



The Quality in Careers Standard >>>>

**The Quality in Careers Standard National Quality Award for Careers Education,
Information, Advice and Guidance Provision Assessor Report.**

Learning Provider: Ascent College

Named Contacts:

Head of Adult Services: Juliett Doherty

Careers Lead: Stephen Hogarth

Employer Engagement Officer: Tara Thomas

Assessor: Carmel Skidmore, Career Connect

External Assessor: Chloe Elliott, Career Connect.

Introduction

Ascent College is a SEND college specialising in education and preparation for adulthood, for students aged 16 – 25 with Autism and co-occurring needs, based in Newton Le Willows, St Helens, Merseyside.

All students who attend Ascent College have an Education, Health Care Plan.

Ascent College has a comprehensive and up to date Careers Education and Employability Programme co-ordinated by Stephen Hogarth (Careers Lead) and Tara Thomas (Employer Engagement Officer); mapped against Gatsby Benchmarks. The college also has an up to date Equality and Diversity Policy and Provider Access Policy.

The Careers Area of the college website is comprehensive and easy to navigate. It includes information for students, employers, teachers, and parents and carers.

The college belongs to the Liverpool City Region Careers Hub, with support from their Enterprise Coordinator, Julie Jones.

The Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy is embedded across the college.

There is an extensive timetable of activities, available for all students to help inspire and raise awareness of pathways and opportunities available to them.

Students have access to good quality, impartial careers information and there is a strong commitment to provide Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) for all students appropriate to their needs.

Inspiring and preparing students for adult and working life, raising aspirations and supporting students to reach their full potential are all key objectives for the college.

Aims of the Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Strategy:

- To raise aspirations and to support students in reaching their full potential
- To prepare students for the transition to life after Ascent College
- To inspire, empower and support students to make informed realistic decisions
- To provide good quality and timely independent and impartial careers advice to students which inspires them and supports them to make informed choices
- To provide advice and guidance which is in the best interests of the student
- To provide opportunities to help develop employability and enterprise skills
- To work in partnership with employers, training providers, colleges, and others to provide real life opportunities to help inspire and prepare students
- To support inclusion, challenge stereotyping and promote equality of opportunity.

The evidence provided in the online portfolio and the assessor meetings demonstrate Ascent College's strong commitment to collaboration; to encourage and provide high-quality Careers Education and Work-Related learning activities across the curriculum.

GB1: A Stable Careers Programme:

There is evidence of a comprehensive, well planned CEIAG programme which ensures students:

- are aware of the range of opportunities realistically available to them in continued education, employment and training at both 16+ and 18+
- are equipped with the necessary decision-making skills to manage their transition points.
- develop their understanding of the wide variety of education, training and career opportunities locally, nationally and internationally.

The Careers Lead and Employer Engagement Officer work closely together and meet regularly to review and adapt the programme; taking into account student evaluation and feedback to ensure the needs of all students are considered and met.

They create resources relevant to the students' needs; examples of lesson plans and schemes of work are included in the portfolio of evidence and will be available for the external assessment; they detail clear learning outcomes.

Independent and impartial Careers Information Advice and Guidance is provided by a Level 6 qualified Careers Adviser, Joanne Patten from Career Connect.

Information, Advice and Guidance for parents/carers is also a key focus for the college; provided at annual reviews, planned events, newsletters, the website and on request.

The latest compass report was available as part of the evidence – dated April 2025 and shows 100% completion against all benchmarks.

There is a clear structure to demonstrate the reporting process to the Head of Adult Services and Senior Leadership Team.

There is evidence of reporting to Governors, the reports are included in the folder of evidence.

At the external assessment the Head of Adult Services explained the commitment to the delivery of high quality CEIAG across the college.

There is evidence of a budget sheet for CEIAG that provides information on what funding will be allocated to activities.

Stephen Hogarth, Careers Lead, has completed the CEC accredited Careers Leader Training with Career Connect.

He has also completed the Department for Education's National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership (NPQSL) and is awaiting the result. This will help to ensure careers can be led more effectively and strategically.

There are training opportunities for staff to improve their understanding of CEIAG, the Gatsby Benchmarks, the labour market and how they can contribute to the Careers Programme for the college. This is monitored, evaluated, and reviewed By SLT through learning walks.

Tara Thomas, Employer Engagement Officer has also completed Level 6 Careers Leader Training.

