



UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON
EDUCATION OBSERVATORY

Deep dive on Career Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and employer education/provider relationships in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire
Stage 2 report: review of employer, education provider and young people and adult learners' engagement

Report completed by:

Lead Author:

Dr Val Hall

Project Lead:

Dr Karl Royle

Contributors:

Professor Michael Jopling

Dr Howard Scott

Dr David Thompson

Trevor Humphreys

Commissioned by:

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) Board

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Executive Summary

Aims

This report follows the Stage 1 review of the project completed in November 2021. In this Stage 2 review, the focus was on investigating 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. Alongside this we explored how this activity is initiated and enacted within the environment of education and skills development for young people and adults; and the implications for the effectiveness and appropriateness of CEIAG in relation to how young people and adults use this information when making choices about their career pathways.

Key findings

Engagement with the Careers Hub and challenges of employers working together with education, training and skills providers

Employers:

- Employers are confronted with a complicated environment of schemes that they are expected to understand in relation to training programmes, but there are strong relationships and working practices across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
- Employers need the curriculum to reflect current industry practice and needs more closely.
- Barriers and bias and stigma about some routes, occupations and trades need to be addressed.
- Engagement varies considerably, depending on the degree to which links are established with local education, training and skills providers.
- The role of the Enterprise Adviser (EA) is critical in getting information to schools and facilitating the development of working relationships between employers and, education, training and skills providers – and also between schools.
- Where there are EAs in companies, the role of the Careers Hub is understood.
- The Careers Hub provides additional opportunities to schools and Career Leads through sharing of practice, resources, etc, and funding for training.
- Employers are beginning to be more involved in curriculum design.
- There is a need for a greater depth and breadth of CEIAG knowledge, specifically in relation to alternative pathways and career options, to meet local and sector skills shortages.

- Young people need to be more 'work ready' for both work placements and employment (in terms of behaviours and expectations).

Education, training and skills providers:

- Providers agree with employers that communication needs to be improved.
- Schools feel that employers need to reach out to them more effectively.
- The role of the Careers Hub is crucial in managing communication, networking and relationship-building.
- Employers need to be involved in curriculum development and to help providers to challenge stereotypes around roles and sectors in relation to areas such as gender, pathways, and labour market information.
- EAs are helping to improve understanding between providers and employers and have raised awareness of CEIAG.
- Huge value is attached to the CPD opportunities, networking, sharing of resources and case studies provided through the EAs and the Careers Hub.
- Schools experience difficulties complying with a multitude of systems and regulatory bodies requiring the same, but diverse format, information.
- Colleges engage actively with EAs and the Careers Hub, but would like to be recognised as 'distinct' from schools and have opportunities for more networking and sharing with other colleges, including those in other areas.
- Some employers do not know who to go to other than established training partners.

Engagement with wider skills programmes

Employers:

- Engagement varies dependent upon an employer's size and sector. There are also issues around the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy attached to various schemes. Larger companies are better able to mitigate this than SMEs capacity.
- Embedding apprenticeships is the most advanced programme, but its requirements are perceived as over-complicated and place high demands on SMEs in particular.
- Nationally, there are examples of innovative approaches to the delivery of higher level apprenticeships alongside degrees, and of colleges working collaboratively with employers to design bespoke pathways programmes to address regional skills gaps.
- Employers' view is that little is happening in relation to traineeships or T-levels. Concerns were expressed about the number of extended placements T-levels require and greater liaison between providers and employers is required before any T-level is developed and delivered.

- The Kickstart schemes is seen as a good recruitment avenue, but engagement with it remains limited and successful recruitment to it appears to be affected by individual Job Centres.
- There are frustrations about not being able to fill vacancies due to poor applications and young people not being 'work-ready'.
- Perceptions are that CEIAG provided in schools lacks breadth and depth and does not value following a 'trade'.
- Employers felt the pandemic may have negatively affected motivation in the potential workforce population.

Education, training and skills providers:

- A mixed picture emerged about extent to which providers are engaging with wider skills programmes.
- While many are aiming to keep the curriculum broad and varied, with options for more vocational qualifications, for example offering tasters between vocational and GCSE pathways in Year 9, there are challenges in overcoming 'legacy' knowledge and beliefs around apprenticeship routes.
- Therefore it is vital to provide parents and young people with accurate information about apprenticeships.
- Higher level apprenticeships are seen as important, and offer opportunities to develop an employer-informed curriculum.
- T-levels raise serious concerns around extended placements and competition for work placements alongside requests for traditional work experience opportunities.
- Kickstart is similarly challenging and providing difficult to get off the ground with evidence of poor applications.
- Traineeships have been displaced by Kickstart schemes and are not viewed as adding value to the skill base. There are questions as to whether they should be available beyond the age of 24.
- There is considerable potential for EAs and the Careers Hub to broker partnerships between providers and employers to improve coordination and cohesion.
- Entrepreneurship remains under-developed as a potential pathway.

Young people and adults:

- Schools focus too much on traditional progression routes currently.
- The curriculum should include preparation for work e.g. developing a CV, applying for jobs, preparing for an interview

- With apprenticeships there is a need to get information out to everyone, including older adults and parents who may be looking for opportunities to upskill, or retrain.
- Kickstart was seen as having the benefit of helping participants to acquire transferrable skills and there is positive feedback about Work Coaches at Job Centres.
- Study programmes are viewed as a good opportunity to obtain work 'experiences' across a number of trades and help to inform career decisions.
- There is a need for more designated careers advisers with expertise in multiple areas in Level 3 vocational courses.

Knowledge of careers advice and guidance services/Government and local schemes supporting people into work

Employers:

- Generally, there is a good level of familiarity with schemes among employers, but a small number felt they would not know where to get information.
- Additional work needs to be done on promoting awareness of full CEIAG and local/government schemes.

Education, training and skills providers:

- There is a large number of schemes and options available (some with fees attached), but less provision and accessibility for those in deprived areas causes inequity.
- Opportunities have been missed to involve independent training providers more.
- CEIAG is inconsistent: it is important to improve the impartiality of advice and the options available.
- Concerns were expressed that Gatsby Benchmark 8 (personal advice and guidance), whilst strong locally, is being met more successfully outside the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire area.

Work placements and work experience activities

Employers:

- All employers offered work placements and/or activities, but felt they could be improved. SMEs found it more difficult to offer them.
- More flexibility is needed around how and when activities are offered, to include taster days, workshop events, employers and employees visiting schools.
- On-site work placements need to be more carefully structured, to offer elements like induction, mentoring, and meaningful work tasks.

- The volume of requests to accommodate placements is problematic, particularly with T-levels' requirement for extended placements.
- Understanding and discussion between schools and employers needs to improve.
- Careers Hubs could take on a greater role, for example in developing a bank of resources, support for employers; and methods of recording work experience.
- More explicit links should be made between work experience and career routes, helping young people to understand what is available.

Education, training and skills providers:

- Work placements and experiences should be integrated into a more joined-up and equitable approach, including recording activity and impact, rather than relying on factors such as a young person's family networks.
- The pandemic encouraged many organisations to move away from traditional approaches to work experience and work placements towards a more hybrid approach, which should be developed further. Innovations included whole year group activities, one-to-one interviews with employers, CV writing, employers doing online assemblies, and use of various apps and platforms.
- However, the pandemic also reduced work placement and experience opportunities for many.
- Careers Hubs play a vital role in helping providers to access and build relationships with employers.
- Issues are anticipated as establishments prepare for T-levels and extended work placements. EAs can help employers and providers to address them.

Young people and adults:

- This was a mixed picture as many have missed opportunities due to the pandemic.
- Where individuals have participated, they would like greater variety and flexibility, more structure and the chance to experience different sectors.
- They recognised the potential to gain soft skills in areas such as communication and team working.

Kitemark

Employers:

- The kitemark was seen as a good idea in principle. However, there were concerns about how it would be offered, costs, and the amount of bureaucracy involved, particularly for SMEs.

- This kind of accreditation could offer reassurance to parents and young people when they make decisions about apprenticeships or work placements.
- While a kitemark is seen as a way to recognise the quality of an apprenticeship or placement, focusing on finding more inventive ways of marking quality and achieving high quality across the board were regarded by some as more important objectives.
- Some feel that there are already too many such schemes available and too many hoops for employers to go through for accreditation.

Education, training and skills providers:

- Some form of quality assurance was also welcomed by providers, especially if it improved the quality of work placements, but concern was expressed about how frameworks would be agreed, level of investment, and how quality would be measured.
- There was concern that this could be another tick box exercise, which would favour larger companies.
- Questions were asked about how the kitemark would be structured to accommodate vulnerable individuals and those with SEND requirements.

Young people and adults:.

- Most felt a kitemark was not important.
- Some felt it would be a good 'external' indicator of a company's commitment to providing quality placements, but would make the process more competitive and placements are already in short supply.

Gatsby benchmarks

- There was uncertainty as to whether employers know about or understand the benchmarks.
- There was approval that they have raised the profile of careers and CEIAG and helped to embed them in the curriculum, as well as providing a means to hold schools accountable.
- Compass and Compass Plus are being used effectively by some schools, linking with EAs and thus employers, but not all. Colleges would like to have access to Compass Plus for tracking and monitoring.
- Concerns were expressed about the interpretation of the criteria and the need for realism in not being expected to achieve 100% on everything.

Young people's and adults' engagement with CEIAG

- Information is accessed in all kinds of ways which are not necessarily available to all, which leads to disparity and inequity.
- There are challenges for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire in relation to social mobility.
- Education providers are at different stages of engagement with CEIAG in general and with employers and the Careers Hub.
- The pandemic has provided opportunities for innovation and involving employers more extensively in education.
- The data show the importance of ensuring that parents, carers and families have access to a broad range of information in relation to CEIAG to support their children.
- Adults primarily access information from the Job Centre, online, or contacts who are already employed.
- Teachers and careers advisers are key sources of support for young people. It is vital that they have access to up-to-date, detailed information about a range of career pathways and routes to employment and trades, not just academic routes.
- Work-ready and life-ready skills need to be taught in school and curricula need to develop transversal skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship.
- A range of apps and online platforms are accessed via schools, but these are not equitably distributed or assessed for quality.
- In comparison with the national picture across England, there is broad alignment in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire's primary sources of CEIAG: parents and wider family; and teachers and trained careers advisers in school or college.
- There is consensus that the CEIAG received is provided at the right time and in the right amount.
- Compared with what is available in some other parts of the country, the CEIAG offer in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire remains too limited in terms of its options and biased toward academic routes.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Aims	2
Key findings.....	2
Contents.....	9
Full Report.....	10
Aim	10
Stage 2 Methodology.....	13
Engagement Between Employers and Education, Training and Skills Providers.....	18
Context.....	18
Engagement with the Careers Hub and Challenges of Employers Working Together with Education, Training and Skills Providers	19
Engagement with Wider Skills Programmes.....	24
Knowledge of Careers Advice and Guidance Services/Government and Local Schemes Supporting People into Work	35
Work Placements and Work Experience Activities.....	41
Kitemark Proposal.....	51
Engagement with Gatsby Benchmarks	54
How Young People and Adults are Engaging with CEIAG and Some of the Influencing Factors.....	55
Conclusions and Recommended Options	66
Appendices.....	74
Appendix 1a: Employers’ survey.....	75
Appendix 1b: Workplace survey	80
Appendix 1c: Students’ survey.....	84
Appendix 1d: School Career Leads’ survey	88
Appendix 2a: Schools	91
Appendix 2b: Workplace programmes (study programmes, apprenticeships, Kickstart).....	92
Appendix 2c: CEIAG ranking statements	93

Full Report

Aim

The aim of this phase of the project is to develop and extend the initial findings in Stage 1 that provided a review of the existing CEIAG and work placement landscape across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. Having already identified strengths and concerns, Stage 2 has focused more specifically on the work placement aspect of CEIAG and employer and education provider relationships. Stage 2 therefore uses a mixed methodological approach through extensive qualitative research including interviews, focus groups and surveys, that include some additional quantitative analysis, with a selection of key stakeholders. The research seeks to identify themes and issues in depth to shape the project's options and recommendations. Examples of case studies demonstrating best practice and innovative approaches are included.

Alongside this, any lessons learned from the shift online during the pandemic have been subsumed into the discussion under the relevant headings. There is a comparison of how local practices compare to relevant elements of a longitudinal study undertaken by the Department for Education (2021)¹ examining the experiences of 6,922 young people in England in relation to CEIAG. Stakeholders include local employers, including Cornerstone organisations; education, training and skills providers; and young people and adults, including mature learners.

The Stage 2 review incorporates key elements identified from Stage 1 and addresses them through the following headline research questions, in consultation with the three stakeholder groups that are the focus of this research phase:

Local employers

Key stakeholders include:

1. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Employers – a sample across sectors, business size and local authority based on the overall local business population.
2. Businesses at varying stages of engagement with CEIAG and work placement activity, including Cornerstone employers.
3. CEIAG and work placement activity leads, including Enterprise Advisers (EAs)

Headline research questions:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-peoples-experiences-of-careers-information-advice-and-guidance>

- 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?

Education, training and skills providers

Key stakeholders include:

1. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Education providers – with a sample of providers who are representative of a broad geographical spread.
2. Career Leads in secondary schools (with and without 6th forms), FE (colleges), HE (universities) and independent/adult training providers.

Headline research questions:

- 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?

Young people and adults

Key stakeholders include:

- Cohorts and sample of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire young people and adults identified with support from SAP partners and career key stakeholder leads from stage 1.
- Young people cohorts from a sample of schools, colleges, and training providers across the geographical area. Participants to include Level 1, Level 2, Level 3+, those at risk of becoming NEET, deprived/FSM, SEND, gifted and talented students.
- For young people and adults this will also cover those engaged with study programmes, Kickstart schemes, and apprenticeships.

Headline research questions:

- 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 relationships 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?

Stage 2 Methodology

Stage 1 consisted of desk-based research, online and phone consultation with work placement and CEIAG leads to understand the existing landscape and what the current CEIAG and work placement offer looks like across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. The outcomes of that review have been used to shape and refine the Stage 2 research.

