

Exploring key facilitating factors to achieving the eight Gatsby Benchmarks in secondary schools in Kent

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The 2017 UK Careers Strategy required schools to meet the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. This paper describes a survey of Careers Leaders in schools in Kent which finds that key to success with the Gatsby Benchmarks were support from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), sufficient resources as well as earmarked staff and curriculum time. This was irrespective of school type. The results indicate that SLTs within schools need to engage with career development activities, ensure that they are fully resourced, and allow them to pervade throughout their institutions.



Introduction

The 2014 report 'Good Career Guidance' from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (Holman, 2014) highlighted a set of eight Benchmarks that could be used in schools against which the content of their career guidance programmes could be audited. The reception of 'Good Career Guidance' has been quite remarkable and it quickly gained traction with both practitioners and policy makers as a basis for a framework for career guidance (The Gatsby Foundation, 2018). The UK Government's latest Careers Strategy (DfE, 2017) and a recent white paper (DfE, 2021) have required maintained schools to use the Benchmarks to develop their career guidance provision. The aim of the strategy was that schools should provide sufficient content to achieve all eight Gatsby Benchmarks by the end of 2020 (DfE, 2018) and there was a commitment to fund a programme of Careers Leader training. While achieving the benchmarks is not a legal requirement, the latest Ofsted inspection framework includes a school's progress against the benchmarks (Ofsted, 2019) and the Gatsby Benchmarks have been integrated

into recent Career Development Institute (CDI) frameworks (CDI, 2020; CDI, 2021).

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) has established online tools including COMPASS, a self-assessment tool whereby schools can compare their current careers programme against the eight Gatsby Benchmarks (Hooley, 2017) and Tracker, an online platform designed to be used to construct and manage a school careers plan once an evaluation of their provision has been made using the COMPASS tool. Aggregated data from COMPASS shows that, since the introduction of the benchmarks in 2014, the average number of benchmarks achieved by schools and colleges has increased from 1.34 to 1.87 in 2017, 3.00 in 2019 and 3.75 in 2020 (The CEC, 2020). However, the tool is unable to indicate which are the critical facilitating factors needed to achieve the eight benchmarks. Recent data from a pilot of implementing the benchmarks in 16 schools and colleges in the North East highlights several key enabling factors which include SLT support, regional facilitators, effective monitoring, and quality of career guidance activities. It also highlights challenges which include fitting these activities in the curriculum, costs and engaging parents (Hanson et al., 2021). This article reports on the regional picture of Gatsby Benchmark achievement in the Kent and Medway area and on some of the factors linked to it.

Concerns about meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks in schools have usually centred around funding from already-stretched budgets and that there may be limited career guidance experience within the staffroom, with teaching staff often being expected to deliver significant careers learning (Hooley et al., 2015). Kent is a county with a wide variation in types of schools including; single sex and mixed selective grammar schools, comprehensive schools, academies,

free schools, and independent schools. COMPASS data show 57% of institutions within the South East LEP completed COMPASS and, on average, had completed 2.8 Benchmarks in 2018/19, below the national average of 3.2 Benchmarks (The CEC, 2019). The proportion of Kent schools and colleges within these data is not identified and the progress against the benchmarks by the different types of institutions in Kent is also unknown. Meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks is challenging for all schools, but whether different types of school had different challenges or perspectives has to date been unclear.

This study therefore investigates career guidance provision within schools and colleges in Kent to determine their current progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks and, importantly, which are the key factors that have an impact on meeting the benchmarks. This will help us understand more about the design, planning, and provision of career guidance, including career learning, how it varies across different school types in Kent and will allow the appropriate, staff, training, resources or time to be targeted in schools to help them move towards achieving all eight Gatsby Benchmarks.

Methodology

Participants

We conducted a survey amongst Careers Leaders in Kent schools using an online questionnaire (Evans & Mathur, 2005) that was sent out to schools by email. Over 100 schools and colleges in Kent were invited to take part in the study. Where possible, a person already identified as a Careers Leader, or having a role in career guidance, or a senior member of staff was targeted. Otherwise, the email was sent to a general administration address.

Questionnaire

Questions were designed to both find out more about the Careers Leaders, their qualifications and time spent on career guidance at their institutions and their progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks. It was intentionally limited to 10 questions and participants were advised that it would only take 10 minutes to complete as a longer anticipated questionnaire completion time reduces the response rate (Galesic &