Strengths:

- There is clear commitment from the Head of Adult Services, all staff and governors to the provision and delivery of high quality CEIAG for the students.
- The dedicated, forward-thinking Careers Lead and Employer Engagement Officer regularly review and adapt the CEIAG programme to ensure the needs of all students are met.
- There is evidence of collaboration to embed CEIAG across the college. This is evidenced by the staff's commitment and the strong ethos of pastoral support and inclusion that runs throughout Ascent College.
- Excellent examples of careers support for students including access to help/support, student workbooks, schemes of work and resources.

- Partnership working between college staff and the Careers Adviser is very positive and working well.
- Family Support Workers involvement in the network of support for parents and carers: information is available via the college website and individually.

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio and the latest Compass SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby Benchmark 1.

GB2: Learning from Careers and the Labour Market

LMI is part of the CEIAG programme with learning objectives and outcomes mapped against the Gatsby benchmarks. Ascent College hosts or attends events such as National Careers Week, Natspec conferences, and Regional Internship Conferences.

There are lots of opportunities across the curriculum for students to develop knowledge of job sectors and the possible routeways available locally, regionally and nationally

All students have access to the following:

- employability and preparation for life after Ascent Autism Specialist College
- STEM opportunities, careers talks and experiences
- offsite visits and visitors to the college provide support for students to develop their understanding of a range of different post 16 and post 18 pathways.
- advice and guidance from their Career Connect Careers Adviser

All students can access a meeting with Careers Adviser and Careers Lead/Employer Engagement Officer to explore future pathways.

Strengths:

- The CEIAG programme includes a range of activities linking the curriculum with LMI.
- The dedicated Employer Engagement Officer continuously develops employer links and identifies opportunities to extend and enhance the students' knowledge and understanding of LMI
- National Careers Week – range of focussed careers events and activities for the students

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio and the latest Compass SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby Benchmark 2.

GB3: Addressing the needs of each student:

The CEIAG Programme and Employability Strategy have been planned to take into account the needs of all students. They link clearly to the students Education, Health and Care Plans

Equality and Diversity is promoted throughout these programmes/strategies and the curriculum.

There is a comprehensive programme of activities, visits, talks aimed at raising aspiration and awareness of opportunities available for all students.

Assessment of need is continuous for the college, preparing and supporting students for both their next transition to a learning/employment opportunity and for everyday life.

There is evidence of a whole college approach and effective partnership working with relevant agencies supporting the students.

Evidence is provided to show that Destination Data is presented to the Governing Board annually showing year on year comparisons. This data is analysed and is used to inform the colleges CEIAG Strategy.

The Careers Adviser, Joanne Patten liaises closely with the Careers Lead and Employer Engagement Officer to ensure she has up to date and relevant information regarding the students.

Jo provides 1:1 Careers Guidance, she keeps accurate records of students' career plans, intended destinations and progress with applications to post college provision as appropriate, this is maintained on a tracking spreadsheet. Careers Action Plans are included in the Education, Health and Care Plan. Jo can attend Annual Reviews and provide support for parents/carers if requested.

Strengths:

The CEIAG programme and Employability Strategy are personalised to meet the needs of the students. The pastoral support provided to students is exceptional; there is a clear commitment from all staff to ensure the best outcomes for each student.

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio and the latest Compass SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby benchmark 3.

GB 4: Linking curriculum learning to careers:

All schemes of work in the curriculum subject areas are mapped out to include careers and labour market elements as part of the learning, and staff are all aware of the importance of Gatsby benchmarks.

Students' work on STEM and Functional Skills in Maths and English is intrinsically linked to specific work placements and cross curricula subjects.

Careers is embedded within the curriculum and links directly to individual pathways, accredited/non accredited learning targets and EHCP goals/aspirations.

Strengths: At Ascent College CEIAG is an important and integrated part of the curriculum, with all subjects having direct links and mapping across Gatsby benchmarks.

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio, assessment meetings and the latest COMPASS SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby benchmark 4.

GB 5: Encounters with Employers and Employees

Ascent College have a dedicated Employer Engagement Officer, Tara Thomas who works tirelessly to secure employer opportunities/engagement for the students.

The needs of the students are assessed; extensive preparation and planning is involved to ensure the activities will help raise awareness, understanding and aspiration and meet the needs of each student

Employers are well prepared and informed about the needs of the students.