Participants

The report has drawn on evidence provided through one-to-one interviews, conducted with 17 individuals from a range of organisations (including Cornerstone organisations) and education, training and skills training providers; in addition, the responses of a further 16 employers, 232 students, 16 apprentices and 2 schools were obtained through online questionnaire surveys. To further triangulate data and themes emerging, focus groups were held with 23 students from schools (Years 11-13). To obtain a spectrum of feedback, schools were informed that the research would welcome views, if possible, from participants in the following categories: SEND, at risk of NEET, gifted and talented, deprived/FSM provision. There were also 53 Level 3 students in colleges, 5 participants on a workplace Kickstart scheme, 5 on an apprenticeship scheme, and a further 5 on a workplace study programme scheme.

Suggestions from SSLEP and network contacts and participants from Stage 1 of the research were approached. As always, participation in research is voluntary, so not everyone who was contacted was either available to talk to us or wished to engage with the research. Strenuous efforts were made to ensure a robust coverage of the three cohorts and all leads provided from Stage 1, and from participants on Stage 2, were pursued. The following identifies the full breakdown of participants contributing to the Stage 2 review. It should be noted that due to the assurance of anonymity of contributors that only establishment names are provided. In one instance this has been further de-identified, at the request of the participant, by not including the name of the specific Bank due to their stringent governance restrictions.

Contributing institutions providing interviews are:

- Achieve Training
- Acacia Training
- Chase Terrace Academy
- Leek High School
- St Thomas More Catholic Academy
- The Orme Academy

- Newcastle and Stafford College Group
- South Staffordshire College
- Stoke-on-Trent College
- Keele University
- Higher Horizons
- Prospect Services
- Broadoak Properties
- National Banking Group (not identified further to preserve anonymity)
- Ornuva Foods UK Ltd
- St Modwen's
- University Hospital North Midlands

Of the 16 employer survey respondents the following organisations also self-identified:

- ELM Group (Stafford) Ltd
- Housing Plus Group
- Performance Through People
- Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Staffordshire and Shropshire STEM Ambassador Hub

Employer survey post codes:

- ST1
- ST5
- ST16
- ST17
- ST18
- ST19
- B90
- DE13
- DY3
- WS11

Employment sectors engaged overall:

- 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

Alongside the information provided above, postcode coverage and additional information from survey participants includes the following:

Schools

- WS7
- WS11

Student survey:

All but one of the 232 student respondents provided information about their age and their year of study, as Tables 1 and 2 indicate:

Table 1. *Age of respondents to student survey*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
16-17	85.71%	198
18-19	11.26%	26
20-25	3.03%	7
Total		231

Table 2. *Year of study of students surveyed*

<i>Study year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Year 11	0.87%	2
Year 12	58.01%	134
Year 13	11.69%	27
Level 1	2.60%	6
Level 2	6.49%	15
Level 3	19.05%	44
Level 4	0.43%	1
Level 5	0.87%	2
Total		231

In terms of postcode coverage, the following were listed. Where some of these sit outside of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire area they have been included as participants are studying within the geographical zone:

ST1	ST11	CW11
ST2	ST13	CW2
ST3	ST15	CW3
ST4	ST16	TF2
ST5	ST17	TF9
ST6	ST18	WS11
ST7	ST19	WS12
ST8	ST21	WS13
ST9		WS15
ST10		WS8

Apprentices' survey

Sixteen apprentices provided responses to the survey. Table 3 indicates their ages and their postcode coverage was as follows:

B75	ST14
B77	ST17
B77	WS11
B77	WS13
B79	WS4
KT21	WV8
LL14	

Table 3. *Age group of respondents to apprentices' survey*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
16-17	18.75%	3
18-19	31.25%	5
20-24	6.25%	1
25+	43.75%	7
Total		16

In accordance with ethical guidelines, participants were reassured that all information collected during the study would be treated as confidential by the research team and that their anonymity would be protected. All participants were provided with information about the research prior to their engagement with any interviews, survey responses or forum discussions, and informed consent obtained.

Survey design

The headline questions for each stakeholder cohort were used as frameworks to develop the surveys (Appendices 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d). The design of the survey for young people and adults (Appendix 1c) was also informed by some of the key questions from the DfE report that aligned with themes around the influencing factors related to CEIAG and career pathway choices; the amount, and type, of information received and whether this was timely.

Forum questions

As with the survey design, the headline questions were used to inform the construction of an outline framework for the discussions with young people in schools and colleges (Appendix 2a) and in workplace contexts for study programmes, Kickstart and apprentices (Appendix 2b). In addition, in alignment with the DfE report, a set of 'ranking cards' (Appendix 2c) were used to support dialogue around those factors that had been a source, or influence, on choices of CEIAG accessed. Participants were also offered the opportunity to include additional factors of influence on their career pathways: such as salary, progression opportunities, location of work, etc.

Employers

This cohort of respondents was asked to give opinions as to the challenges faced by employers in working with education providers; the range of programmes and schemes they engage with (apprenticeships, traineeships, T-levels, degrees, Kickstart, etc). Discussions also focused on their familiarity with careers advice and guidance services, and their awareness of Government and local schemes supporting people into work. In addition, the research explored their thoughts around possible 'Kitemark' schemes to recognise the quality of the CEIAG offer, and their awareness of the Careers Hub model and its effectiveness for employers.

Education, training and skills providers

These participants were similarly asked how they would like to engage with employers in delivering CEIAG and work placements/experience, and the challenges faced in sourcing and managing these. They were also asked about their engagement with, and awareness

of, programmes including apprenticeships, traineeships, T-levels and Kickstart schemes. The research explored how providers felt the Gatsby benchmarks were working, and the effectiveness of the Careers Hub model for schools, colleges and other training and skills providers.

Young people and adults

This final cohort was asked about experiences of work placement, and how employers and education, training and skills providers work together. They were also asked for their opinions about the CEIAG they receive and how influential it is in helping them to make choices about their future career pathways.

Engagement Between Employers and Education, Training and Skills Providers

Context

Context varies considerably dependent upon the size of the organisation, and whether it has established links to its local providers. In more recent times, following on from the Government's Careers Strategy, published in 2018, one of the ways in which these relationships have been established, or further developed, is through the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC). This is a national body for careers education in England, focusing on young people aged 12 to 18, and providing support to schools and colleges to deliver CEIAG. In 2018, the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership area became one of an initial 20 'Careers Hubs' around England. The primary target being to help the area meet the eight Gatsby Benchmarks of 'excellent careers education'. The CEC provides support in three ways:

- Training and supporting Careers Leaders;
- Sharing practical digital tools and resources; and
- Providing a network of Careers Hubs to enable employers, educators and providers to come together.

One of the key enablers in this has been the establishment of a network of Enterprise Advisers (EAs) who are business volunteers, working in senior roles in organisations, who help to provide a bridge between the world of work and education. Their role is to work closely with the Careers Leader and wider Senior Leaders of the school or college with which they are partnered in order to create opportunities for young people.

Employers were asked a number of questions, identified in the ‘headline research questions’ about their relationship to, and the role of, the Careers Hub and where they felt there were challenges in their ability to work with education, training and skills providers. Similar questions were also posed to education, training and skills providers about their knowledge of, and relationship to, the Careers Hub and challenges of working with employers. Points were also addressed in relation to how institutions work with each other.

Engagement with the Careers Hub and Challenges of Employers Working Together with Education, Training and Skills Providers

Employer perspective

There was a very mixed set of responses dependent upon whether organisations had their own EA. It was felt that where this role exists in a company, then the role of the Careers Hub is understood. Otherwise, there were questions as to how effective it is for employers. The role of the EA has started to change what is happening in schools, and of finding ways to get information through to teachers. Initially, the response was often negative, with a feeling that teachers were “here to educate...get them through their GCSEs”; but there has been a huge shift in the way teachers are starting to engage – although schools are at varying points on this journey dependent upon the length of time they have been working with an EA. The aim has been to enable teachers to understand their role in CEIAG and that relationship with employers.

Ways in which this has been approached are varied: running business breakfasts; networking with groups to get them to go into schools and meet the staff being some of the examples given. It has been about “making those links explicit [to teachers and students] and showing – this is *why* you’re learning this’ – so that every single lesson has a connection to the workplace”. In doing so it is also about broadening knowledge and awareness of potential job roles and pathways into employment for young people; but for the employers it has been about enabling them to see the benefits of being involved and developing an appreciation as to “why they should give up their time”.

In terms of the relationship between employers and the Careers Hub, there was strong evidence of a recognition of the value of the team at the Careers Hub, and the degree of support that they provide. This was not just in relation to networking opportunities, and

sharing of practices, but also in the opportunities they provide for the school and the Career Leads.

“I know the schools really love being involved as well. I think the opportunities they’ve got in terms of the extra support, being able to go and complete an actual qualification, has been really well-received.”

Employers thought that the Hub provides a structured approach for schools to take with employers, supported by a platform of resources and a curriculum planning model that is becoming more established. However, there are challenges within this and ways in which the curriculum needs to be further developed to break down the bias and stigma associated within some employment routes. For example, with construction, there was frustration with the perception that it is only “messy and dirty jobs that are available.....that in construction you can only be a bricklayer – there are other roles – accountants, marketing people, etc”. So, there was a strong desire for more up-dated awareness to be in place and for closer development of the curriculum and CEIAG around potential job pathways.

At the most basic of levels some of the main challenges expressed were a lack of understanding by education, training and skills providers about what the “business end goal is for that learner/employee” and the implications of trying to fit around ‘timetables’ for course areas. This is further complicated within industries where the curriculum is not felt to be keeping pace with advances in equipment, technological developments, or moves towards more environmental sustainability measures.

“The workplace requirements change far faster than the educational syllabus can, so the workplace will always have to retrain to their specific requirements.”

There was a degree of frustration that individuals arrive without basic skill sets and not ‘work ready’ and for employers and education providers needing to work together more closely on this aspect. There are also complications in terms of the number of schemes currently ‘in the system’ and employers having to understand the range of different training programmes available, and the multiple demands this makes on them.

Some employers would like to see greater engagement with the Careers Hub so that there was a more “equitable representation of employers, with an equitable representation of schools” and concerns were raised that some employers do not engage – so “how do we mesh that together?” In fact, some employers have no knowledge or awareness of the

Careers Hub at all, and this was not dependent upon the size of the organisation. Two of those interviewed face-to-face (one a large organisation and one an SME) had no knowledge and out of the 16 employers who responded to the survey, only 6 reported a connection with, or knowledge of, the Careers Hub. Out of these, 16.67% (n=1) felt that it was not effective, 66.67% (n=4) that it was somewhat effective and 16.67% (n=1) that it was very effective.

Overall, it was felt that the Careers Hub was working particularly well in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire because they understand what the area needs and so employers can provide appropriate support:

“It’s the communication, the links, and the understanding from the team in Stoke and Staffordshire – they’re responsive, they’re thinking ahead, which is what we need.”

Education, training and skills provider perspective

There was a broad agreement with the ‘employer perspective’ comments in that greater communication needs to be built up; though the emphasis from schools was on employers needing to reach out to them. The role of the Careers Hub was seen as crucial in the way that they manage a lot of that communication and introductions to each other.

One provider felt that the relationship was improving all the time:

“....now they’ve got more of an overview of positions and businesses. As they’re building that network, that’s really starting to help. If we’re struggling to get information from schools or colleges, we can ask to speak to one of the Careers Hub staff and get that relationship built up.”

The Careers Hub has also been seen not only as something that has helped champion careers, and provide those networking contacts with employers, but in doing so of enabling a 'levelling up' of opportunities "across different providers and different employers particularly". In terms of the curriculum development, having employers on board was seen as a key element, and engaging them to work with schools – who also liaise with other schools – to build up case studies that can then be shared as examples of good practice, and have the potential to provide evidence of impact. Current examples of innovation include the following:

- A school that is working on a programme to inform parents and carers about vocational pathways – with particular reference to challenging gender stereotypes, linking with labour market information and creating a 'parent pack' to support parents and guardians in helping their children make decisions. This information will then be submitted as a case study and shared with others within the Hub.
- A project reviewing numbers who are opting for apprenticeships and T-levels, and considering the take-up and viability of such options.
- Providing opportunities for young people to try different things, and other specialisms they may not have considered, during a two-week window. This is being supported by employers who are being asked to help schools to challenge gender stereotypes – female engineers, males working in health and social care, for example.
- Further evidence of close working between a school and their EA has been provided with the company's apprentices going into the school and doing activities with the young people; of providing support if Inspectors for Careers go into the school; and of helping to support and 'professionalise' careers events. Importantly, and echoing comments from employers, of helping "the school to see that they have got to provide something for the businesses – the 'what's in it for them' – the reality of working together".

In providing support and funding for CPD, for staff and governors, schools have been able to upskill their staff and in some cases they have dedicated Career Leads that have undertaken training as a result of the funding available. This is of particular importance when the constraints on school budgets are taken into account.

One area that has been raised as a concern is the plethora of 'systems' and 'bodies' schools have to work with. It was noted that schools have to work with the CEC, Local Authority and Careers Advisers, and that

“...they've all got their own agenda, their own pots of money and their own ringfencing about what we're allowed to spend it on. The amount of time we waste trying to please three different audiences, when all we need is a joined-up approach.”

Similar points were made in relation to the time wasted in providing the same data, on the same children, but in different formats.

One way in which the role of the Careers Hub could be improved would be to recognise that schools, colleges and providers are very different. It was acknowledged that, rightly, schools are the focus of a lot of their work, and that in meetings and via the Hub, it was interesting hearing about schools. However

“...there's almost something missing which is looking at a slightly wider geographical area – how do we connect college providers. It's a different world, different aims and demands, and priorities.”

Colleges would like to be recognised as a “big, important part of the Careers Strategy as well, particularly with our direct delivery and link to traineeships, T-levels, apprenticeships and work placements”.

The role of the Enterprise Adviser is seen as key, providing that regular contact and helping to hold schools 'to account' for the progress they are making; the introduction of more EAs coming on board is seen as 'great' for more schools.

Data were also provided from two Career Leads via an online survey. When asked about the effectiveness of the Careers Hub, one felt that it was 'Somewhat effective' and one that it was 'Very effective'. Although the funding provided through the Careers Hub was seen to be useful, it was felt that without additional input that CEIAG would continue to be 'fragmented' and not a priority with Senior Leadership Teams and Governors.

Engagement with Wider Skills Programmes

Employer perspective

This varies enormously dependent upon the size of the organisation, the sector within which they operate, and the governance structures embedded within an institution's ways of working. For example, within a large banking organisation, there are strict governance requirements in relation to the opportunities available. The approach is rather to take people on, and train them up in-house. There are challenges, however, in getting applications from the right people as often roles are initially 'temporary', so less attractive, and links with schools, colleges and universities are not exploited as much as they might be so "there's an untapped market, particularly with the university population".

