for example apprenticeships, traineeships, T-Levels, Degree, Kickstart scheme etc.?

- Are employers familiar with careers advice and guidance services and how do they engage with them?

- Do employers feel it would be helpful if a 'Kitemark' system were established for work placements, to recognise the quality of its CEIAG offer to young people and adults?

- Are employers aware of the range of Government and local schemes supporting people into work?

- How can the cohesion and coordination of the current work placement offer be improved?

- How effective is the Careers Hub model for employers?

Headline research questions: education, training and skills providers

- How would providers like to engage with employers in delivering CEIAG and work placements/experience such as through government skills and education programmes including apprenticeships, traineeships, T-Levels, Kickstart scheme etc.?

- Do providers face challenges in sourcing and managing placements, including apprenticeships, traineeships, T-Levels, Kickstart scheme etc.?

- Do providers feel it would be helpful to provide a Kitemark recognising employers who provide high quality placements?

- Do providers feel that the Gatsby benchmarks work for supporting engagement with employers and routes into employment?

- Can providers navigate the careers advice and guidance support and use it effectively in supporting children and young people?

- How can the cohesion and coordination of the current work placement offer be improved?

- How do approaches to work placements and CEIAG vary in and between colleges and schools?

- What does work placement provision and support for mature learners look like?

- How effective is the Careers Hub model for schools, colleges and other training and skills providers?

Headline research questions: young people and adults

- What CEIAG do young people/adults receive and how influential is it, to guide careers choices?

- Do young people/adults feel there is anything that could be improved in the CEIAG they receive?

- Do pupils/students participate in placements or work experience, and do they find this activity useful?

- Do pupils/students feel that placements or work experience could be improved?

- How do pupils/students use the CEIAG and/or work placement/experience they receive to support career choices?

- What are the most important enabling factors and barriers in relation to work placements and CEIAG from the perspective of learners?

- To what extent do the views of, and support for, mature learners in these areas differ in comparison with younger people?

- The perspectives of, and existing work placement provision and support for, mature learners?

Key findings:
challenges of employers working together with education, training and skills providers and engagement with the Careers Hub

- Employers, and education providers, face a complicated environment of schemes and information, which they struggle to navigate.

- Bias and stigma persists around some routes and occupations.

- Greater depth and breadth of CEIAG knowledge are needed to meet local and sector skills shortages, specifically re alternative vocational pathways and career options.

- The Enterprise Adviser (EA) role in companies is critical in getting information to schools and facilitating effective working relationships between employers and education, training and skills providers.

- The Careers Hub creates opportunities for schools to share practice, resources and access funding for training.

- Employers are becoming more involved in curriculum design (which is important re skills).

- Young people need to be more 'work ready' for both work placements and employment

Key findings: engagement with wider skills programmes

- Systems are bureaucratic, with information spread across too many places.

- Apprenticeships are the most embedded of the programmes but there are mixed views dependent upon historical 'sectoral' awareness of apprenticeships (construction, health and social care).

- Brokerage is required across employers and education providers to enable collaboration that identifies regional skills gaps and designs bespoke pathways to address them.

- Higher level apprenticeships are deemed important but greater flexibility is needed in curriculum design and delivery.

- There has been limited engagement with Kickstart. However, some employers regard it as a positive recruitment opportunity and Stoke-on-Trent Job Centre was praised for its approach and support.

- Lack of breadth (routes) in CEIAG is preventing more engagement from young people and adults.

- T-levels raise concerns around extended placements and competition with other work experience demands from schools and colleges.

- Entrepreneurship remains under-developed and under-valued as a potential route.

Key findings: work placements and work experience

- SMEs struggle to offer placements (absorptive capacity).

- More flexibility is needed around scheduling placements.

- Employers are struggling to accommodate needs and anticipate greater difficulties as T-levels develop.

- The hybrid work placement model that arose during the pandemic has potential to be developed further e.g. involving virtual placements, employers in schools, taster days.

- Many work experiences/placements lack value for young people and adults e.g. fail to understand their requirements, do not include meaningful tasks, offer poor feedback.

- On-site placements need more structure and consistency e.g. re activity records, reflections, mentoring and tracking.

- A wide range of Apps and platforms is used across education providers, but not all are accessible (e.g. costs attached), which has created an inequitable landscape.

Key findings: Kitemark proposal

- Viewed as good idea in principle but concerns over the amount of potential bureaucracy, costs and difficulties for SMEs to 'manage'.

- Seen as another 'tick box' exercise.

- Too many schemes already out there.

- Consider more inventive ways of ensuring quality of work experience.

- Focus on 'quality of experience' as being the 'norm' (potential to have a review system such as Trust Pilot, TripAdvisor).

Key findings: engagement with Gatsby benchmarks

- Familiarity for employers restricted to where there are EAs.

- Potential to keep CEIAG high on the agenda.

- Compass and Compass Plus being used effectively by some schools - colleges would like access to Compass Plus for monitoring.

- Concerns around interpretation of criteria – need for realistic expectations (not achieving 100% in everything).