The college provides an extensive range of employer encounters to include:

- Visit to Career Fairs to collect information and inform choices
- Pre supported internship work and industry placements
- Supported internship opportunities and placements
- Employer talks
- External employer visits.
- National, Green and Creative Careers Week activities to include preparation
- Apprenticeship Week includes a range of activities for all students
- Wide range of work tasters available on internal work placements
- Mock Interviews
- Volunteering Opportunities
- Community Engagement coffee mornings

Parents/carers are kept well informed and up to date on activities being undertaken to include activities they can take

part in.

The college also provides information to help parents' understanding of opportunities and pathways.

This is an area of Strength for the College with excellent relationships across a range of employers, and other opportunities for students to engage in activities that support pathways to employment.

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio, assessment meetings and the latest COMPASS SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby benchmark 5.

GB 6: Experiences of the Workplace:

Work experience opportunities are considered in line with the needs of the student.

Each student is assessed and has a personalised plan.

Work Experience opportunities for the students are bespoke in type; length and duration.

Students are individually assessed to identify strengths, abilities and support needs. They all have a personalised plan including strategies and activities relevant to prepare them for placements and experiences of the workplace.

The college help students to prepare through exploring different vocational pathways, employability skills, behaviours and what is expected in the workplace.

Information and support are provided for employers who are hosting work experience placements to ensure they are fully aware of the students needs.

Extensive planning and preparation for bespoke student work experience in a variety of settings has been demonstrated through the evidence provided both in the portfolio and to the assessor.

Students are prepared well, and they are asked to complete a reflective log of their experience when on placement.

Evaluation and feedback are also a valued and a critical element of the process.

The college's Employability Strategy is also linked to transition and how these activities support the students to not only prepare for the next stage of their education/employment/training but also preparation for adult and working life.

Tara Thomas the Employer Engagement Officer is continuously looking at employer engagement opportunities for the students and is building up a network of support for students at the college.

Strengths

This benchmark is an excellent example of good practice with students having a range of opportunities to take part in. Thorough assessment, preparation and evaluation are critical to achieving successful outcomes.

This is a real area of strength for the college to continue to build upon. The college has excellent relationships with local employers and the local community that are used to continue to tailor work related opportunities for their students

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio, assessment meetings and the latest COMPASS SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby benchmark 6.

GB 7: Encounters with Further and Higher Education:

A schedule of meetings and visits, to include the full range of learning pathways available, is planned to include sixth forms, colleges, universities, and apprenticeship providers.

Students are prepared for visits and talks; evaluations are completed to ensure understanding and to identify any gaps/areas for development.

The college also provide parents/carers with information on Further and Higher Education opportunities and pathways available to include support for students.

The Provider Access Policy confirms this commitment to raise awareness of all available Pathways.

Strengths:

There is strong evidence of effective partnership links with local Post-16 and Post 18 Providers.

The portfolio evidence includes information on range of pathway choices available for the students. It demonstrates how individual students can engage with and experience a wide range of activities; there is a true commitment to raise aspirations and encourage students to look at their post 16 and post 18 options

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio, assessment meetings and the latest COMPASS SEF, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby benchmark 7.

GB 8: Personal Guidance:

Ascent College commission Career Connect to provide independent and impartial Careers Information, Advice and Guidance for their students.

Career Connect is a Matrix accredited Careers Guidance provider.

The Career Connect Contract is for an academic year and is reviewed annually.

A Service Level Agreement between college and Career Connect provides details of the activities delivered.

Jo Patten records individual interviews with each student via a shared spreadsheet and each student/parent receives an Action Plan.

Jo is part of the network of support for the students, provided by the college and external agencies.

The information and preferred post college destination and pathway is included in the students Education, Health and Care Plan.

Career Connect have a robust Performance Management Framework for all staff to include Performance Development Management Review, supervision and observation of practice.

Steve Hogarth and Tara Thomas provide ongoing careers education through curriculum lessons and are always available to provide information, advice and support for both students and parents/carers.

Strengths:

The strong partnership between the college and Career Connect ensures support for all students.

From the evidence provided in the Quality in Careers Standard portfolio, assessment meetings and the latest COMPASS, the External Assessor is confident that Ascent College has fully achieved Gatsby benchmark 8.

Further Comments from Career Connect as a Licensed Awarding Body for the Quality in Careers Standard.

Stephen Hogarth the Careers Leader and Tara Thomas work very effectively together and are fully committed to providing the best possible support for each student. This is reinforced by the Head of Adult Services full support and in the cross curricular careers support offered throughout the college. All staff are focused on raising the aspirations of the students to enable them to make well informed and realistic decisions for their futures. Staff from across the college are focused on providing students with a range of CEIAG opportunities and a progressive approach to work related learning that enables students to explore their future options with the appropriate level of support. It is clear that CEIAG and work related learning are a whole institution endeavour aimed to secure the very best outcomes for students.