Bosnjak, 2009). The survey was conducted during May and June 2020 when schools were closed because of Covid-19. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire as if there had been no disruptions to education caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The first three questions identified the type of school the respondents worked at, the title they were given and whether they had any formal careers qualifications together with the amount of time spent on career guidance. This allowed subsequent question data to be divided into groups based on school type. One question allowed data collection on current progress towards meeting the benchmarks that could be compared with published data gathered from the Compass tool (The CEC, 2020). This treated the 8 benchmarks as Likert-type items with six rating options for participants to describe their progress; 'not at all well', 'not so well', 'somewhat well', 'very well', 'extremely well' or 'we have fully met this benchmark'. This was followed by a question which enabled respondents to rank the benchmarks from 'easiest' to 'hardest' to meet. Next were mirroring questions which addressed facilitating factors that enabled good progress to achieving benchmarks and those same factors that would help respondents achieve the remaining benchmarks for which they had made least progress. These were a list of factors with Likert-style responses (e.g. 'was most significant', 'helped a lot', 'helped a little', 'made no difference'). The final question was a 'free text' option in which respondents were asked to detail any barriers they had to meeting benchmarks or any significant hurdles overcome to achieve benchmarks.

Results

Survey Respondents

Responses are summarised in Figure 1. Just under half of respondents from maintained schools (18/38, 47%) indicated that they were a 'Careers Leader' or 'Careers Leader and Careers Adviser' and only 16% (6/38) indicated that they were a 'Senior Leader' in the school with responsibility for career guidance. This may reflect the recent adoption of these titles even though legislation required all maintained schools to appoint a 'Careers Leader' by September 2018 as the first step towards achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks (DfE, 2018).

Figure 1. Responses from Careers Leaders in Kent

The 'Other' category comprises three Secondary Modern Schools, two Colleges of Further Education, a University Technical College and a Special School.

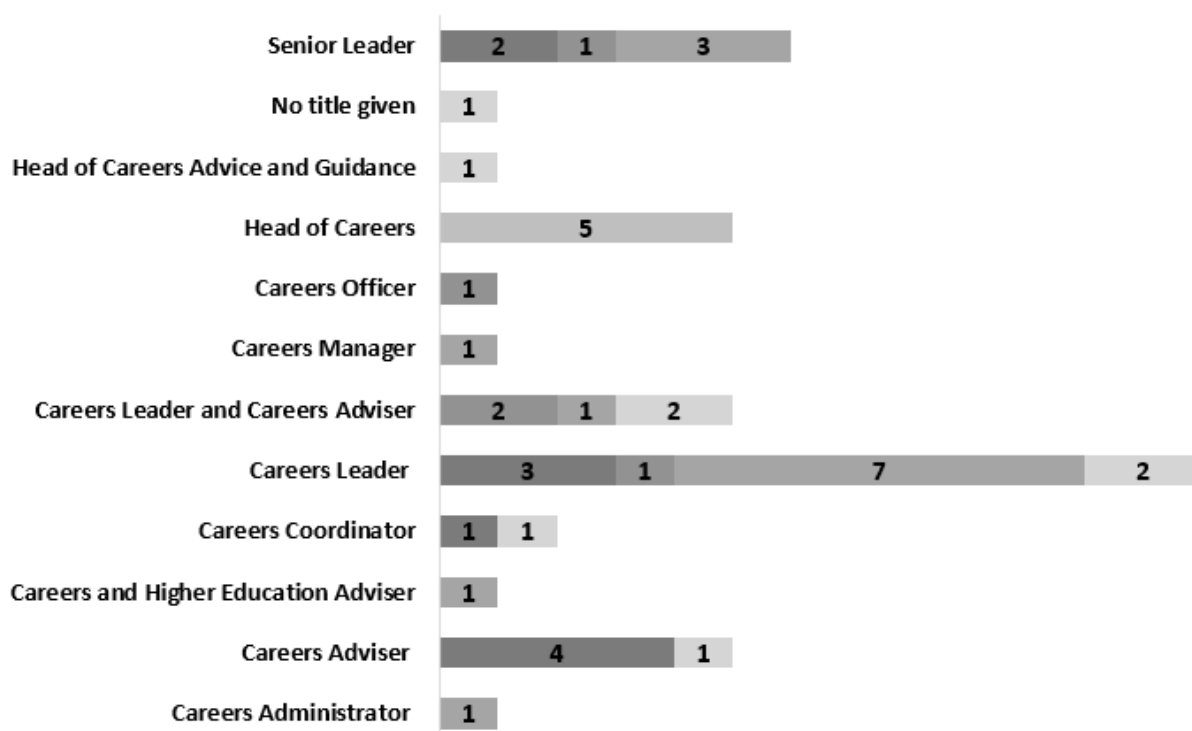
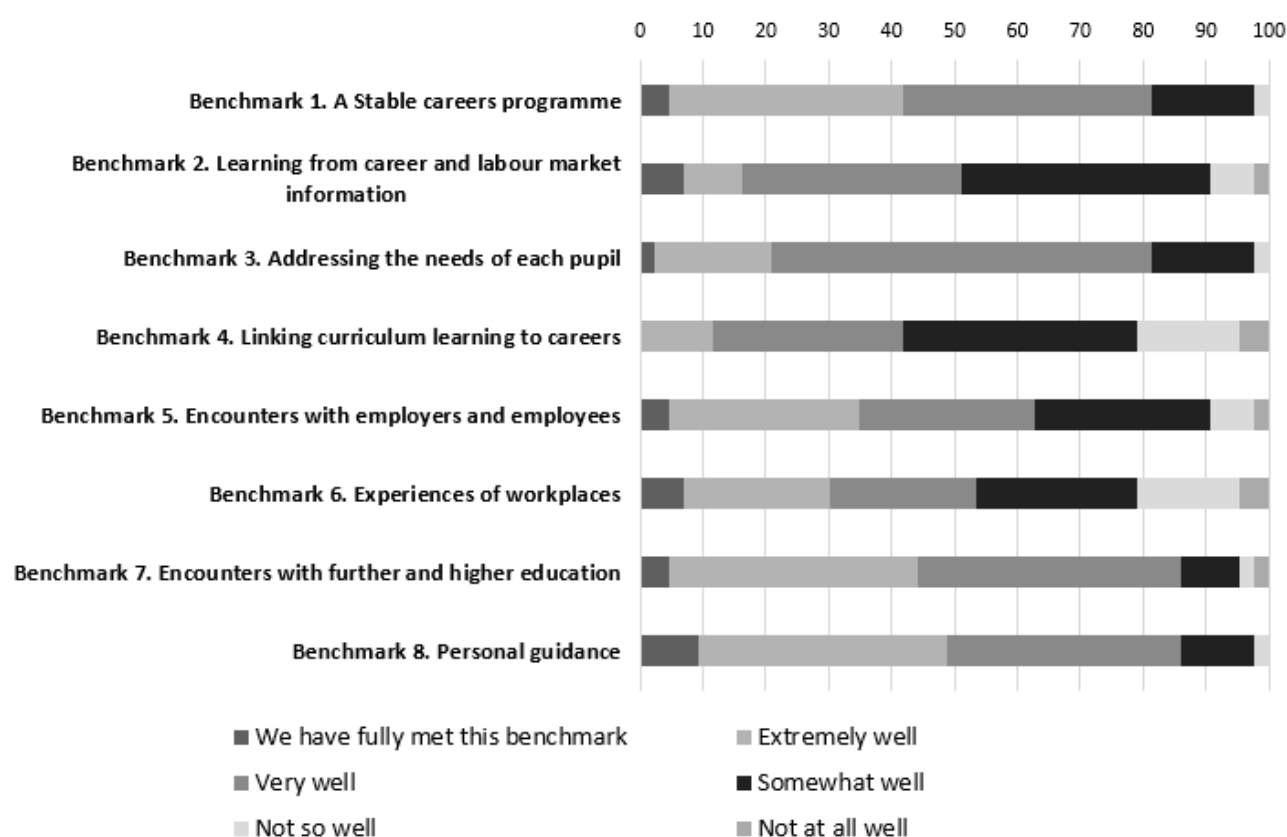