At the moment little seems to be happening in relation to traineeships or T-levels. There is more evidence of apprenticeships and some involvement with the Kickstart scheme; although there was a great deal of suspicion at first around the scheme as it was regarded as just "one of those government things". Now, for some, it is well-embedded within the company. The picture in relation to Kickstart also appears to be influenced by the approach of the Job Centres. Where a company has had the scheme operating on a national level, but only successfully recruited in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire region it was felt to be down to the approach of the Stoke Job Centre who were praised for their successful outcomes as being "absolutely phenomenal". This was a similar picture with another large national company who also reported trouble recruiting nationally, and only being successful in Stoke-on-Trent. On the whole the Kickstart scheme was viewed as a way to "give people a taste of what the organisation is, the employability skills required".

For some SMEs there are challenges, as is noted elsewhere in the report, of knowing 'who to go to' other than an established training partner who they may use for a specific sector role. One company expressed a great deal of frustration in their inability to fill vacancies.

"We want to offer apprenticeships, we want to offer upskilling to people who've got a trade, and we look for graduates as well. We spend a fortune on advertising but no-one comes."

They felt that there was a lack of awareness and breadth in the CEIAG being provided in schools; and of a value being assigned to following a 'trade'.

“What I would say is give young people some options. Okay, so you’re not going to do A-levels – have you thought about going into a trade? That would be an ideal place to start....look at what an electrician does, what a plumber does, what a joiner does and then ultimately think – I’d like to do that.”

Often it was felt people only came into a ‘trade route’ because of a family member being in that profession. Something that was echoed in the conversations in the forum groups with those on apprenticeship and Study Programme routes. Comments were also made about the lack of up-to-date curriculum knowledge, particularly in terms of emerging markets of renewables and decarbonisation. Another employer also remarked that they had seen students being taught on out-of-date equipment that had not been used in their sector for some considerable time.

Some see the sector as ‘over complicated’ and the requirements of fulfilling an apprenticeship, including the 20% ‘away from the job’ can be a barrier for some: including the reality of the impact this can have on companies with smaller workforce numbers when they give employees the requisite time away. With the introduction of End Point Assessments (EPAs) there is a growing need for apprenticeship providers, trainers, coaches and mentors – so employers need to upskill their own workforces. There are also issues around the language used, understanding about what is involved – including with the EPAs. For some there are challenges around how apprenticeships are perceived within the company and the need for upskilling of their own workforces in terms of supporting the development of an apprentice. Overall though, apprenticeships are seen to be performing well.

As T-levels start to come on board more there are red flags being raised about how companies are going to manage the required number of placements. One example provided was of a large company, with an established relationship with their local college, having offered two T-level placements this year. However, they are being asked to take on more. This raises legitimate concerns about how the offer can grow when employers will struggle to accommodate these extended placements in larger numbers. Another large organisation also commented on the need for providers to be realistic about the expectations on the workplace citing the difficulties that might emerge around safeguarding and child protection issues in certain sectors. It was felt that a crucial element of making T-levels successful was for providers to liaise closely with the relevant employer **before** starting their offer – and echoing other comments about constraints on placements “the expectation is that we will automatically come up with a placement from day one”. As employers it was also seen as

crucial that the young person coming onto one of these placements has realistic expectations about what they may be doing.

When asked to indicate all of the schemes they engaged with, data from the online survey illustrated in Table 4 provide a similar confirmation of those most commonly seen:

Table 4. *Schemes engaged in (apprentices' survey)*

<i>Scheme</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Kickstart	17.24%	5
Apprenticeships	37.93%	11
Traineeships	17.24%	5
T-levels	6.90%	2
Graduate placements/degrees	20.69%	6

There was also a sense that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic a degree of apathy and apparent lack of motivation has crept into the potential workforce population as a result of the impact on individuals who have either been fairly isolated in their rooms for almost two years, or who have been on furlough and are now taking time to think more about what work they do, and how they do it.

Education, training and skills provider perspective

The extent to which education providers are engaging with the wider skills programmes is mixed. Many are aiming to keep their curriculum broad and varied, with the option of vocational qualifications gaining more ground. To support this, schools are reviewing the ways in which they approach the choice of options in Year 9. One school organises a two-week 'taster' programme during which Year 9s can look at the differences between vocational and GCSE pathways. The focus is on the students being successful "regardless of pathway", and of 'matching up' students to the best possible route.

Getting information out to parents and carers was also felt to be crucial, and particularly because there is a 'legacy' knowledge about apprenticeships and how they used to be viewed. When asked about apprenticeships, one school felt that the "perception sometimes is still there that you do an apprenticeship if you didn't get the grades to go on and do an academic A-level route". One training provider reinforced this, acknowledging that where

schools are managing to break through, to get information out to parents and facilitate access for providers and colleges to speak to parents and teachers, that it raises awareness.

“We speak to them (parents) about the frameworks and the standards, and what’s included in that, and what they’d learn, the end point assessment and the portfolios.”

In addition, they endeavour to educate the Careers Advisers so that they can pass information on and ensure that students understand that there are multiple routes into a career. There was also recognition that it can be very easy for young people to be swayed by their friends or parents/carers, by external influences and that in this, without proper guidance

“a lot of young people fall into the trap of either doing nothing at all, because they really don’t know what they want to do, or go and do something which turns out to be not the right thing and then they bounce around from one to another.”

They are keen to engage further with employers, to bring in external training providers to work with Years 7, 8 and 9 to raise awareness and to ensure students have “enough information to make the best decision.” They recognised that although the school can provide this information, it has much more weight if employers come in and engage with them.

One provider, who liaises with the Job Centres about training and apprenticeships for older learners, states that there are still issues around companies tending to want younger learners on apprenticeship routes, particularly “with the incentives in place from the government....This makes it harder on older learners and getting them placed.”

Compounding that problem are perceptions from these mature learners that they’re “too old for that”, “I’m older, I can’t be an apprentice”. It is almost as if there is an embarrassment, a loss of authority and recognition of the level of experience they have. It was noted that “they don’t see it that an apprentice is still part of the workforce, it’s just that you’re learning”. Feedback from another provider indicated a mixed picture in terms of how much planning is in place with some employers having a “whole master plan for the next 2-3-5 years – they want to build their apprenticeship programme in”, whereas others are only interested in taking on, or able to take on, one or two apprentices. The provider very much saw their role as also enabling employers to understand the different schemes and what is available.

There are also still misconceptions with employers, as with potential applicants, that apprenticeships are for young people “coming from school”.

As others have noted, it is recognised that the space is ‘complicated’ with different providers and different offers also part of the mix (apprenticeships, Kickstart, Traineeships).

Additionally, there are concerns about the plethora of paperwork and bureaucracy attached to various schemes and the difficulties this poses for smaller companies. There may therefore be a skewing of opportunities towards larger companies who have the resources to mitigate this as opposed to SMEs who may not have the capacity to deal with the scheme requirements.

The fact that apprenticeships are now being offered at a higher level was seen as important, but there must be greater promotion of these options and alternative pathways. This picture was also reflected in the different ways apprenticeships are viewed dependent upon the sector.

“If I was looking at a sector like social care, they really value apprenticeships and do a lot of them. But other sectors like digital and cyber tend to go for graduates. The apprenticeship model seems not fit for purpose for some of them. They’ll say graduates are coming out with a load of knowledge, but not a lot of employability skills. The apprentices are coming with the development of those employability skills, but haven’t got the knowledge of the graduates...they just think it takes too long.”

In terms of innovative approaches to the complexity and difficulties experienced within these wider skills programme areas, one provider reported on a specific Pathway programme they are offering. This started with a rapid induction programme (sitting outside of the Skills Funding Agency) followed by a funded short course; on to a traineeship and then apprenticeship; going through the various levels of qualification available. In this way different programmes were woven together. It also offered some longevity for employers concerned about future skills gaps. This brokering approach may be seen as crucial for the future with evidence reported elsewhere² by the Society for Education and Training (SET) of colleges being more proactive in linking up with universities and employers much more directly. Exeter College, for example, provides up to 150 apprenticeships and now offers a degree programme delivered by the college but awarded by the University of Exeter. It has taken a very proactive approach towards getting things ‘off the ground’ rather than waiting

² www.set-et-foundation.co.uk, InTuition Spring 2022, pp17-18

for demand to grow. Similarly, Solihull College and University Centre are focusing on helping manufacturers in the region to identify skills gaps, and then working collaboratively with them on solutions to find “the best pathway for students and employers”, linking up “further and higher education for employers, parents and students, and make the pathways and possibilities clear”. Employer Advisory Boards are then used to facilitate greater communication between employers to maximise opportunities on a broader basis. There is acknowledgement of the need to move to a more employer-led direction and changes implemented as a result of the pandemic are seen as one way forward. By pivoting towards online and hybrid learning, more creative and flexible approaches to apprenticeship delivery are possible through “virtual learning environments, on-demand learning, remote masterclasses and flipped learning approaches” that can improve accessibility and equality of provision.

The Society for Education and Training also reported on other opportunities that exist in relation to Level 5 and Level 6 apprenticeships. The National College for Nuclear in Cumbria has designed specific modules that enable direct linkage to degree qualifications. This enables students to connect their learning and workplace activities to their own set of apprenticeship competencies whilst completing the same assessments as the degree group.

There are some fundamental concerns about T-levels and the requirements for extended work placements. Institutions currently piloting T-levels are reported to be struggling to get placements something also noted by one organisation who confirmed the difficulties they are having in providing the number of placements required by their local college. Others are simply ignoring them for the time being. As T-levels increase there are fears that issues that already abound in relation to getting placements for work experience are simply going to be compounded by the requirement for extended placements for these qualifications. It was reported that “the employment environment is too swamped, so we need to look at a new model for work placements”.

Kickstart has proved similarly challenging, with reports of it being difficult to get off the ground. There are concerns about how well-resourced job centres are to support individuals; issues around the quality of CVs received – and evidence of some very poor applications. Such fundamental skills appear to be missing. One college observed

“...how do we prepare young people to have those practical employability skills on job search, etc. It’s got to be part of that core programme so when they leave school – not as a bolt on though – but something every pupil does as part of their journey.

The job market is tough.....and some of the young people aren't even going to get past that application.”

In terms of traineeships, it is felt that Kickstart may have displaced these for the time being; the review of the scheme at the end of March was seen as something that would be of interest in evaluating this aspect. The pandemic also had an impact with employers needing skilled labour, rather than considering trainees. It was hoped that over the coming months as there is a transition out of the pandemic that this will start to settle down. Traineeships were also viewed sometimes as just another form of 'work experience' rather than “adding value to the skill base”. The fact that it finishes at age 24 was also seen as an issue and that perhaps a Traineeship for adults would get some take up for those wanting to 'career change'.

The two additional survey responses indicated that they engaged with employers in providing CEIAG predominantly for traineeships and apprenticeships, although Kickstart and T-levels were also mentioned. In terms of how their schools engaged with external CEIAG, one had a Service Level Agreement with Entrust for a one-day a week Careers Adviser and the other had their own Careers Adviser for KS3 and KS4 and also an independent adviser.

When looking at degrees and graduate routes the pandemic appears to have provided an opportunity. For universities it was important to have an 'employer-informed curriculum' – much as schools, colleges and training providers are advocating – and that employers adopt a role of 'critical friend', meeting through Employer Advisory groups to engage in discussions around “effective transition progression, workforce development, labour market intelligence, skills, attributes and competence”. Some of these groups are linked specifically to curriculum areas or departments; and this also then feeds into opportunities to collaborate on CPD and short course options.

The potential for universities to broaden out 'knowledge exchange' and experiential learning models and opportunities, for students as well as employers, is seen as an exciting opportunity. One project has achieved this via Internships, enabling some to participate who may otherwise have been excluded. Students maintain a reflective log, pre-opportunity support, and then evaluation at the end: operating along the same frameworks as a project might. One of the key aims has been to prioritise under-represented students and so the model has to be accessible, with “good advice and guidance at the front end, making sure that the contract between the opportunity provider and the student is robust and achievable.” Employers also report this online virtual delivery as being a positive opportunity. Such an

approach does, however, favour those universities with large numbers of vocational training courses (engineering, construction, health and social care, etc).

It was also felt that a greater centralisation of information was needed: information is perceived to be available on apprenticeships and traineeships, for example, but “it’s all over the place”. One provider also raised the point that there was a huge gap around any attention being given towards entrepreneurship and that this needs to be addressed in terms of identifying skills that could be developed – tenacity, professional approaches, curating your identity. One attempt to address this issue is through Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce’s ‘Ignite’ programme that is offering free advice, workshops, support and mentoring for post-16 FE students across Staffordshire. It is working with colleges in Burton and South Derbyshire, Leek and Buxton, Newcastle and Stafford group, and South Staffordshire College.

There was also a running theme that

“...we need to just join the dots a little better and glue some of this together – presenting the offer a little bit more coherently, robustly to students.....trying to make sure that staff are on the same page”.

One of the main points to emerge was that CEIAG needs to be the responsibility of everyone: employers, universities, schools, colleges, training providers, Local Authorities, Councils, etc. That it also needs to ensure that there is a strong element of impartiality and inclusion of breadth of information to ensure equality of advice. There is a need for providers of CEIAG to understand “how the world is changing, and changing at pace, changing differently for different sectors and different professions”. This is something that the pandemic has exacerbated, along with the emergence of a need for greater flexibility and hybrid working models; alongside which there is a requirement for greater flexibility in terms of the curriculum offer and greater use of virtual delivery options.

Some of these aspects were also picked up during conversations with young people and adults in the forum group discussions.

Young people and adults' perspectives

Apprenticeships

When reviewing how adults are considered in relation to apprenticeships, one participant asked for this particular group of potential applicants not to be ignored; for there to be no 'missed opportunities' to talk to them about what they are going to do, or if they had thought about retraining. In this instance it was a parent who talked about a Community Champion at the school of her children who had approached her and provided the support and encouragement for her to find out more.

Kickstart

All participants in this forum group were aged over 21 and had a mix of backgrounds coming onto the scheme; all reported positive experiences of their links with the Job Centre and how supportive their Work Coaches had been. They felt they had acquired "really good, transferrable skills". Travel issues were a problem for all but they had been supported by the Work Coaches to identify suitable potential placements.