Key findings: young people and adults' engagement with CEIAG

- Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire broadly align with national picture of CEIAG – provided at right time, right amount

- However, bias is toward traditional academic routes and CEIAG tends to offer limited information around vocational/ trade options, especially in schools.

- Educational establishments are at different stages of engagement with CEIAG, employers and the Careers Hub.

- Variable availability and quality of CEIAG – career leads, bought-in services, external sources.

- Challenges for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire around social mobility and travel.

- Need for 'work-ready' and 'life-ready' skills to be taught at school. (Transversal)

- Inequitable distribution of access to Apps and platforms.

Recommended Options:
challenges of working together and Careers hub engagement

Develop a strengthened unit (possibly Careers Hub and EA network) to:

- Provide greater connectivity between stakeholders

- Identify local and regional skills shortages

- Develop 'brokerage' approach to design and deliver flexible pathways that can address skills shortages, closely aligned to the recently commissioned SCC brokerage service

- Offer funded and non-funded short courses/bespoke CPD designed to target skills gaps;

- Identify funding to support local projects addressing social mobility

- Develop a central portal with full breadth of relevant CEIAG options & timely labour market information

- Strategic review of bias and stereotyping across sectors to identify strategies to address them.

Recommended Options:
engagement with wider skills programmes/ knowledge of schemes

Need to address these in combination:

- Create and develop website/portal as 'one-stop shop' for employers to access full breadth of information about schemes and pathways; (route maps) – is closely aligned to the recently SCC commissioned PDMS website

- Review higher-level apprenticeships and explore options for more modular approach

- Use EAs and Careers Hubs to develop information targeted at raising parental awareness and dispelling misconceptions about vocational pathways

- Broaden awareness of offer to highlight potential of wider skills programmes for adults looking to upskill or make career change.

- Consider issues around T-levels alongside feedback re work experience issues.

Recommended Options: work placements/ work experience

1. Develop framework/toolkit to support all, but particularly SMEs, to ensure standardised quality of placement:

- Create portal with standardised templates to create permanent record

- Explore options to develop a digital 'work experience passport'.

- Portal could also provide access for employers to online CPD in coaching and mentoring trainees.

2. Build on innovative work placement practice during pandemic:

- Use end-of-year weeks identified for 'off-curriculum' work experience to develop hybrid approach further

- Use Careers Hub to draw together case studies of innovative local practice

- Develop more flexible offer to e.g. taster days, workshop events, more engagement between employers and education providers

- Identify sector and skills gaps to focus on sector-specific content, with EAs and Careers Hubs collaborating on employer-led activities

- Develop range of accessible platforms or Apps similar to *Unifrogs* and *Sparks 4 Careers* that link to local and regional employers and sectors – accessible to all.
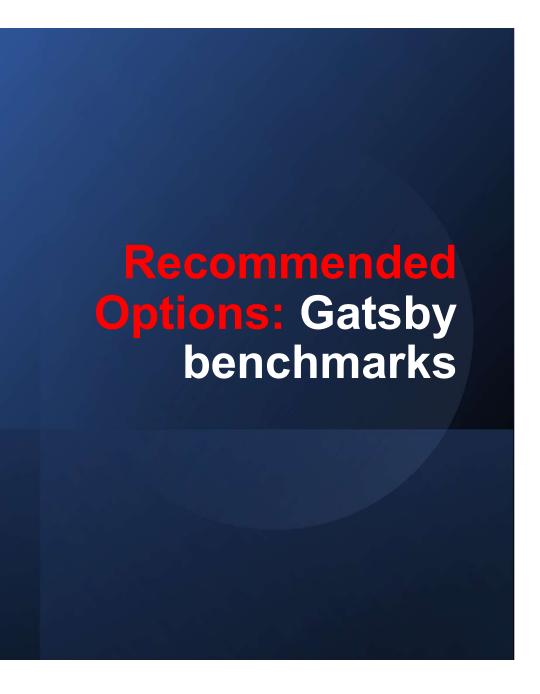
Recommended Options: Kitemark proposal

Two options:

1. Create agreed set of benchmarks appropriate to Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire in consultation with relevant bodies and employment sectors.

Options could include a 'minimum viable product' plus an 'evaluator' system (like Trust Pilot) or a tracking system (like Compass/Compass Plus), integrating T-level requirements into the system.

2. Promote quality work experience as 'standard', supported by work experience record options identified previously.

Recommended Options: Gatsby benchmarks

- Undertake strategic analysis of awareness of Gatsby benchmarks in the sector.

- Strengthen EA network to further develop knowledge base and embed them into employer-provider collaboration .

Recommended Options: CEIAG and young people and adults

In addition:

- Identify with education providers and EAs areas young people feel they need to develop to prepare for work

- Explore approaches already being used across Career Hubs and share practice

- Map and expand curricula to develop transversal skills and enterprise and entrepreneurship

- Support EAs and education providers to collaborate on the development of schemes of work, lesson plans, and resources that cover essential skills e.g. applying for a job, writing a CV, preparing for interviews.

Questions, thoughts, omissions, additions?

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