Figure 2. Progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks in Kent Schools



Overall, 14 respondents (35%) had a careers qualification of Level 6 or above including five at Level 7 (Masters) with 3 of these also having gained QCD/QCG. A further two declared a Level 4 diploma in Career Guidance. Only two respondents stated that they had undergone Careers Leader training. Independent schools had the most staff with formal careers qualifications with 60% (3/5) of respondents being qualified to Level 6 or above. From the academies that responded, only 10% (1/10) had a Level 6-qualified Careers Leader and only 10% (1/10) had undertaken Careers Leader training. These data suggest that, across all school types, formal careers qualifications are either not deemed necessary or not available for the role of Careers Leader, or delivery of career guidance. The increased prevalence of formal careers qualifications within the independent sector may reflect the costs to undertake them and a willingness/ability to support staff with these costs.

Current progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks

Government legislation required schools in the maintained sector to meet all Gatsby Benchmarks by the end of 2020, although it is unlikely that there will be any negative consequences for non-compliance given the recent coronavirus pandemic. The respondents were asked to answer as if the pandemic had not disrupted education and 74% were confident that they would have achieved all eight benchmarks by the Government deadline (6-7 months after the survey). This included four of the independent schools who were not bound by the legislation but were clearly working towards achieving the benchmarks.