In school they had felt that CEIAG had focused too much on next steps being on an 'educational route' and that there was little advice available for those wanting to leave, or to take a different pathway. It was felt that greater emphasis needed to be placed on working with students to reflect and find the skills they have and that

"...maybe this research is part of that change and will make it possible. That identification of the skills of students, to guide them in the right way. Play to their strengths."

Again, individuals expressed the need to have more tailored sessions, perhaps in PSHE, where they could learn about CVs, interview techniques, etc, in order to "take the pressure off" when they are in those situations "for real". Even though it was several years since they had left school, some talked about still feeling lost (prior to joining the Kickstart scheme) and of feeling "like a deer in the headlights".

Study Programmes

One of the reasons young people engaged with Study Programmes was to have access to genuine work-related experiences. There was appreciation that such programmes provide an opportunity to find out about a range of possible career options, along with the possibility of moving on to an apprenticeship at the end. Some had experienced difficulties in obtaining

careers advice at school: either there was no dedicated Career Adviser within the school, or where an external Adviser visited the school there was limited time and lots of young people waiting to be seen. One young person expressed their frustrations

“It’s like you have to push back, you want to ask questions and prepare for your future but you can’t, you haven’t got that.”

Most had gained the majority of their support and advice from parents and wider family members. What they had asked for is that people with ‘real experience’ would come into schools to talk to them about possible careers and routes available. They wanted a shift in perceptions about apprenticeships as being only an option for those who had failed to succeed academically; of not being regarded as a ‘failure’ because they had not passed an exam.

Level 3 Vocational College Programmes

During conversations with these learners, the theme that emerged most strongly in this category was of the need for more designated Careers Advisers, and ones who have expertise in different categories and potential career pathways “to broaden our minds about opportunities and different routes into jobs”.

One common theme that emerged from all focus groups was around the need for more ‘work ready’ skills to be taught in school: financial awareness, writing a CV, applying for a job, how to approach an interview. In one young person’s words “the things everyone needs in life”.

Student Survey

To establish how the picture in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire compared to a national overview, comparisons were made with data provided in the Department for Education’s Research Brief (2021) that had undertaken a longitudinal study of the experiences of young people in England in relation to CEIAG. Although focusing on a cohort aged 18-19, the parameters are sufficiently similar for comparison with our participants who are aged from 16 upwards and the criteria incorporated in the DfE report were used to inform questions posed to our participants through surveys and focus groups.

Participants were asked to indicate which of the following pathways they were told about via CEIAG within their schools and colleges: A-levels, T-levels, diplomas, degrees, apprenticeships, Kickstart scheme, traineeship, or Other. In relation to ‘Other’ this was predominantly about BTECs (n=12), with Level 2 courses (n=3) and two not stated. So,

excluding 'Other' and those 'not stated', a total of 503 responses have been used for calculations. Table 5 summarises the responses:

Table 5. *Pathways students had been informed about*

<i>Pathway</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Doing an A-level	34.00%	171
Doing a T-level	3.78%	19
Doing a Diploma	11.73%	59
Doing a Degree	18.89%	95
Going on to an Apprenticeship	21.67%	109
Going on to a Kickstart scheme	2.58%	13
Going on to a Traineeship	3.98%	20
Other	3.38%	17

Cumulatively the majority of CEIAG was focused on academic routes (A-level, Diploma, Degree): 64.87% (n=325). A smaller percentage collectively toward vocational routes (Apprenticeship, Kickstart, Traineeship): 28.34% (n=142). Relatively low numbers for other options, acknowledging that T-levels are only just coming on-stream: T-level: 3.79% (n=19); BTEC: 2.40% (n=12); L2: 0.4% (n=2)

In the DfE report, the responses were as below (% are approximate as extracted from a bar chart), indicating that there is a far higher availability of CEIAG in relation to apprenticeships (64%), vocational qualifications (34%) and traineeships (30%) on a national level than apparent in the data collated for the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire area:

Table 6. DfE data on pathways

<i>Pathway</i>	<i>%</i>
Doing a Degree	78%
Apprenticeships	64%
Doing a Diploma	46%
Doing an A-level	43%
Studying part-time	39%
Vocational qualifications	34%
GCSEs	31%
Going on to a Traineeship	30%
International Baccalaureate	16%

Knowledge of Careers Advice and Guidance Services/Government and Local Schemes Supporting People into Work

There are a substantial number of schemes and areas of support in relation to CEIAG, dependent upon whether you are accessing these as an employer; an education, training and skills provider; or as an individual. All of the schemes below have been mentioned, to some extent, by participants. It is therefore useful to have some background information as context for the report and their comments. Some of the schemes used by schools have a fee attached, so not all schools are able to access these. A brief overview of each is provided below.

National Careers Service (NCS)

This provider now operates the National Careers Helpline (NCH), offering telephone advice and guidance for those aged over 13. The focus is on supporting individuals to find their career pathways: this is achieved by working with individuals, employers, and other providers. In addition to the NCH individuals are also supported face-to-face, through digital skills assessments, customer newsletters (with good news stories, feedback, job opportunities, training opportunities, information on the current labour market), webinars (with sector information about hospitality in Stoke and Staffordshire for example), interview skills, CVs, and Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) being supported with local training providers or the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). There is also a small employer engagement team responsible for ensuring advisers are aware of current

training opportunities and priorities. Projects that enable 'matching' of customers to employer needs are also supported: working to establish what an employer wants and whether or not a customer has those qualifications, experience, or requires additional upskilling.

It is tasked with a number of priorities: examples include focusing on deprived areas; key 'customer groups' requiring support; with specific projects such as working with the Afghan refugees; SEND; single parents; those without a Level 2 qualification, etc. The aim is to utilise a 'joined up' approach and cross-referrals where appropriate.

As others noted across the research discussions, there are issues around recruitment of suitably qualified individuals with sufficient experience and qualifications appropriate to high level CEIAG delivery.

SWAPs have become a key opportunity in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, with a lot of work being done with the DWP and providers to support them.

SWAPs

These sector-based work academy programmes provide opportunities for individuals to learn new skills and gain experience working in a particular industry: for example, construction, warehousing, or care. The programme is designed to help those seeking work who are claiming either Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). The primary aim is to build confidence, improve job prospects and enhance CVs. Each SWAP lasts up to six weeks.

Restart Scheme

This is part of the government's 'Plan for Jobs' designed to help people and businesses recover from the economic effects of the pandemic. It is focused on supporting claimants on Universal Credit who have been out of work for at least 9 months, to find jobs in their local area.

Project SEARCH

Established originally at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1996 to help young people with learning disabilities get a job, this programme now provides an internship programme aiming to offer real-world experience, and support to find full-time paid work. This also includes ongoing support for both ex-students and employers once an individual is in work.

Speakers 4 Schools

The aim of this scheme is to address educational inequality by providing all young people with access to prestigious networks: it offers talks from influential figures; and, recognising that young people (particularly from harder-to-reach areas or lower socio-economic backgrounds) can struggle to access in-person work experience, links state school students to industry-leading companies to provide a virtual work experience programme. In doing so employers are able to increase the number of placements they can offer and accommodate a more diverse range of young people. The service is free of charge.

Career Ready

This organisation, which is a social mobility charity, works with young people, schools and colleges by providing employer-led programmes that offer a network of support, workplace experiences and access to work placement Internships. There is now a network of over 1,000 employers and 3,300 volunteers who deliver a range of careers focused programmes in 400 schools and colleges. As part of their digital events they offer 10-minute assemblies that deliver against Gatsby benchmarks 1, 2 and 7.

Sparks 4 Careers

This is an App providing access to information, resources and opportunities to enable young people to develop their understanding of the relationship between education and employment. The aim is to improve motivation and attainment and help develop a more informed understanding of how to progress their aspirations. The App provides a programme of 40-minute live employer events that students can access; a panel of young employees who talk about their roles and backgrounds; observation of the workplace; opportunities to submit questions before and during live events; and a link to the Gatsby benchmark number 5: Employer Encounters.

Unifrogs

The *Unifrogs* portal offers one central point for information relating to apprenticeships, university and college courses in the UK. In addition, it offers programmes that enable young people to collate their personal 'career journey' records. This aims to enable young people to write their CVs and Personal Statements by having all of their information in one place.

Higher Horizons

This is part of the Uni Connect Programme and is funded by the Government to deliver free and impartial higher education outreach to schools and colleges across Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire. It provides a Progression Framework designed to be an outreach curriculum structured around three key themes: information, advice and guidance about post-16 and post-18 choices; providing hands-on experience at a university, college or employer partner; and supporting subject interests and attainment, helping learners transition to the next level of study successfully.

Employer perspective

There is generally a good level of familiarity with the ‘local picture’ with employers reporting working with the Careers Hub, of links to local schools, colleges and universities, government and local schemes – such as Restart, for example; and of supporting ex-military personnel. In addition, there are strong links to the Chamber of Commerce in relation to these schemes.

A small number of employers, however, felt that they would not know where to look for support or information; or perhaps were aware of the DWP for example, but had no close connection to them from an employer’s perspective.

This was also evident in the data from the online survey and the responses of 13 participants when asked about their level of familiarity and engagement with CEIAG services collated in Table 7.

Table 7. Familiarity and engagement with CEIAG services (apprentices)

<i>Engagement</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Not familiar at all	7.69%	1
Occasional use	30.77%	4
Established use/ knowledge	61.54%	8
Total	100%	13

When asked about their awareness of the range of government and local schemes supporting people into work however, this was more evenly split between ‘some awareness’ and ‘very aware’, as Table 8 indicates.

Table 8. *Awareness of government and local schemes (apprentices)*

<i>Awareness</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Not aware	0.00%	0
Some awareness	46.15%	6
Very aware	53.85%	7
Total	100%	13

When asked for further information about the schemes they did engage with these were mainly Kickstart, Traineeships, and apprenticeships. There were 2 comments of working with Jobs 22 and 1 of working on STEM activities across the community and education providers; 1 participant also mentioned SWAPs.

The findings would therefore indicate that there is additional work to be done in promoting awareness of CEIAG and the full range of Government and local schemes that support people into work with employers.

Education, training and skills provider perspective

Although this is developing, more work is needed, and there are some missed opportunities for the independent sector to be more involved. The independent training provider market was seen as more difficult to navigate, as opposed to a school or a college's offer. There are attempts to work on this and develop the local provider network.

“You’d find advice and guidance from schools and colleges are stronger than independent training providers in terms of being linked into the careers system. Locally they do a lot more than in other areas....sharing and starting to share more information. They’re engaging with the local provider network and trying to understand what the independent sector’s offer looks like”

The picture is varied across schools and the ways in which they work with training providers and the depth of information provided to young people around options available is also variable. Some bring in different colleges to talk to their students, going through offers and following up “with personalised sessions afterwards”. However, in some institutions there was evidence of “only certain students being passed over for the provider to speak to – and we’d like to speak to them all”. The role of the ‘independent’ careers adviser is therefore crucial in some instances, encouraging wider conversations with students and parents about

appropriate routes. The models of CEIAG delivery are varied however across education, training and skills providers so in some instances having access to an external portal (such as the NCS) is crucial to gain this additional information.

Use is being made of *Unifrogs* as this links into local labour market information, degree and apprenticeship opportunities. There is a subscription for this service but it is seen as a means through which CEIAG can be personalised with “every student and teacher having access to the platform.....they [students] have their own unique area and can look at what’s right for them and their pathway plan”. Previously students would have had to ask a member of staff to print off their student record for them. There is also evidence of another online platform, *Sparks 4 Careers*, being used. This has been used in one school successfully with Year 9 students, some of whom are at risk of NEET, where they have found this format more engaging: this has then provided opportunities for teachers to revisit various aspects with the students at a later date.

There is also evidence of schools using the Career Development Institute framework, alongside the *Career Ready* option with assemblies and resources, to support their CEIAG programme, offering a 20-minute tutorial session every week which is careers-based and brings in elements of the CDI framework.

Schools acknowledge that there is a lot of information out there, so they are attempting to navigate this, alongside statutory external guidance that has to be managed. Anecdotally it was felt that Gatsby benchmark 8 (personal advice and guidance) is strongest in all of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire schools, but that nationally those schools and colleges not in Careers Hubs are achieving better on that benchmark than those across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire who are – so there is some room for exploring why this is so. Schools are endeavouring to make their guidance as “objective as it can be”, but there is honesty that barriers do exist as a result of sixth form funding and that the market is a competitive one in terms of the incentives involved in retaining ‘bums on seats’. There are also issues around how much time is allotted to career appointments with an adviser – taking an individual ‘off curriculum’ and especially where these are independent advisers – commissioned, rather than in-house. There needs to be a guarantee of equal access to personal guidance for every single student.

There was a collective agreement from education, training and skills providers that a commitment needs to be seen more broadly that “it’s not about us, it’s not about our numbers, it’s about what’s the right thing for the student, giving them all of their options in an

impartial way.” At the moment there is inconsistency, but this may be due to those with responsibility for delivering CEIAG not having sufficient depth and breadth of knowledge to provide information about all of the possible pathways. One specific example was provided around apprenticeships, where so much has changed, and the need to move away from some of the

“...traditional thinking around routes other than A-levels and students only taking that route because ‘you’re not bright’. It’s not that, it’s about what do you want to do with your life and your future career and what’s the best way of getting you there”.

Work Placements and Work Experience Activities

Employer perspective

Although all employers offered work placements or work experience activities to some degree, it was felt that this could be improved, particularly in regard to a much more local perspective; and something more structured. However, experiences and approaches to this varied greatly between employers, and certainly between SMEs and larger organisations. For one of the larger companies this was expressed as a need to create a process of work experience that helped young people to see what was on offer; something that would involve staff from each of their departments.

“Ideally, it would be a week’s work experience at the beginning of the year, and the young person thinks ‘oh, that’s great’; finish that and in March they apply for our apprenticeship programme and start in September.”

This was cited as one of the reasons why this particular company had decided to offer Kickstart opportunities to facilitate access for young people and adults to find out more about the business and potentially become long-term employees.

A smaller organisation, however, saw the whole work experience and work placement environment as problematic. The usual picture was that the young person was normally the son or daughter of someone who already worked at the company. For them, the priority was not on work placements, but on finding a route through a very challenging and frustrating recruitment situation; particularly at present.

Other larger employers presented a mixed picture. There was some resonance with the feelings of the smaller company around the difficulties of offering work experience. This centred on why work experience week has to be the same week for everyone. A lack of flexibility. “How can you expect every employer to take every child?” A lack of awareness that the very weeks when organisations are expected to host work experience placements are also when many staff are on annual leave.