The External Assessor has identified many strengths throughout the visit to Ascent College. There is a whole college approach showing all staff are fully committed to providing the best possible CEIAG support for students

The college has and continues to make effective links with employers and as is offering a careers programme that will support young people to effectively transition into their next stage of education, employment or training.

All students have differentiated and tailored support in which all college staff work closely to ensure students' needs are met. Transition is well planned and those who need to be further engaged and motivated can access tailored support based on their vocational interests.

Students are positive about their experience of CEIAG at Ascent College. They were able to talk about the support they receive in relation to careers and planning for the future.

The students could talk about the activities they have taken part in, students were also positive about the support offered by college staff. Students were enthusiastic about the support they had received from the careers adviser working with the college, and also the opportunities they had been able to take part in whilst at college.

The students who were involved in the assessment also discussed how important they felt it was having access to meaningful work experience opportunities; students were able to articulate how much they had enjoyed their work experience, the confidence they had gained from being able to take part and the additional life skills they had developed as a result.

One student explained ***'I have been in college since 2020, its been extremely useful but also challenges me to help me cope and improve, in my work experience I have to carry out tasks to the highest level and keep on getting skills and knowledge'***

Another student discussed their experience ***'I used to go to a mainstream college, it's a lot different here but now I feel more confident and grow my skills, I am happy'***

The college works with a range of employers across different elements of the careers programme and students were particularly enthusiastic about having the opportunity to meet employers and also take part in work experience.

As part of the assessment two employers were spoken to, both of which were committed to working with the college. The employers were very positive about the approach the college had taken to building relationships, keeping them informed and also how the students on placement were supported to make the most of the opportunity.

The employers both relayed back to the assessor that the positive working relationships with the college and the students had also been a great experience for their own staff and enhanced their own understanding of SEND, both employers envisioned that they would continue to be able to offer opportunities for students and were keen to develop their working relationships, one of the employers explained he had been so impressed with the support available from the college he had reached out to other local companies in his industry to advocate on behalf on the college to find further work place opportunities.

One employer explained ***'The students are fantastic, its been amazing they are so polite and professional'***

Another employer mentioned that staff from Ascent College had provided excellent training to enable their work experience placement to take place ***'the relationship just works, I couldn't have had better communication and the training helped us to understand what we need to do and how best to work with the students. We have been incredibly well supported.'***

Two parents were also spoken to as part of the final assessment, both parents were extremely pleased with the support on offer at the college. They were particularly encouraged about the work experience opportunities that had been available and the positive impact of this on their children in terms of their confidence, independent living skills and understanding of the world of work. One parent explained their child had unfortunately had a negative experience of work, however the college staff had worked hard to support the young person and rebuild their confidence after this experience so they were able to access other opportunities, the parent was incredibly grateful for all of the time and support offered by college staff to ensure this one bad experience didn't have any further detrimental consequences.

One parents explained *'I am so proud of (young person), and I am really happy the college has helped find such great opportunities for them to be a part of'*

Another parent explained *'the college staff go above and beyond, I know they want (young person) to succeed and will make sure that they do everything to help, I am truly grateful.'*

There is evidence to show the effective delivery of the Careers Programme has an impact on raising aspirations, helping each student to make challenging but realistic plans for their future.

Suggested future considerations:

*Updated CEIAG Statutory Guidance is expected in Spring 2025 - it will be useful for Ascent College to review their CEIAG provision in line with any updates in legislation.

*The 10 Year review of the Gatsby Benchmarks has also recently been published, to be meeting all 8 Gatsby Benchmarks again the college will need to review any changes from September 2025, this will include the use of college systems to track the cohorts, aspirations, intended destinations, careers activities taken part in and further engagement with parents/carers.

*Keep looking for suitable digital careers products that are accessible to students and could help to further embed the careers programme across college.

The college may now use the following words to describe their achievement of the ward in all publicity materials.

Ascent College is nationally accredited by the Quality In Careers Standard as fully meeting all the accreditation criteria incorporating the Gatsby Benchmarks

Signed: Carmel Skidmore, Assessor, Career Connect. **Date:** 21/04/2025
Chloe Elliott, External Assessor – 25/04/2025