Respondents were asked how well they thought they were currently meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks using Lickert-style ratings (Figure 2) based on COMPASS or other data and their own judgement. Overall, respondents were cautious in their assessment of having 'fully met' any of the Benchmarks (<10%) compared to the data from the COMPASS tool which shows between 21% and 57% of schools completing the tool had achieved each benchmark (The CEC, 2019). This likely reflects a more nuanced approach by respondents when assessing whether they had met a Benchmark, even though they were told they could use the COMPASS data. Based on the positive responses, >80% of the schools surveyed have a stable careers

programme (Benchmark 1), address the needs of each pupil (Benchmark 3), enable encounters with higher and further education (Benchmark 7) and undertake personal guidance (Benchmark 8). The Benchmarks considered to have been least well met were; linking curriculum learning to careers (Benchmark 4) where nearly 60% of respondents indicated that they had met this benchmark 'somewhat well' or worse; Benchmarks 6 (experiences of workplaces) and Benchmark 2 (learning from career and labour market information), where nearly 50% respondents put them in the negative categories. Benchmark 4 was also the only benchmark not 'fully met' by any of the 43 respondents.

Estimation of how easy/hard it is to achieve each Gatsby Benchmark

Respondents were asked to rank the benchmarks from easiest (1/8) to hardest (8/8) to achieve. Only Benchmark 3 was not ranked 1/8 by any respondents and only Benchmark 5 failed to achieve an 8/8 ranking. An average ranking score was calculated for each benchmark (Figure 3). The results suggest that Benchmarks 1 and 8 were the easiest and Benchmarks 4 and 6 as the hardest to achieve ($P < 0.05$). This correlates well with the data on progress against the benchmarks with those showing least progress considered the hardest and those showing most progress considered the easiest.

Facilitating factors to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks

From a list of nine possible facilitating factors, respondents indicated whether they had helped to meet the benchmarks or not and which factor(s) were most significant (Figure 4). Of all nine factors, the three that were most significant were, resources (27%, $n=41$, $\chi^2 = 16.463$, $p < 0.01$), staff time (24%, $n=41$, $\chi^2 = 8.659$, $p < 0.05$) and support from the SLT (24%, $n=41$, $\chi^2 = 17.634$, $p < 0.01$). Interestingly staff training was only rated most significant by 5% ($n=38$) of respondents and was much more likely to be rated as 'helped a little' (49%, $n=39$). The COMPASS tool was most rated as 'helped a little' (56%, $n=41$) whereas the Tracker tool was generally considered to have 'made no difference' (58%, $n=31$).

Figure 3. Ranking of the Gatsby Benchmarks from easiest to achieve (1) to hardest (8)

Error bars are $\pm$ SD. Benchmarks ordered from lowest average ranking to highest average ranking.