Similarly, from another large employer there was frustration around the sheer volume of education providers all making requests of ‘time-strapped’ employers. There was a perception that schools were ‘out of touch’ with what is actually happening with employers; and also of there being a drift in the currency of student learning on equipment that “isn’t even used in industry anymore”.

Various suggestions were considered during discussions including the possibility that the Careers Hub could be expanded to engage with more employers; facilitating different types of engagement with schools. There was some evidence of this starting to happen. Suggestions of developing a “bank of resources that showcases as much of the employer sectors as possible across the patch”; of collaboration on Open Days. “It could be a couple of Open Days a year so interested students could sign up for that and come along and see us.”

It was felt that the Careers Hub was a “good broker in terms of pushing out best practice” and that it would also be beneficial if they identified if, and where, a school or employer were struggling so that support could be targeted.

At its most basic, improving work experience and placement activities was seen as a means by which all opportunities were made available to ensure that individuals get a really good grasp of what a role entails so that employers can “whittle people down until we get the core group of those who were really interested” in pursuing a particular career pathway, and thus linking it more strongly, and directly, to potential recruitment opportunities.

Picking up on feedback from other participants, employers were also asked about the potential usage and development of a central portal that could host, or facilitate, work experience opportunities. For one larger employer this was felt to be problematic, and potentially unequitable, in effectively putting in a ‘recruitment stage’ for an employer. There were concerns that it would be difficult to maintain equity of access, particularly for those from deprived backgrounds and areas, and those struggling with travel.

Of those who responded to this question on the online survey (n=13), 11 indicated that they did offer work placements or work experience opportunities. In terms of how easy they felt it was to do so, two (18.18%) felt that it was 'not easy at all'; seven (63.64%) felt that it was 'okay'; and two (18.18%) felt that it was very easy. Some of these difficulties echoed issues raised in the face-to-face interviews.

- Most work experience placement requests came from existing employees' families.
- A lack of clarity around expectations as to what is expected of the young person, and of what the employer can offer.
- Some good links with schools and other education providers; although in certain cases these could be improved with greater understanding needed from the educational institution as to business needs and constraints.
- Further elaboration on this also focused on the difficulties of matching work experience projects with curriculum timetables.
- Whilst some schools, colleges and employers have endeavoured to facilitate something 'virtual' during the Covid-19 pandemic it was acknowledged that it had been "really difficult to offer a good quality work experience placement as young people have had to work from home and this does not give them a good insight into the job role/opportunities available to them".

Employers were asked about the advice they would give to another company offering work experience or work placement activities. The strongest responses indicated the need to provide:

- An induction.
- A named contact (and preferably a named mentor).
- Information on health and safety in the workplace.
- Meaningful tasks and a review of tasks.
- A debrief/appraisal at the end.

Also important was the need to provide the following:

- A work plan for the period of the placement.
- An opportunity to discuss 'next steps'.

Picking up on some of the issues raised in the face-to-face interviews, employers responding to the survey were asked to rank how useful they would find each of the following:

information about the individual coming onto a placement; a named contact at the organisation sending the person; the opportunity for greater flexibility across the year to take placements; access to a portal with information to support their business (eg standard templates for induction, health and safety, etc); and access to a portal with resources to support the development of their own workforce (mentoring, health and safety, etc). Of the 11 respondents who had indicated that they did offer work placements or work experience opportunities, 7 provided further answers to the questions. Although a small number of responses, there was a degree of concurrence with points being made in the face-to-face interviews. It was viewed as either 'essential' (n=5, 71.43%) or 'very useful' (n=1, 14.29%) that there was information about the individual coming onto a placement. Having a named contact at the organisation sending the person was viewed as 'essential' (n=5, 71.43%) or 'very useful' (n=2, 28.57%). Of slightly less importance was having greater flexibility across the year: this was deemed as 'very useful' (n=5, 71.43%) or 'somewhat useful' (n=2, 28.57%), in agreement with comments from the face-to-face interviews. A slightly stronger response was seen in having access to a portal with information to support the business as 'very useful' (n=6, 85.71%) and 'somewhat useful' (n=1, 14.29%), which would again tie in with some of the face-to-face interviews. Lastly the response to having a portal to support the development of their own workforce was seen as slightly less crucial: 'very useful' (n=4, 57.14%); 'somewhat useful' (n=2, 28.57%); and 'essential' (n=1, 14.29%).

Education, training and skills provider perspective

When work experience and work placement activities work at their best they are seen as an optimal way to enable individuals to “see what an employer would expect – the reality of it [work]. That transition period from school to work”. The feedback across education, training and skills providers is, however, mixed in relation to this aspect.

The situation pre-Covid saw a lot of schools aiming to get Year 10s out for a week somewhere: this was not always successful, or a meaningful experience. For many Year 10 students this left them feeling 'overwhelmed', that they “hadn't learnt anything – there wasn't a really good induction, or structured support in place”. As a result, some establishments have moved away from offering any placement activities until Year 12. There were also issues around fulfilling placements for those with SEND requirements, and especially those on the autistic spectrum who have “really struggled with changes to routine and changes to the environment”. Schools were also picking up on feedback from employers who felt that schools “need to be doing a lot more work towards preparation for employment”.

Taking the view that it was impractical to find placements for a whole year group of 200-300 students, alternative approaches being tried are to bring employers into school and offer an 'in-house programme'. This involves whole year group activities around body language, interview techniques, writing CVs and letters, etc, but with every student having "an interview with an employer that then gave feedback about their strengths and weaknesses", in addition to the students choosing the type of sectors they were interested in: engineering, construction, health and social care, etc. The activity is targeted much more to specific pathways, having employers in to give talks, offering site visits, of students doing research and presenting what they have learnt about various career options and pathways. Another school has similarly chosen to forego the more 'traditional work placement' route at the moment, preferring instead to take a hybrid approach between students going out, and offering activities for students to work with employers so that it is more about having "live briefs that they can work on in the curriculum".

The pandemic has undoubtedly created difficulties, but it has also provided ways for schools and colleges to think differently and to be more creative in the ways that they are approaching this aspect, including virtual work placements. An external site that is being used is *Speakers 4 Schools* and this is being promoted out to the students.

For Year 12 students, however, there is now a mandate that they have to have a work placement. This creates a 'rush' of schools and individuals endeavouring to chase down a limited number of placements all at the same time. One school has indicated the difficulties around "managing students' and parents' expectations", not just because of the limited availability, but because for some there are huge social mobility issues where someone just "isn't willing to travel further than 5 miles away" and in that 5-mile radius there might be 10 secondary schools chasing placements in the same week.

It is crucial that opportunities are available to all, so, although he felt it may be viewed as stereotypical, one provider related his own experiences:

"...for middle class kids with great networks, it's not so difficult to self-source, but for lots of other kids, working class, single parents, etc, like mine.....all of my uncles, aunties, friends and neighbours were dinner ladies, taxi drivers, rail workers....so if I'd wanted to go into medicine or accountancy, where was I going to go?"

As a result they are endeavouring to do more work around such situations using LinkedIn to create an 'instant professional network' and supporting students to create networks and self-

source future connections. It was deemed important that employers also reach out to schools and work with them to build up communication.

What has emerged is a picture of a very varied and diverse methodology around work placements and work experience activity. There is also a growing realisation that schools and employers each have to recognise the implications for the other party in attempting to organise and offer successful work placement experiences. Each works on very different timescales and within very different budgetary constraints. There are also issues if a school wants a whole year group, or large class groups to go out: for the employer they may only be able to facilitate a small group of 6.

One school has started to address these issues from Year 9, getting students to complete – and regularly revisit – a survey about what they are interested in doing as a career. This information is then reviewed and updated on a regular basis and goes onto the student's report so that everyone is aware when discussions are had with the student, teacher and parents. A programme is also being trialled, working with the Careers Enterprise Company, with Year 9 and 10 students who are failing to engage and at risk of NEET. Short, regular work placement activities are planned that help to foster good 'working relationships' outside of the school environment, in order to promote better behaviour when in class. There is also a 'Nurture Group' working specifically with those who have been on exclusions for a week. This is being trialled with Year 9s with the aim that next year when in Year 10 they will do a day's work experience on a regular basis.

With a lack of commonality in approaches taken, one school has started to use *Career Ready* with Years 12 and 13, offering the potential for internships and access to a mentor: but this is a competitive process and there is nothing similar for Years 10 and 11. The scheme is also not freely available to all schools so the challenge is therefore is one of how to get "equality of provision for **every** single child", particular across deprived areas.

Although contacts and networking through the Careers Hubs is seen as vital in gaining access and understanding between employers and educational establishments, the apparent lack of a more 'joined up approach' across the area only contributes to the difficulties being experienced. Suggestions were made about the possibility of having something much more centralised, or in a database format, that could provide information about employer placements and how these might be accessed, when they might be available – or even 'bookable'. This is not without its own issues however with one employer cautioning that this risked becoming almost a 'recruitment' portal, with associated

implications for the business of having to screen potential 'applicants'. Yet there is clearly a need for something to be done.

The pandemic has shown that a hybrid approach to doing things can be successful; that online 'connections' need not be without value. It is important that this is now planned effectively into the curriculum as preparation for employment in a post-pandemic world. Within vocational areas, where placements are already viewed as a core component, there are historically strong links between employers and education, training and skills providers: the sectors know they are needed. In other sectors, however, this can be more challenging. As establishments prepare for T-levels, and the need to look at those extended work placements, there are concerns about misunderstandings about what is needed. It is also about the ways in which employers understand that these placements are something that is 'mutually beneficial'. In this instance, the role of the EAs is seen as helping to bridge some of that gap as "they get an understanding and connection with the providers, schools and colleges. The Cornerstone employer network is helping to get those big employers on board". The challenges are greater for industries that tend to have a lot of small businesses and how to get those extended work placements in those sectors. It is seen as imperative that employers see the benefits for their 'future' workforce; about conversations with employers about what skills and attributes are needed. Employers need to be involved in helping to shape the curriculum and of identifying what skills and attributes need to be covered as part of a young person's or adult's education and training.

"It's less about just going somewhere, it's about something that's beneficial to you and your journey. Once they reach that college age they are your future work force and apprentices, rather than work placements you might see in year 10 – which are still important but as a taster of work. Maybe there's something about employers understanding the different age groups and what they need."

There is also a need for co-ordination, planning and tracking of work placement so that there is a 'student record': something already offered by some employers, but not necessarily 'tracked' in terms of the impact for the young person on placement. At the moment schools and colleges are investing in different schemes and tools, but maybe this needs to be streamlined and standardised so that there is a consistency of approach and information across the piece.

A final thought was around the need for this to not only be seen as something for younger learners; the assumption should not be that "somehow mature learners know a great deal of

this stuff already.....who cares if they're 45 years old? They may know absolutely nothing about a particular profession" so offering a broader concept of work placement/experience as more of an 'experiential learning' opportunity may have benefit for mature students. A need for more outreach and community-focussed learning.

Young People and Adults' Perspectives

Many of these points were also reiterated within the forum focus group discussions with questions over the usefulness of work experience activities in Year 10, although it was acknowledged that this could help to "shift your perspective on how you look at things". There was a strong emphasis on having more preparation for work – of 'work ready' skills such as financial awareness, CV writing, interview skills, etc. It was also felt that having more varied, regular access to work experiences – even if shorter or in a different format – short workshops, taster events at school, or on-site – would help to gain knowledge about how businesses work, the roles and functions. In response to calls for a more formalised work placement to be developed (induction, mentoring, etc), as discussed with employers, young people and adults wanted the way in which they were treated in placement to be improved: for employers to "remember I'm here".

Student Survey

In response to the survey, when asked if they had participated in any work experience (including virtual) or internship activities, of the 208 responses, 76 (36.54%) indicated that they had and 132 (63.46%) indicated that they had not. Of those that had, when asked what they had found most useful and why, respondents indicated several key factors identified below, including gaining a "better insight into what I want to do and a more realistic idea of the future". The 57 responses that could be categorised are collected in Table 9. They largely echo the feedback from interviews and forum group discussions in terms of priorities.

Table 9. *What students gained from work experience*

<i>Gained</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
Insight into a role	1	1.75
Confirmation of possible career routes	6	10.53
Confirmation that it was the wrong route	3	5.26
Experience in the workplace	12	21.05
Knowledge of the industry/company	1	1.75
Gaining confidence	2	3.51
Communication skills	3	5.26
Expectations around role/workplace environment	12	21.05
Virtual work experience	3	5.26
Gaining new skills	3	5.26
Social skills	2	3.51
Independence	1	1.75
Personal feedback	1	1.75
Responsibility	1	1.75
Team working	5	8.77
Money (paid work experience)	1	1.75
Total	57	

Apprentices' survey

In response to the question about work placements or work experience prior to starting on their apprenticeship scheme, of the 16 total respondents, 11 responded to this question with four (36.36%) having had some sort of work experience, and seven (63.64%) having had no work experience. Out of those who had, the responses were very similar to the *Students*, indicating that the experience had helped to build up confidence and improve communication skills; to understand 'working life' better, and to help them to "move forward for when I was eventually employed".

Forum groups

a) Schools

The pandemic has had a huge impact on actual 'in person' work experience activities, with schools either offering nothing or having moved to a hybrid approach with online 'virtual' work experience, and whole year group sessions frequently delivered by external providers. Some followed these up with personalised one-to-one career chats with an adviser to

overcome some of the pandemic constraints and to limit the negative impact on the students. *Career Ready* was seen as a good option by students.

Those who had been in Year 10 at the start of the pandemic, and now in Year 12, had the worst experiences as their two-year window to access something has been heavily impacted by the restrictions in place. Any activity had been largely 'virtual' although a small number had managed to organise placements.

b) Level 3 college learners

Most of the 53 students had participated in some form of work placement activities. Many were organised through the college as part of their placement provision for their vocational courses. These were useful in gaining experience in specific sector-based environments that helped to confirm choices being made – although experiences in more diverse placements would have been preferable. They felt these experiences were helpful in developing independence, teamwork, and communication skills. For some there were issues around the quality of the placements, and the experience of the staff to support their students. Some talked of not having a meaningful experience or a clearly defined role when in the placement setting.

c) Study programme group

Unfortunately, for this group of learners most had lost out on the chance for work experience whilst at school due to the pandemic. Some had managed to gain some experience through going out with family who could offer 'trade' experience: general labouring, bricklaying, plastering, etc. Due to the structure of the study programme, however, they had found opportunities to gain a variety of work 'experiences' that were enabling them to make informed choices about their future trade pathways.

d) Kickstart group

These individuals were all in their early to mid-twenties, so any work placements were at least 5 years previous. They had varied experiences with some of the group citing no opportunities being available within their schools; some remembered there being time at the end of the school year, but of having difficulties in getting anything set up. To an extent they felt that they had missed out on being able to explore potential options and reflecting back the group thought that it would be beneficial to have more varied and flexible options that could enable shorter 'taster' visits to a number of companies or sectors.

e) Apprentices

As with those on study programmes, this group had little opportunity to engage in work experience activities through schools. They had either had nothing, mainly due to pandemic restrictions, or had accessed work experience via relatives.

Kitemark Proposal

Before reviewing the responses from participants to this Stage 2 review, it is useful to set the landscape around the question of Kitemarks. Whether or not to have some form of national 'Kitemark' scheme that could identify 'quality work experience' has been considered for some time, and particularly in the last 4 – 5 years with the introduction of the Careers Strategy and the Gatsby benchmarks. In 2018 the British Youth Council, Youth Select Committee³ explored the potential of developing a "standard, minimum framework that employers offering work experience should meet" in order to ensure fair access and promote social mobility. There were concerns that this might be too onerous for SMEs, but a sense that there was a need for clear guidance that could be applicable to a variety of employer contexts. A further option considered was to adopt a benchmarking scheme, similar to the Gatsby benchmarks, that could utilise a tool comparable to the CEC's Compass or Compass Plus platforms to demonstrate progress towards a framework. There had been plans for government funding of a "universal, digital Enterprise Passport scheme" but this funding was withdrawn. A recommendation at the time was for the Government to work with the CEC to develop this option.

In 2018, Youth Employment UK supported the introduction of a kitemark system, but with specific relationship to apprenticeship employers. They do, however, also offer a 'Youth Friendly Employer Award'⁴ to employers of all sizes that provides a "comprehensive support to create, learn from and develop the best opportunities through their early careers engagement, work experience and employment opportunities". In 2021 a number of providers were recognised for their work in this area including Essex Council's 'Entry to Work' team.

³ <https://www.byc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Youth-Select-Committee-Realising-the-Potential-of-Work-Experience.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/a-quality-kitemark-for-apprenticeship-employers-supported-by-key-partners/>

Reviewing alternatives being explored nationally, more recent research has been conducted into this question around Kitemarks by the University of Leeds on behalf of Health Education England⁵ towards the end of 2020 to gain a better understanding of work experience activities. The NHS Trust currently holds a Fair Train quality kitemark and is developing a work experience quality assurance framework and kitemark; it should be noted, however, this is alongside established work placement activity that is inherent within the sector.

The response to questions around the feasibility, and suitability, of a Kitemark were considerably varied, across both employers and education, training and skills providers. There were also mixed responses from young people and adults.

Employer perspective

On first glance, this was seen as a means through which employers could demonstrate the quality of any work experience and work placement activities they offered. In having the Kitemark, it would demonstrate to young people, schools, other employers, etc, that the placement had provided the individual with a valuable and valued experience. Some felt that, whilst they could see it might be a good idea in principle, they did not feel it would be appropriate for them. There was also recognition of the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the shift to a 'virtual' element and knowing how to work in a very different way with schools to offer something meaningful.

One larger employer stated very firmly that they would not want to put such a thing on their public sites or marketing. They felt that getting a good work experience should be regarded as the 'norm'. Like another larger employer they made use of a personal record that was kept by the young person, with details about work activities undertaken, skills gained, discussions with a mentor, aims and objectives. The document also had feedback from the company and provided something tangible that the individual could take away and show to any prospective employer.

There were also concerns about the administrative burden associated in offering, and maintaining, such a scheme; and of whether there might be any cost implications: registration, annual monitoring visits, etc. Whilst it could be viewed as recognition of a company's 'corporate social responsibility', it could present huge challenges for smaller firms.

⁵ [Work experience and Work-Related Learning activity | Health Education England \(hee.nhs.uk\)](https://www.hee.nhs.uk/work-experience-and-work-related-learning-activity)

From the online survey participants 13 provided responses about whether they felt it would be helpful to have a 'Kitemark' system that recognised the quality of the work placement offer to young people and adults. Of these, eight (61.54%) indicated 'Yes' and five (38.46%) indicated 'No'. Employers were further asked what aspects they felt should be 'kitemarked' in order to improve the work placement experience.

Some felt the Kitemark could be useful in terms of having accreditation that would support parents and young people when making decisions about apprenticeship or work experience choices: that it would "highlight the business as a provider of choice". This might be because it was seen as something that indicated a 'standardised' approach; that it was somewhere offering a 'safe placement'; and that there would be an assurance of the quality of the content of the placement offer through such things as Induction, Health and Safety, Mentoring, On-programme Planning (quality of tasks) and Review. All things echoed in the comments of face-to-face interviewees. Others, however, expressed their concerns that there are already too many schemes, systems, kitemarks, etc, and having "more hoops for providers to jump through" might just result in something that was meaningless. It was felt that perhaps "more inventive ways of giving work experience and a wider variety of people involved in giving work experience" would be more helpful.

Education, training and skills provider perspective

Although having some form of a quality assurance aspect was welcomed, there was concern about the sheer number of schemes already out there, and again the possibility for this to favour larger companies who could embrace schemes more easily. It was acknowledged that there would need to be agreed frameworks around how the Kitemark would be judged: level of investment in people; how an individual is developed whilst in the workplace, for example, but this might be difficult to measure in some industries and for some SMEs.

If a scheme could help to provide greater confidence and credibility in the quality of a placement, then this could be a means through which to 'engage' more employers and for those individuals without networks or opportunities, to gain access to better quality experiences. This did however come with caveats in terms of how such a scheme would be managed and potential costs involved.

Concerns were also raised that this could become "just another tick box exercise" and perhaps greater rewards could be achieved if energies were directed at "making it work with the student than getting the Kitemark". Echoing comments raised by others, feedback was

frequently that students do not get a work placement experience that is structured enough, and that they learn little during their time on placement. If a Kitemark could improve this, then it would be welcomed.

Within these discussions it was also noted that there are difficulties in accessing meaningful work experience activities for those who are vulnerable or with SEND requirements and questions as to how these concerns might be addressed within a Kitemark scheme.

Young People and Adults' Perspectives

On the survey, respondents were asked if they felt that some sort of Kitemark would be helpful to identify those employers showing 'good practice' in their placement and work experience offers. Of the 202 who provided an answer, 46 (22.77%) said Yes, with the majority (n=156, 77.23%) saying No.

From those who had indicated a positive response, and provided follow-up comments, they felt that it would be a way of letting people know that would "get decent work experience" and to "distinguish employers". Whilst they felt it could "make it easier and reduce time spent looking" for a work placement if there were some means by which a 'quality' employer could be located, they also recognised that it could make it more competitive to get into a company that has a Kitemark: placements are already in short supply. These comments were also echoed in discussions in the forum groups.

For some, however, they had little understanding of what a Kitemark was or the difference this would make.

Engagement with Gatsby Benchmarks

This was very much perceived as a school-based benchmarking tool but the value of such a framework was recognised, although different benchmarks are prioritised in different geographical areas and across counties. There is uncertainty as to whether employers know what the Gatsby benchmarks are, but where they do, it has provided a clear framework for "both employers and educators to work towards achieving". For example, when the Careers Strategy came out, one provider

"redesigned our programmes and our sessions we deliver so they would cover those Gatsby benchmarks to support schools and give their learners that support and guidance as well."

However, when independent providers have been into a school to do a presentation there is no feedback beyond that point: no means of measuring the impact or influence of that input.

Overall, the Gatsby benchmarks are being used to raise the profile of careers, so it is not seen as a 'bolt-on activity' but "embedded into the school curriculum". It is also seen as a means through which to "hold our governors accountable and hold the school accountable". Whilst recognising that it might, there was commitment to prevent it becoming yet another tick box exercise: "we have to know where we are, but also where the students are". To this end, schools are making use of Compass and Compass Plus via the Careers Hub for monitoring and tracking purposes, liaising closely with their EAs when completing records, but Compass Plus does not as yet appear to be available to colleges who would like to utilise its functions. Colleges do report, however, that the benchmarks have supported them in "refocusing and redoubling around the whole careers strategy and linking all of these different aspects together".

Primarily the benchmarks are being used as a means to keep CEIAG high on the agenda for employers, education, training and skills providers. However there does need to be a "little bit of realism there rather than us all going for 100%". There were concerns around how benchmarks are interpreted with "room for vague interpretation in some of them which might be to do with a quality assessment". Also of activities being used to 'tick 100%' for an activity when in reality it does not meet a benchmark in depth.

How Young People and Adults are Engaging with CEIAG and Some of the Influencing Factors

There is agreement across all participant cohorts that the CEIAG environment is complex and that there are a wide number of schemes and 'interaction points' across an individual's life. The ways in which information is accessed are diverse and not necessarily available to all; so there is disparity. There are also challenges for the Stoke-on-Trent area in that "people don't tend to move away from Stoke, they tend to stay", raising questions as to how to maximise access to potential pathways and opportunities for young people, adults and employers in the area. In fairness, this was also raised as an issue in the South of the County in terms of potential social mobility.

Those responsible for the delivery of CEIAG are at different stages in their provision, their engagement with employers and the Careers Hub, and their understanding and knowledge of the full breadth of provision and career pathway options.

Alongside this, over the last two years, the pandemic has had a huge impact on the chances available to young people in particular to access work experience and work placement activities. However, this has generated innovative thinking and a willingness to try something new. This move to a more hybrid approach is producing more flexible programmes and raising questions as to how this can be further developed.

For those at the start of this journey, the aim has been to develop links with employers; making use of virtual opportunities as much as practical over the last two years. For one school this was patchy at the start: employers are not teachers but they were having to effectively 'teach remotely'; there was unfamiliarity around technologies and frequently IT-related problems, "so there were teething problems....but now we've done more virtual events – and they [employers] have done more, I see the quality of what we're getting is improving and they're engaging better with the students". There is also greater embedding of careers in the PSHE programme and allocated CPD time for staff to develop this further. The aim has been to not simply embed careers in English, maths and science (as mandated), but to develop schemes of work with references to employers, FE, HE and training providers: building up lessons and learning from Year 7 upwards so that there is greater understanding at Year 9 and decisions being made around options – and of trying to raise aspirations. This has included having 'drop down' days so that a programme can be developed to allow year groups to engage with careers activities – for example having the Army come in – and of working more closely with parents to improve their awareness of CEIAG.

Some who are more established with relation to CEIAG have made use of the *Career Ready* scheme, and they are seeing that employers are now also viewing this as a way 'in' to a school and as a potential recruitment drive.

Surveys

The research has endeavoured to gain an understanding of the CEIAG sources that influence young people and adults. Whilst acknowledging that this is difficult to measure, or to establish direct causal pathways between CEIAG and educational and employment outcomes, the responses from surveys and focus groups did capture attitudinal data towards CEIAG that are useful for informing policy decisions (see survey and forum questions in

Appendices 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b and 2c). Participants were also asked to indicate any other factors influencing their choice of career pathway (such as salary, progression opportunities, locality, etc); whether the amount of information and guidance was appropriate to their needs, and timely. From the online survey to students, there were 231 respondents overall and from these between 176 and 186 provided their 'ranked' choices against each of the categories provided.

- 1 Parents, guardians and wider family
- 2 Jointly = Teachers/work experience/site visit
- 3 Trained careers adviser in school
- 4 Apprenticeships' website
- 5 National Careers Service

In the survey of students, when asked to provide additional information about what influenced their career pathway choices, 156 respondents gave the responses collected in Table 10:

Table 10. *Influences on career pathway choices (students)*

<i>Influence</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Salary	63	40.65
Further study	22	14.19
Location (proximity to family/support network)	19	12.26
Progression and opportunities	15	9.68
Personal growth/fulfilment/enjoyment	8	5.16
Grades/qualifications required	8	5.16
Knowledge of various pathways to a career	5	3.23
Living costs	3	1.94
Work experience opportunities	3	1.94
Flexibility (family)	3	1.94
Experience required	3	1.94
Unknown	2	1.29
Competitiveness in the industry	1	0.65
Self-employment options	1	0.65
Total	156	

From the online survey to Apprentices, there were 16 respondents overall and from those between 6 and 11 provided the following 'ranked' choices.

- 1 Parents, guardians and wider family/Friends
- 2 Jointly = Chat with trained careers adviser in school/Careers event at school
- 3 Apprenticeships' website
- 4 Work experience
- 5 Jointly = National Careers Service/local careers service/social media/guest visitor to school/college

For those responding to the apprentices' survey, similar responses were given as the *Students*:

"It was important for me to go for a career where I can work my way up, constantly improve..."

"I mostly looked for a job that was local"

"Career pathway is important to me as the more my skills advance the better career I will have"

"Better salary and progression"

Forum groups

Additional data were provided from the forum discussions as follows:

School 1(8 students)

- 1 Teachers
- 2 Careers advice website
- 3 Jointly = careers guidance chat at school/careers advice website
- 4 Event at school
- 5 Social media

In discussing their choices the young people felt that 'Parents, guardians and wider family' sat outside of their top 5 as they had less relevant experience in relation to career choices. Careers advisers were felt to be helpful in providing specific information, and external careers advice for additional perspective (the NCS); the NCS were also seen as helpful when working on a CV. Students were making use of *Career Ready* and *Unifrogs*. One of the key benefits to *Career Ready* was the provision of workplace internships and personal mentors, but students recognised that this scheme was not open to everyone – across all schools and colleges. They found the master classes good and the potential to connect with

speakers afterwards via LinkedIn. *Unifrogs* was used to collate evidence, primarily towards UCAS statements and CVs. They felt they were fortunate to have a dedicated Careers Adviser within the school but equally would have appreciated more information about apprenticeships and other opportunities and routes.

Other aspects influencing their career choices included many of the things mentioned across other groups: salary; location; further study; competition to get into the role; progression opportunities; etc. This group, largely due to their interaction with *Career Ready* were very comfortable in developing professional connections through LinkedIn.