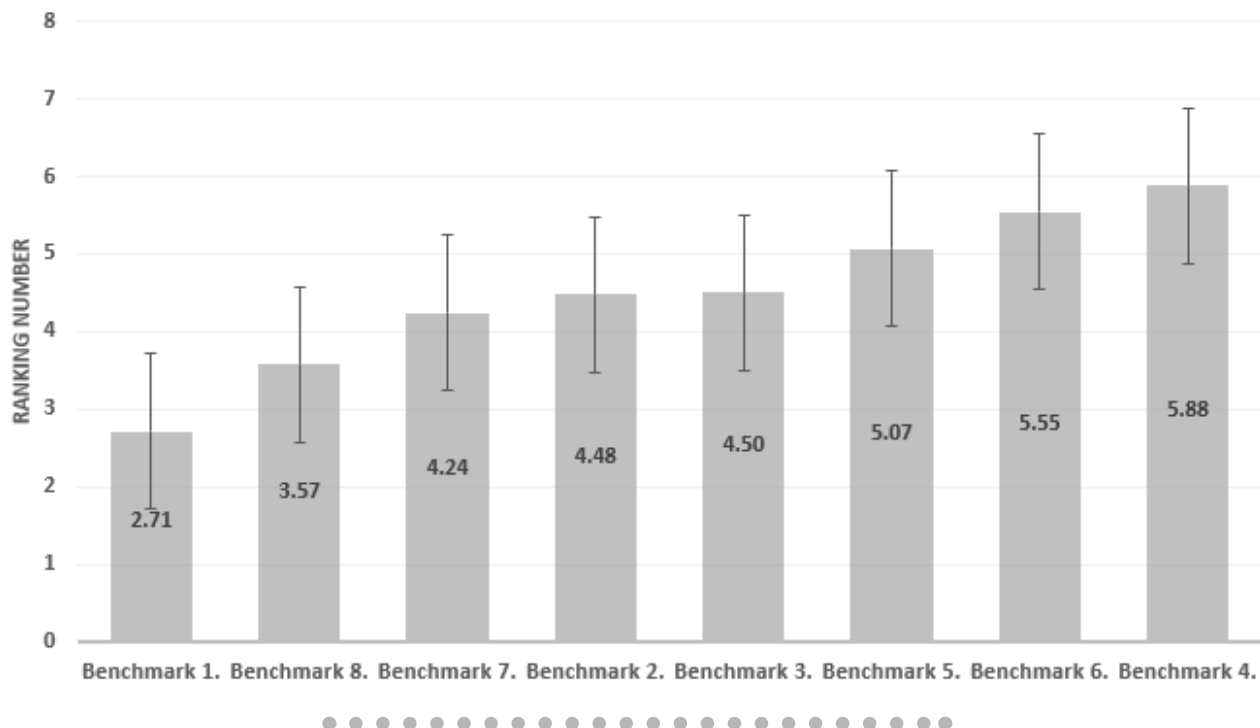
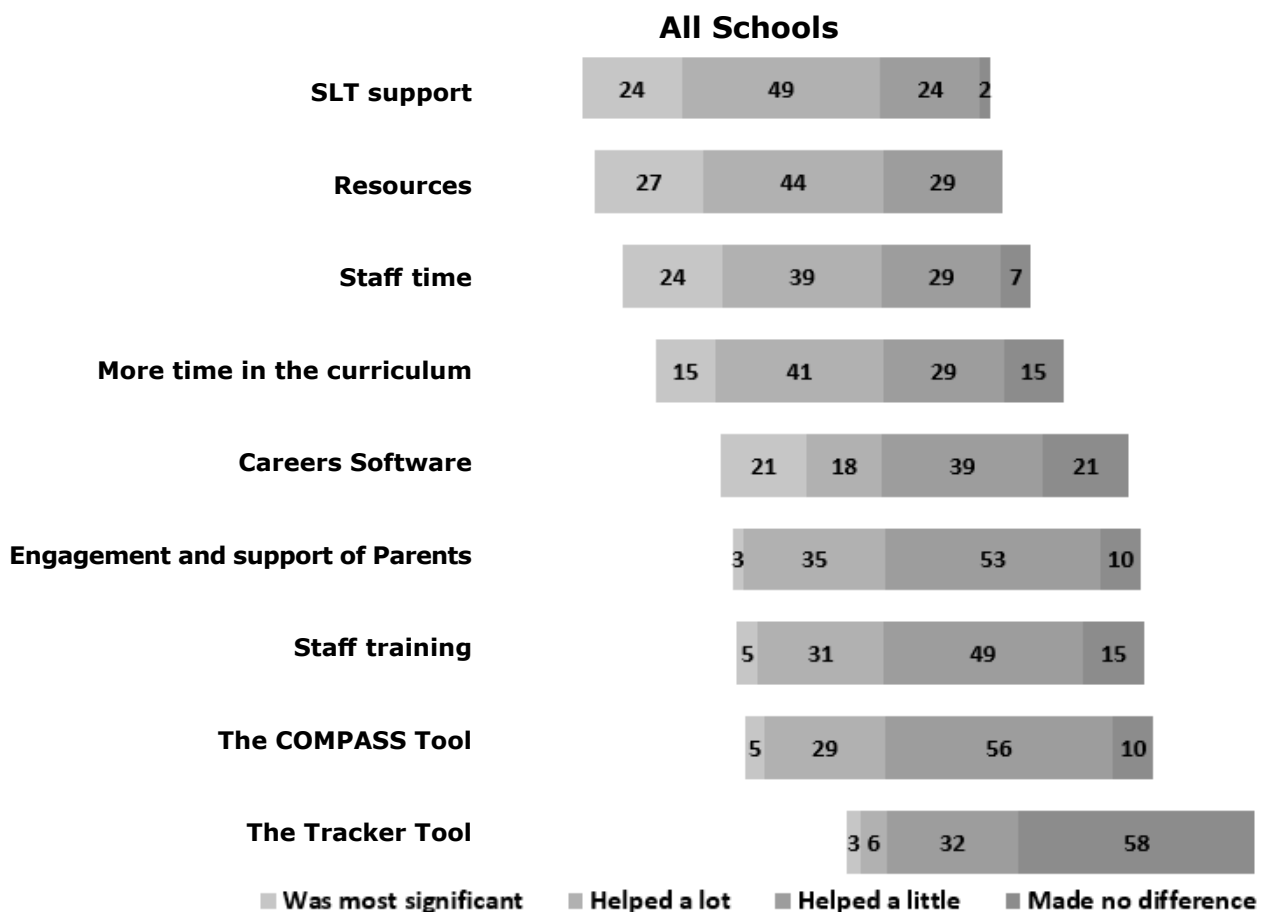


Figure 4. Facilitating factors to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks



With the data divided up by school type there were no differences across school types (see Figure 5), the only exception being staff training which was considered significant only in grammar schools where 64% ($n=14$) indicated it to have 'helped a lot' or have been 'most significant' in achieving Gatsby Benchmarks.