School 2 (7 students)

- 1 Parents, guardians and wider family
- 2 Work experience
- 3 Joint = courses I enjoy/careers chat at school/site visit
- 4 Teachers
- 5 Joint = social media/job websites

The students in this school were very much influenced by their family and local experiences available to them. Career guidance chats at school were regarded as very helpful and supportive. They felt they had a fairly broad range of advice provided to them, including touching on apprenticeships, but they would have liked more information. They were strongly in favour of more being taught around 'work-ready' skills, money management, awareness and support for those with SEND, mental health of other specific support requirements in terms of work placement opportunities and career opportunities. Additional influencing factors included the following: potential salary; enjoyment of the subject; personal experiences in a specific working environment; progression opportunities.

School 3 (8 students)

- 1st Careers guidance chat at school
- 2nd Work experience
- 3rd Guest visitor
- 4th Careers advice website
- 5th Joint = Parents, guardians and wider family/Teachers

This school was using CEIAG events, exhibitions, and one-to-one career interviews – the students would have liked more frequent appointments for careers advice. The students felt

that the information was useful and provided opportunities for discussion. They would have liked more experience days at universities or colleges, and also work experience.

College (53 students)

- 1 Parents, guardians and wider family
- 2 Teachers
- 3 Joint = Site visit/careers event at school
- 4 Work experience
- 5 Social media

When discussing their ranked choices many students had additional information that they wanted to provide in terms of how CEIAG could be improved. The most consistently mentioned issue was the need for more career advisers available across different categories, and for these individuals to be able to talk confidently about various routes into jobs. In addition to information already provided from the forum discussions, a comparable picture emerged with a total of 86 responses from the Level 3 college student groups against the influencing factors collected in Table 11:

Table 11. *Factors influencing career pathway (College)*

Salary (financial stability)	23
Own interests/hobbies/enjoyment of subject	12
Location (distance to travel)	8
More study – university, etc	6
Family experiences/influence	6
Progression opportunities	6
People I work with/relationships	6
Working hours/holidays	4
Confidence boosting/opportunities/trying something new	3
Knowing someone in that role	3
Work experience/placement	3
Motivation/enjoyment	3
Safe/friendly environment	3
Job roles available	3

Study Programmes (5 participants)

- 1 Parents, guardians and wider family
- 2 Careers guidance chat at school
- 3 Careers advice website
- 4 Job website
- 5 Friends

The overwhelming aspect influencing their career choices was 'Parents, guardians and wider family' with many talking about the help they had received as "they've got more time to sit with you than at school and would go through websites and look at what's the best place to go for an apprenticeship". In terms of other factors informing their choices, this was predominantly about the possibility of going on to an apprenticeship and improving their job prospects. They would like to have more knowledge about choices available to them when at school, not just going to college. There was a sense that pursuing a 'trade' was seen as failing. Again, there was mention of being more 'work-ready' and 'life-ready' in terms of financial awareness. There were issues for some in terms of the availability of careers advice interviews at school and of feeling somewhat 'lost in the system'. There was enthusiasm for people to visit schools from trades and different professions. This did happen to an extent in the past but had been substantially reduced due to the pandemic. The Study Programme route was seen as a highly positive approach, with the key roles of personal coaches and general work coaches being very supportive in terms of progression through the courses.

Kickstarters (5 participants)

- 1 'Other' – this was identified as the Job Centre
- 2 Teachers/lecturers (for those coming from university)
- 3 Jointly = Work experience/career advice website
- 4 Parents, guardians and wider family
- 5 Courses I enjoy

Whilst there was little difference in preference in the 3rd, 4th and 5th choices, the dominant influence had been through the Job Centre and relationships formed with Work Coaches. These individuals had worked closely with the Kickstarters to find suitable opportunities, and also to accommodate issues around travel difficulties. Support had also been found from university lecturers who would help with preparation for interviews and CV writing. Reflecting on their school experiences, all felt that this had been very skewed towards A-

levels and traditional pathways rather than broader options being discussed. More information about those 'life-ready' skills would also be beneficial.

Apprentices (5 participants)

- 1 Parents, guardians and wider family
- 2 Teachers
- 3 Friends
- 4 Courses I enjoy
- 5 Work experience

Often advice and guidance was provided by family members, including those already working in a particular trade. This was also linked to individuals then being able to acquire relevant work experience prior to starting on their apprenticeships. Other factors of influence were wanting to have a decent salary and job security, and of going into a family business. As with other groups, the same points were made about the need for more, and varied, careers advice – and for the quality of that advice to be consistent across all schools and colleges.

As previously, comparison is made in relation to the DfE report. In terms of the most important sources of CEIAG, for the DfE cohorts this was as follows, and shows broad similarity with the data in this report:

- 1 Friends and relatives
- 2 Teachers
- 3 Trained careers adviser in school or college
- 4 Apprenticeships' website
- 5 National Careers Service

Students were also asked whether the information and guidance they received about future careers was well-timed, and again this was compared with the DfE data. There were 208 responses to this question from the survey to students, illustrated in Table 12:

Table 12. *Timing of IAG (students)*

<i>Timing</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Too early	13.94%	29
Too late	16.35%	34
About the right time	69.71%	145
Total		208

The response from 11 apprentices in their survey indicated a similar picture, as Table 13 indicates:

Table 13. *Timing of IAG (apprentices)*

<i>Timing</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Too early	0.00%	0
Too late	18.18%	2
About the right time	81.82%	9
Total		11

In the DfE data the majority of respondents felt that the CEIAG they received was at ‘about the right time’ (84%), with a small number regarding it as ‘too late’ (10%) and minimal numbers as ‘too early’ (6%).

Students were also asked whether the amount of information and guidance received was suitable for their needs. There were 209 responses to this question, collected in Table 14:

Table 14. *Suitability of IAG (students)*

<i>Suitability</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Too general	23.92%	50
Too limited - focused on one main option	15.79%	33
I didn’t understand the advice given	9.57%	20
The advice was about right	50.72%	106

Total	209
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In their survey 11 respondents presented a similar picture with most feeling that advice was 'about right', as Table 15 indicates:

Table 15. *Suitability of IAG (apprentices)*

<i>Suitability</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Too general	18.18%	2
Too limited - focused on one main option	0.00%	0
I didn't understand the advice given	9.09%	1
The advice was about right	72.73%	8
Total		11

From the DfE data 95% felt that their information, advice and guidance had been suitable for their needs. Of the remaining 5% who felt it was not, responses focused on advice given being 'too general', 'too focused on going to university', of 'not understanding the advice given', or advice 'not being helpful'. So again, a similar response to those across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire responding to this research.

Students were also asked to identify all of the elements of CEIAG they received that had helped them with their career choices. There were 511 responses, collected in Table 16:

Table 16. *Elements of helpful CEIAG (students)*

<i>Element</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Staying in education	29.75%	152
Identifying qualifications needed for the career path chosen	18.98%	97
Identifying a range of possible career options	19.96%	102
Understanding about what's out there	15.66%	80
Feeling confident to apply for a job	12.52%	64
None of the above.	3.13%	16
Total		511

It can be seen that predominantly the information received is about 'staying in education' (n=152 responses), with a third fewer responses on identifying a 'range of possible career options' (n=102) and fewer again on understanding about 'what's out there' (n80). So there is an inequity in breadth of information provided.

Apprentices were asked if the information, advice and guidance they had received had helped them with the following career choices, selecting all that applied. Their 19 responses are illustrated in Table 17 show:

Table 17. *Elements of helpful CEIAG (apprentices)*

<i>Element</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Count</i>
Identifying qualifications needed for the career path chosen	42.11%	8
Identifying a range of possible career options	15.79%	3
Understanding about what's out there	36.84%	7
Feeling confident to apply for a job	5.26%	1
Total		19

Asked to elaborate on these responses, comments were made that a "couple of chats with someone in industry or work experience at several companies" would have been beneficial. It was also deemed essential that young people have a

"broader view on their future instead of keeping it narrow and putting it forward that uni or sixth form are the only way to go. Need more advice given on apprenticeships in all sectors".

Conclusions and Recommended Options

The research brief required the Stage 2 report to consider a range of headline research questions, to be explored with three specific stakeholder cohorts: employers; education, training and skills providers; and young people and adults. In doing so it also required local and national best practice to be identified and a number of options to be put forward for a more effective locally co-ordinated approach to the engagement of employers in CEIAG and broader skills programmes and Government schemes.

Employer engagement with the Careers Hub and the challenges of working together with education, training and skills providers

Where there are EAs in companies, the role of the Careers Hub is understood and links between employers and education, training and skills providers are well-established. Without this element there are sometimes limitations on critical information and knowledge exchange between all parties, and on opportunities to develop broader and deeper networks. There is growing potential for employers to be more involved in curriculum design and in the response needed to challenge stereotypes around vocational pathways, in terms of who such pathways are appropriate for; gender role stereotyping; removal of bias and stigma around some occupations and trades.

The Careers Hub already provides funded opportunities for schools and Career Leads to develop their skills and knowledge further; for sharing practice and resources; for connecting employers to education, training and skills providers and acting as a network for education, training and skills providers more broadly. However, as with employers, many education, training and skills providers experience difficulties in accessing information and navigating the various systems and bureaucratic requirements. There is also a need for greater connectivity in terms of the breadth and depth of knowledge held by CEIAG advisers to ensure young people and adults have access to a full range of career pathway options.

The recommendations therefore are to:

1. Develop a strengthened central unit, possibly via the Careers Hub and EA network, to enable closer connectivity between employers and education, training and skills providers to identify local and regional skills shortages across sectors;
2. Broker through this unit the design and delivery of flexible pathways that can address skills shortages by:
 - a. Offering funded and non-funded short courses/bespoke CPD to target skills gaps;
 - b. Identifying potential funding to support projects to address issues around social mobility across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
3. Provide a central portal with access to all information about career pathway options (academic, vocational, full-time, part-time, distance), including the local labour market, available to everyone responsible for CEIAG.
4. Ask EAs to contribute to a strategic review of bias and stereotyping across sectors to identify ways to combat this on a longer-term basis.

Engagement with wider skills programmes and Knowledge of careers advice and guidance services/Government and local schemes supporting people into work

As these two elements sit very closely when considering potential options, they have been considered together. Within the report, and evidence brought forward, employers acknowledged the difficulties created by having to navigate a number of different pathways and government schemes, with this being particularly problematic for SMEs which may not know where to go, or how to access relevant information.

Apprenticeships are traditionally more 'recognised' and 'accepted' across sectors, but there are still challenges for companies in meeting all the framework and standards requirements. There is also a need to promote higher level apprenticeships, and to maximise such opportunities through a more flexible approach, such as modular delivery. T-levels are still

emerging, but extended work placement requirements are already raising concerns among employers.

Education, training and skills providers are striving to broaden the curriculum and offer more options in vocational as well as traditional academic subjects. Examples of innovative practice in relation to this are included within the report. There are, however, challenges in overcoming 'legacy' attitudes towards non-academic routes. Young people and adults spoke frequently of being provided with limited options, so the knowledge of those with responsibility for CEIAG needs to be broader and more up-to-date. Although limited in the comments emerging from the report, it is also worth noting that there is a need to further develop approaches that support, and address issues around, the development of entrepreneurial skills.

The recommendations therefore are to:

1. Create and develop a website/portal to act as a 'one-stop shop' where employers, and education, training and skills providers can access information about the full range of schemes available and the associated pathways (offering route maps);
2. Review higher-level apprenticeships to identify the potential for a more modular approach that would enable their apprenticeship components to be taught alongside degrees, integrating apprenticeship competencies;
3. Use EAs and the Careers Hub to work with education, training and skills providers to develop CEIAG information targeted at parents to help dispel some of the misconceptions about vocational pathways (offering route maps);
4. Consider how to broaden the offer to highlight the potential of wider skills programmes as an option for adults looking to upskill or make a career change;
5. Consider issues around T-levels alongside work placements and work experience activities more generally to ensure an integrated approach is developed.

Work placements and work experience activity

Work experience can provide opportunities to improve social mobility, but for this to happen, access to work placements and work experience activities needs to be equitable.

Unfortunately, the evidence confirms that this is not the case and that, notwithstanding the impact of the pandemic, many individuals fail to secure access to meaningful work placements, even when they are a requirement of their vocational courses. The pandemic has provided an opportunity for schools and colleges to rethink work placement activities and adopt more innovative, hybrid models. The evidence also demonstrates that even where work placements are an embedded element of a vocational course, placement experiences are inconsistent. This suggests that employers need support to understand the importance of offering quality work experiences and how to do so.

The recommendations therefore are to:

1. Embedded vocational work experience placements

- a. Develop a framework and toolkit that can offer support to all, but particularly SME, companies in an endeavour to standardise the quality of placement provision;
- b. Develop a portal through which companies, and education, training and skills providers can access standardised templates for work placements to create a permanent record of the experience and containing:
 - i. Induction, including named mentor within the company; health and safety information;
 - ii. Agreed aims and objectives for the work placement period with scope to have formalised review and feedback discussions between individual and mentor;
 - iii. Formalised final feedback from the company;
 - iv. Identification, if appropriate, of 'next steps';

- c. Then explore options to develop a digital format, such as a virtual 'Work Experience Passport';
- d. Develop a section on this portal that can provide access to employers for online CPD in relation to coaching and mentoring for those on work experience placements.

2. *Work placement experiences – schools and colleges*

- a. Take the end-of-year weeks identified for 'off-curriculum' work experience activity and, rather than chasing work experience placements, further develop the hybrid approach seen during the pandemic;
 - i. Use the Careers Hub to draw together case studies of innovative practice developed in schools over the last two years;
 - ii. Provide a more flexible offer to include taster days, workshop events, employers and their employees visiting schools, etc;
 - iii. Engage EAs and Careers Hubs to collaborate on ways to create, and curate, a network of employer-led activities that can be utilised in digital and physical environments to enable greater opportunities to share resources;
 - iv. There is potential to identify sector and skills gaps and use this to focus on sector-specific content;
- b. Create, design and develop a range of platforms or apps, similar to *Unifrogs*, *Speakers 4 Schools*, *Sparks 4 Careers*, that can link to local and regional employers and sectors and be accessible to all;
- c. Connect this back to the skills agenda work, career pathways and potential recruitment opportunities;
- d. Create professional networks, similar to LinkedIn but with a local and regional context.

Kitemark proposal

Suggestions around the development of a Kitemark, used to indicate the quality of a work placement employer, raised numerous concerns, such as the danger of it becoming another 'tick box' exercise. There was also recognition of the difficulties this would create for SMEs which may not have the necessary resources. In light of the limited number of individuals who successfully gain access to work placements, the kitemark was also seen as something that had a narrow focus.