Facilitating factors important to achieving the remaining benchmarks

Respondents indicated whether the same nine facilitating factors would help 'a little', 'a lot', 'be very significant', or, 'would make no difference' to achieving the Benchmarks that they had made the least progress with (Figure 6). More time in the curriculum (44%, $n=39$, $\chi^2 = 12.59$, $p < 0.01$) and support from the SLT (44%, $n=36$, $\chi^2 = 8.222$, $p < 0.05$) were the two factors that would 'be very significant'. Staff time was also considered 'very significant' by 30% of respondents ($n=37$) and a further 51% ($n=37$) considered that it would 'help a lot' ($\chi^2 = 17.811$, $p < 0.01$). More resources were deemed important with 46% ($n=35$) responding that they would 'help a lot' and 23% ($n=35$) responding that they would be 'very significant'. The COMPASS tool and the Tracker tool were rated as 'making no difference', or 'would help a little' by 77% of respondents. There were no significant differences between school types with the exception of more staff time that would 'help a lot' or 'be very significant' for 93% ($n=14$) of respondents from grammar schools.

Discussion

Our survey of Careers Leaders in Kent indicates the term 'Careers Leader' has not been fully embraced. While not surprising for independent schools, schools within the maintained sector have been required to appoint a 'Careers Leader' since September 2018. It is a relatively new term (DfE, 2017; The CEC, 2018; Andrews & Hooley, 2018) but has clearly not been fully adopted, perhaps because the careers practitioners who responded consider other aspects as more important, such as their advisory roles, or that the person who is the nominated 'Careers Leader' within their schools is not them.

Significantly less than half of the Careers Leaders surveyed had formal career qualifications at Level 6 or

above, 10 years on from the 2010 Careers Profession Task Force report recommendation (CPTF, 2010). The Careers Strategy encourages schools to identify qualified practitioners (DfE, 2017), however, it does not make it a requirement and the Gatsby Report itself (Holman, 2014) also stops short of saying that those providing 'personal guidance' should be professionally qualified. It is therefore not surprising that a significant number of the Careers Leaders surveyed had no formal careers qualifications. Careers Leaders lack recognition in line with other subject leads within schools suggesting that embedding careers guidance in sound theoretical frameworks and principles like other curriculum subjects should enhance professionalism and allow formal qualifications to get the full backing of Government and policy makers. Until then they will remain peripheral to practitioners and their relevance and utility will be missed by school leaders and governors. Research shows that training improves the experience for students (e.g. Kuipers & Meijers, 2017) and training should enable career learning to happen rather than careers activities to be planned and delivered. It was more surprising that only two respondents had undergone Careers Leader training given that there have now been two tranches of money allocated for these programmes and some of these are run in Kent. Perhaps these programmes need more time to become embedded, or, those who are likely to respond favourably to training opportunities already have a suitable qualification (e.g. a Level 6 qualification). A recent report has outlined the benefits of this training, not only to careers practitioners, but also to schools and particularly gaining the support of the SLT and other staff (Williams et al., 2020). It may take a step-change to enable SLTs within schools to appreciate the link between staff training and career learning rather than focus on the career activities defined by the benchmarks.

A much lower percentage of institutions indicated that benchmarks had been 'fully met' than that based on the COMPASS data (The CEC, 2019; The CEC, 2020). Of note is Benchmark 2 (learning from career and labour market information) where the CEC reports 56% of schools to have achieved it (The CEC, 2020) and the data presented here for Kent schools finds that only 15% of school have 'fully met' or progressed 'extremely well', possibly indicating the difference between the

Figure 5. Facilitating factors to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks by school type

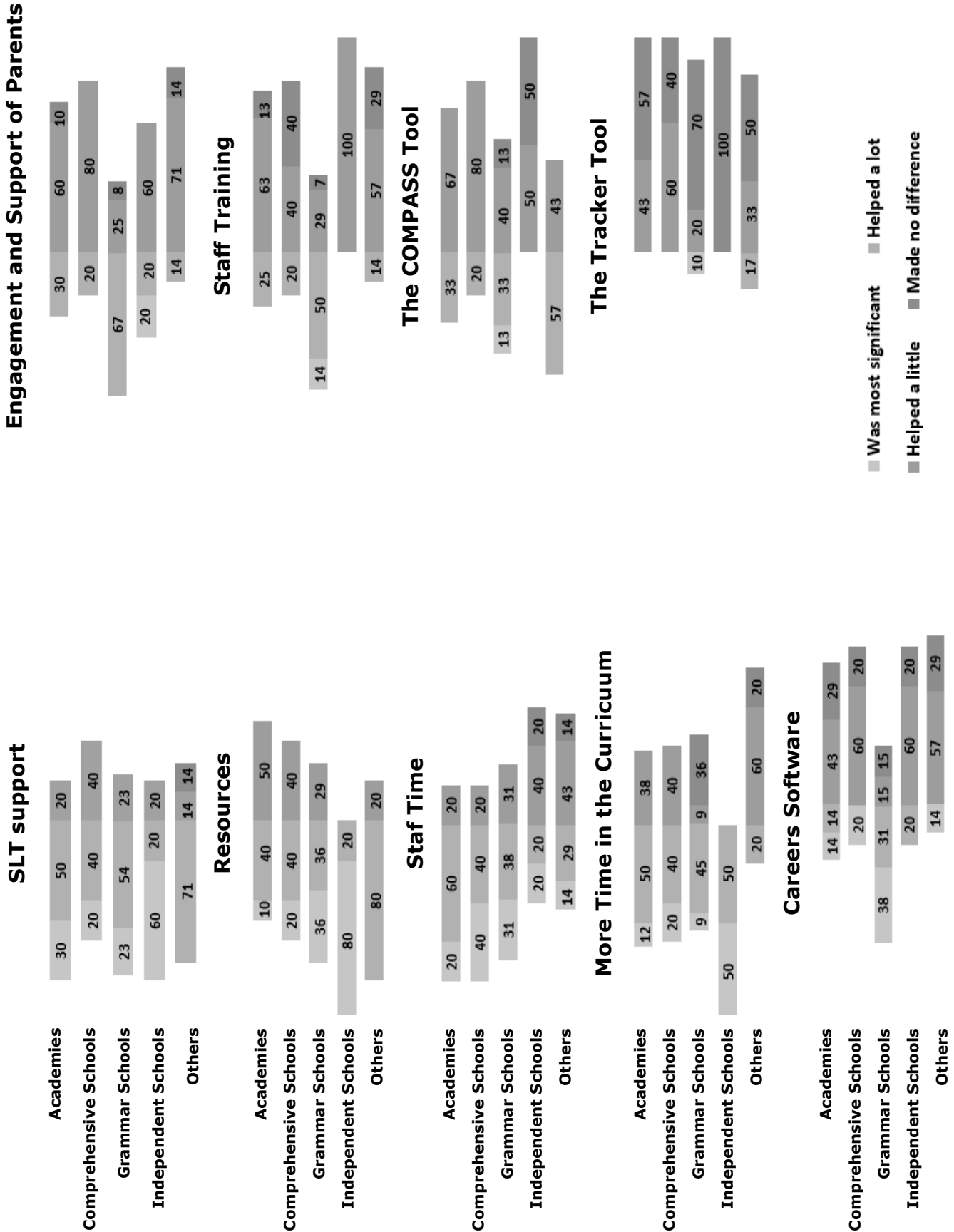
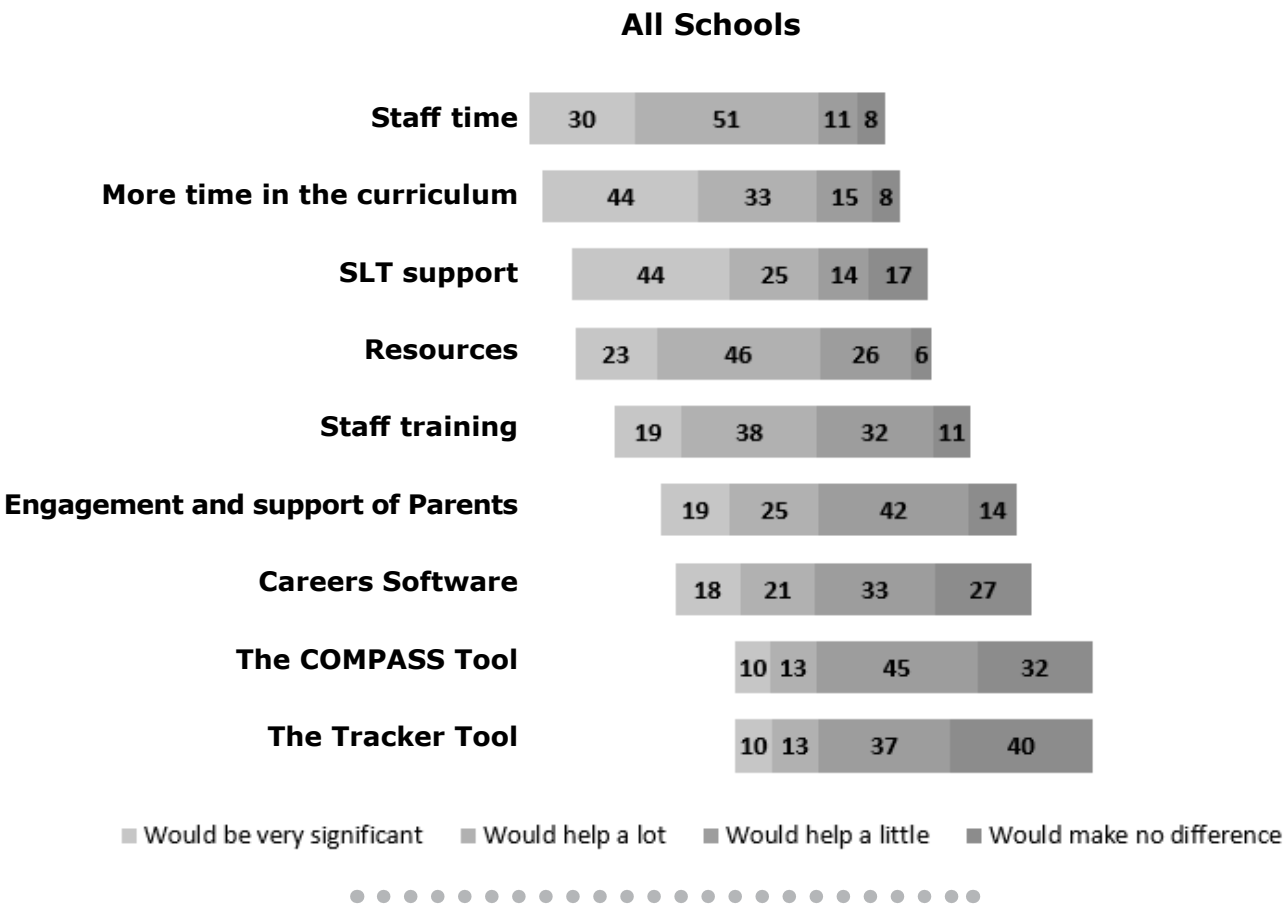