The recommendations therefore are to:

1. Create an agreed set of benchmarks that are appropriate to the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire area in consultation with relevant bodies and employment sectors:
 - a. Options could include a 'minimum viable product' approach plus an 'evaluator' system such as Trust Pilot or a Trip Advisor style model; or the development of a tracking system (similar to Compass and Compass Plus currently used by education providers) in discussion with their EAs, to measure their progress against a set of benchmarks.
 - b. They would also reflect the need to embed T-level requirements into the system.
2. Or, take the view that having a good level of work experience placement should be considered as 'standard' and promote the use of the work experience record identified in the options above across employer and sector networks.

Gatsby Benchmarks

The benchmarks have now had several years to 'bed in' and are used widely by education providers. Where there are EAs working closely with providers, understanding of the benchmarks has increased among employers involved, creating a sense of 'shared accountability' for ensuring progress against the benchmark framework. However, employers with which EAs are not engaged have little to no awareness of the benchmarks.

The recommendations therefore are to:

1. Undertake a strategic analysis of the sectoral awareness of the Gatsby benchmarks;
Strengthen the EA network to increase understanding of the benchmarks and embed them into employer-provider collaboration.

How young people and adults engage with CEIAG and some of the influencing factors

There is a need to expand how young people and adults are supported to access a variety of CEIAG sources. There are a large number of schemes, platforms and apps available, but not all are accessible to everyone as there may be fees attached, so there is a lack of parity, particularly across deprived areas.

The report sheds light on the need for all involved to have the depth and breadth of information to offer relevant, and up-to-date, information about all potential career pathways for an individual, including vocational and academic routes. Evidence within the report has demonstrated the critical nature of the role of the EAs in establishing collaboration and effective working relationships between employers, education, training and skills providers. It has also provided information about the ways in which they are working together to develop the curriculum, the skills of CEIAG advisers, and extend networking opportunities more broadly. Alongside this, one key element that came through strongly from all participants and survey respondents was the need for young people to have access to programmes that can make them feel more confident and both 'work ready' and 'life ready'.

In addition to what has already been identified, the recommendations therefore are to:

1. Undertake analysis, with education providers, and EAs, to identify those areas young people feel they need to develop in order to prepare for their working lives;
2. Explore approaches to this already being used across Career Hubs and share examples of good practice;

3. Map and expand curricula to develop transversal skills, and enterprise and entrepreneurship;
4. Support EAs and education providers to collaborate on the development of schemes of work, lesson plans, and resources that cover those essential skills, such as:
 - a. Applying for a job;
 - b. Writing a CV;
 - c. Preparing for interviews;
 - d. Managing money/budgeting;

Acknowledging that the development of education and skills across young people and adults is crucial for the future competitiveness and economic prosperity of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, this Stage 2 report has explored a wide range of agreed headline questions with targeted stakeholder groups. It has identified concerns and issues raised amongst these, as well as examples of best practice, and used these to inform the recommendations and options available to the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) and aimed to align these with strategic objectives.

Appendices

Appendix 1 *Surveys issued to participants*

- a) Employers' survey
- b) Apprentices' survey
- c) Students' survey
- d) School Career Leads' survey

Appendix 2 *Questions provided for Forum groups*

- a) Schools
- b) Workplace programmes (study programmes, apprenticeships, Kickstart)
- c) CEIAG ranking statements

Appendix 1a: Employers' survey

Q1 - Please indicate in which sector your company operates.

Answer	%	Count
Manufacturing		
Construction		
Information Technology & Communications		
Logistics		
Health and Social Care		
Hospitality		
Education and Training		
Finance		
Other		
Total		

Q2 - If you have indicated 'Other' could you please say which sector your company works in, thank you.

.....

Q3 - Please provide the first part of your workplace postcode (eg ST3, ST9, ST15). Optional: If you are happy to, would you please also include the name of your company, thank you.

.....

Q4 - Which of the following schemes do you engage with? Please select all that apply.

Answer	%	Count
Kickstart		
Apprenticeships		
Traineeships		
T-levels		
Graduate placements/degrees		
Total		

Q5 - What do you think are the main challenges faced by employers in their ability to work with education and training providers?

.....

Q6 - Does your company offer work placements or work experience opportunities?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q7 - If 'Yes', how easy is it to offer these?

Answer	%	Count
Not easy at all		
It's okay		
Very easy		
Total		

Q8 - Could you provide any extra information as to why you think that?

.....

Q9 - What advice would you give to another company offering work experience or work placement activities? Please tick all that apply.

Answer	%	Count
Provide an induction		
Provide a named mentor or key contact		
Provide information on health and safety in the workplace		
Provide a work plan for the period of the placement		
Offer regular catch-up meetings		
Ensure there are meaningful tasks and a review of tasks		
Offer a debrief/appraisal at the end		
Offer an opportunity to discuss 'next steps'		
Total		

Q10 - In terms of work placements/experience activities, how useful would you find the following? Please rank each statement, thank you.

Question	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Essential	Total
Information about the individual coming onto a placement					
A named contact at the organisation sending the person					
The opportunity for greater flexibility across the year to take placements					
Access to a portal with information to support your business: eg standard templates for induction, health and safety, etc					
Access to a portal with resources to support development of your own workforce in relation to offering work placements: eg mentoring, health and safety, etc.					

Q11 - What else do you think would help?

.....

Q12 - How familiar is your company with careers education, information, advice and guidance services?

Answer	%	Count
Not familiar at all		
Occasional use		
Established use/knowledge		
Total		

Q13 - Do you feel it would be helpful if a 'Kitemark' system was established for work placements and work experience to recognise the quality of the offer to young people and adults?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q14 - If so, what aspects do you feel should be 'Kite marked' to improve the work placement experience?

.....

Q15 - How aware is your company of the range of Government and local schemes supporting people into work?

Answer	%	Count
Not aware		
Some awareness		
Very aware		
Total		

Q16 - What schemes do you engage with? Please list below, thank you.

.....

Q17 - If you liaise with the Careers Hub in Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire, how effective do you find the model to be for employers?

Answer	%	Count
Not effective		
Somewhat effective		
Very effective		
Total		

Q18 - If you have any further comments about careers information, advice and guidance, or the ways in which employers and education/training providers work together, please use the box below. Thank you.

.....

[Thank you message embedded in survey]

Appendix 1b: Workplace survey

Q1 - Please indicate your age range

Answer	%	Count
16-17		
18-19		
20-24		
25+		
Total		

Q2 - Please provide the first part of your postcode (eg ST3, ST9, ST15)

.....

Q3 - Please tell us what work-based programme you are on.

Answer	%	Count
Kickstart		
Apprenticeship		
Traineeship		
Graduate placement		
Other		
Total		

Q4 - If you have replied 'Other' can you please state what this is in the box below, thanks.

.....

Q5 - There are a number of ways you may have received information, advice and guidance that helped with your career choices. Out of the list below, which did you use, and which were most important? Please use the scale to 'rank' your choices, with 1 being the most important and 10 the least. You may not have used all 10, so please just rank the ones that you did, thank you.

#	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1	Friends and relatives											
2	Teachers											
3	Trained careers advisor in school/college											
4	Apprenticeships' website											
5	National Careers Service											
6	Local Careers Service											
7	Social Media											
8	Guest visitor to school/college											
9	Work experience or site visit to a workplace											
10	Careers events at school											

Q6 - Was the information and guidance you received about future careers well-timed?

Answer	%	Count
Too early		
Too late		
About the right time		
Total		

Q7 - Was the amount of information and guidance received suitable for your needs?

Answer	%	Count
Too general		
Too limited - focused on one main option		
I didn't understand the advice given		
The advice was about right		
Total		

Q8 - Did the information, advice and guidance received help you with the following career choices? Please tick all that apply.

Answer	%	Count
Identifying qualifications needed for the career path chosen		
Identifying a range of possible career options		
Understanding about what's out there		
Feeling confident to apply for a job		
Total		

Q9 - If you do not feel that you got the information, advice and guidance you needed, what do you think would have helped?

.....

Q10 - When you were making choices about your career pathway, what else was important? For example, further study required, local opportunities, progression, salary, etc. Please provide your answer in the box below, thanks.

.....

Q11 - Before starting on your current scheme, did you participate in any work experience or internship activities?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q12 - If Yes, what did you find useful, and why? Please enter your answer in the box below.

.....

Q13 - If you have any further comments about careers information, advice and guidance, please use the box below.

.....

[Thank you message embedded in survey]

Appendix 1c: Students' survey

Q1 - Please indicate your age range

Answer	%	Count
16-17		
18-19		
20-25		
Total		

Q2 - Please tell us what year of study you are in: Yr 11-13 if at school, or what Level you are studying at (L1-L5) if at college or university.

Answer	%	Count
Year 11		
Year 12		
Year 13		
Level 1		
Level 2		
Level 3		
Level 4		
Level 5		
Total		

Q3 - Please provide the first part of your postcode (eg ST3, ST9, ST15)

.....

Q4 - There are a number of ways to get information, advice and guidance to help with your career choices. Out of the list below, which have you used, and which were most important? Please use the scale to 'rank' your choices, with 1 being the most important and 10 the least. It doesn't matter if you haven't used all 10, just rank the ones that you have, thanks.

	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1	Friends and relatives											
2	Teachers											
3	Trained careers advisor in school/college											
4	Apprenticeships' website											
5	National Careers Service											
6	Local Careers Service											
7	Social Media											
8	Guest visitor to school/college											
9	Work experience or site visit to a workplace											
10	Careers events at school											

Q5 - Which educational options are you told about at school/college? Please tick all that apply.

Answer	%	Count
Doing an A-level		
Doing a T-level		
Doing a Diploma		
Doing a Degree		
Going on to an Apprenticeship		
Going on to a Kickstart scheme		
Going on to a Traineeship		
Other		
Total		

Q6 - If you chose 'Other', can you please say what this is, thanks.

.....

Q7 - Was the information and guidance you received about future careers well-timed?

Answer	%	Count
Too early		
Too late		
About the right time		
Total		

Q8 - Was the amount of information and guidance received suitable for your needs?

Answer	%	Count
Too general		
Too limited - focused on one main option		
I didn't understand the advice given		
The advice was about right		
Total		

Q9 - Did the information advice and guidance received help you with the following career choices? Please tick all that apply.

Answer	%	Count
Staying in education		
Identifying qualifications needed for the career path chosen		
Identifying a range of possible career options		
Understanding about what's out there		
Feeling confident to apply for a job		
None of the above.		
Total		

Q10 - When you are making choices about your career pathway, what else is important? For example, further study required, local opportunities, progression, salary, etc. Please provide your answer in the box below, thanks.

.....

Q11 - Have you participated in any work experience or internship activities?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q12 - If Yes, what did you find useful, and why? Please enter your answer in the box below.

.....

Q13 - Do you think some sort of Kitemark would be helpful to identify those employers showing 'good practice' in their placement and work experience offers?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q14 - If Yes, can you say why you think this. Please enter in the box below.

.....

Q15 - If you have any further comments about careers information, advice and guidance, please use the box below.

.....

[Thank you message embedded in survey]

Appendix 1d: School Career Leads' survey

Q1 - Please provide the first part of your institution's postcode, eg ST4, ST13, ST15, etc.

.....

Q2 - Please indicate what type of educational institution you work in.

Answer	%	Count
School without sixth form		
School with sixth form		
College		
Training provider		
Total		

Q3 - Are you a designated Career Lead in your institution?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q4 - Does your institution offer work placement or work experience activities?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q5 - If you have answered 'Yes' can you please provide a bit more detail about these. If you have answered 'No', can you please explain further, thank you.

.....

Q6 - Does your institution engage with employers in providing careers information, advice and guidance through any of the following programmes? Please select all that apply.

Answer	%	Count
Kickstart		
Apprenticeships		
Traineeships		
T-levels		
Total		

Q7 - What do you think are the main challenges in sourcing and managing work experience/work placements?

.....

Q8 - Do you feel it would be helpful to provide some sort of a 'kitemark' that recognised employers who provide high quality placements?

Answer	%	Count
Yes		
No		
Total		

Q9 - If 'Yes', could you provide any more detail as to why you think this?

.....

Q10 - How do you feel the Gatsby benchmarks support engagement with employers and routes into employment?

.....

Q11 - How do you engage with external careers advice and guidance to support your young people?

.....

Q12 - How do you feel the cohesion and co-ordination of current work experience/work placement activities could be improved?

.....

Q13 - How effective is the Careers Hub model for schools, colleges and other training and skills providers?

Answer	%	Count
Not very effective		
Somewhat effective		
Very effective		
Don't know anything about it		
Total		

Q14 - If possible, can you provide any further details for your last answer, thank you.

.....

Q15 - If you have any further comments about careers information, advice and guidance, or the ways in which employers and education/training providers work together, please use the box below. Thank you.

.....

[Thank you message embedded in survey]



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

- What CEIAG do you receive and how do you use it to support your decisions?
- How influential do you feel it is in guiding your careers choices? If possible, can you please explain your answer.
- Do you feel there is anything that could be improved in the CEIAG you receive? If so, what would you like to see changed, and why?
- Have you participated in any work experience activities? If so, how were these organised? What did you find useful, and why?
- Do you feel that work experience could be improved? If so, what would you like to see changed, and why?
- Thinking about CEIAG and work experience activities, what do you feel helps most? What barriers do you think there are?
- Do you think that some sort of Kitemark would be helpful to identify those employers showing 'good practice' in their work placements/work experience offers?
- What else would you like to add?

Many thanks for your help with the research.



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

- What CEIAG have you received in the past and how did you use it to support your decisions about your pathway into work? Where did the advice come from?
- How influential do you feel it was in guiding your careers choices? If possible, can you please explain your answer.
- Do you feel there is anything that could be improved in the CEIAG you received? Or the way it was offered? If so, what would you like to see changed, and why?
- When you were in education, did you participate in any work experience activities? If so, how were these organised? What did you find useful, and why?
- Do you feel that these work experience could be improved? If so, what would you like to see changed, and why?
- What else would you like to add?

Many thanks for your help with the research.

Appendix 2c: CEIAG ranking statements

Teachers

Parents/Guardians (including wider family)

Friends

Courses I Enjoy

Social Media

Careers Guidance Chat at School

Guest Visitor

Site Visit

Work Experience

Careers Advice Websites

Job Websites

Careers Events at School

Other