Figure 6. Facilitating factors important to achieving the remaining Gatsby Benchmarks



COMPASS tool which monitors whether pupils have access to good LMI and the Careers Leaders surveyed making a judgement as to whether pupils are *learning* from that LMI. This highlights the limitation of the Gatsby Benchmarks as a set of career activities with no learning outcomes and the need to use them in conjunction with the CDI framework (CDI, 2021) to bridge the gap between activity and learning.

The data presented here suggest that Benchmarks 1 and 8 are the 'easiest' to achieve and that the most progress has been made against them. Benchmark 4 (linking curriculum learning to careers) and Benchmark 6 (experiences of workplaces) had least progress made against them. Benchmark 4 was also judged to be the hardest to achieve from the ranking data, which correlates with our data on progress. The North East Gatsby pilot also highlights Benchmark 4 as a challenge for the schools and colleges within it (Hanson et al., 2019, Hanson et al., 2021) and is often perceived as the 'hardest' Benchmark within schools (Davenport, 2019). This benchmark is the only one that implies an aspect of careers education and career learning which makes

it harder to achieve than a simple activity defined by other benchmarks (e.g. a stable careers programme). Indeed, Andrews (2019) argues that Benchmark 4 should be re-defined to explicitly include careers education. Achieving the benchmark requires more professional pedagogic understanding and therefore also supports the argument for more qualified staff within schools.

The factors that facilitated strong progress against the benchmarks were resources, staff time, and support of the SLT; and the factors that would ensure they meet the remaining benchmarks were more time in the curriculum and continued support from the SLT. It is clear from our survey that schools that have made good progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks have had a supportive SLT that has provided the resources, the school structure, and the appropriate staff time to allow the Careers Leader to put in place an effective programme of careers guidance. Several of the comments in the 'free text' question indicated the importance of a fully supportive SLT, and Hanson & Neary (2020) make similar conclusions about the

role of the leadership within schools that had made successful progress against the benchmarks. It is also consistent with the North East pilot study (Hanson et al., 2021). Where this is not the case at present, schools will have to change their structure and ethos to ensure that the SLT and governors invest in career guidance, emotionally, psychologically, and monetarily to support their Careers Leader. This strong leadership is pivotal to ensure that the Careers Leader has the freedom and authority to make the changes necessary to implement a programme of career guidance that is embedded within the curriculum and recognised by pupils and staff. This would then, quite naturally, make more time available in the curriculum as the importance of the programme would warrant the attention of key staff such as Directors of Studies and those responsible for curriculum timetabling. Once all staff regard the Gatsby Benchmarks in the same way they do other criteria needed for a successful Ofsted inspection, the outcomes for young people will improve. To achieve this, good quality training for all staff is needed to highlight the importance of the Gatsby Benchmarks and their role in the curriculum; not just training for careers practitioners.

The Gatsby Benchmarks are here to stay as a useful 'check list' of activities for career guidance within schools. Across our dataset, there were no significant differences between any of the school types. Their progress against each benchmark was comparable and the factors that facilitated good progress, or would help achieve the remaining benchmarks, were also similar. This suggests that, irrespective of budgets, ethos, pupil destinations, and culture, it should be possible for all schools to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks as intended by the 2017 Careers Strategy (DfE, 2017). A recent report highlights improved post-16 outcomes with Gatsby Benchmark achievement (Percy & Tanner, 2021). However, ensuring that effective career learning is being achieved in schools is much more problematic. Ultimately, the Gatsby Benchmarks and 'good career guidance' are about learning, so Careers Leaders need to embrace the CDI framework (CDI, 2021) to ensure that the learning is delivered and sustained.



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