

Meaningful Encounters and Experiences in Career-related Learning

Guidance to Support Theme 5 of the Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools



Purpose of this Guidance

Meaningful encounters with employers and experiences of workplaces can play an important role in helping pupils broaden their horizons, develop curiosity and begin to understand the wider world around them. In primary schools, these experiences are not about encouraging pupils to make early career decisions or preparing them directly for employment. Instead, they help pupils explore different roles, sectors and pathways in ways that are engaging, accessible and relevant to their stage of development.

Employer encounters and workplace experiences can help pupils connect their learning to real-life contexts and recognise the value of the knowledge, skills and interests they are developing in school. Through conversations, visits, projects and shared experiences, pupils begin to understand how people use communication, creativity, teamwork, resilience and problem-solving in many different aspects of work and life.

Meaningful encounters are often most effective when they are experienced regularly and progressively throughout a pupil's primary journey. Over time, pupils can build on earlier experiences, encounter a wider range of people, roles and workplaces, and develop an increasingly broad understanding of the opportunities and pathways available to them.

Representation is an important part of this learning. The people pupils meet, the roles they encounter and the workplaces they explore all contribute to how pupils understand themselves and their future possibilities. When pupils regularly encounter diverse and relatable role models from different backgrounds, sectors and pathways, they are more likely to see that opportunities are open to everyone. Schools wishing to explore representation, inclusion and meaningful participation in greater depth may find the guidance *Inclusion and Impact in Career-related Learning* a useful companion resource.

This guidance has been developed to support schools in strengthening meaningful employer encounters and workplace experiences over time. It is intended to complement Theme 5 of the Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools by offering practical examples, reflective prompts and supportive approaches that schools may wish to explore as they continue to develop their provision.

Schools will be at different stages in their journey. Some may already have established partnerships and regular workplace experiences, while others may be beginning to consider how employer engagement can become part of wider curriculum and enrichment activity. Many schools will already be providing valuable encounters and experiences through curriculum learning, visitors, community partnerships, enrichment activities and wider school life. This guidance is intended to help schools recognise these opportunities, build on existing strengths and become increasingly intentional in how encounters and experiences are planned, connected and reflected upon.

The guidance explores how schools can:

- Develop meaningful and progressive encounters over time.
- Connect encounters with employers to curriculum learning.
- Broaden aspirations and challenge stereotypes.
- Strengthen partnerships with employers, families and communities.
- Support all pupils to participate meaningfully in experiences.
- Use preparation and reflection to deepen learning.
- Build increasingly connected and sustainable approaches to encounters with employers across the school.

Meaningful encounters and workplace experiences do not need to be large-scale or complex to have an impact. Some of the most valuable opportunities may come through everyday conversations, local partnerships and curriculum-linked activities that help pupils explore the world around them. Thoughtful, inclusive and connected approaches can help pupils develop confidence, curiosity and a stronger understanding of the possibilities available to them in the future.

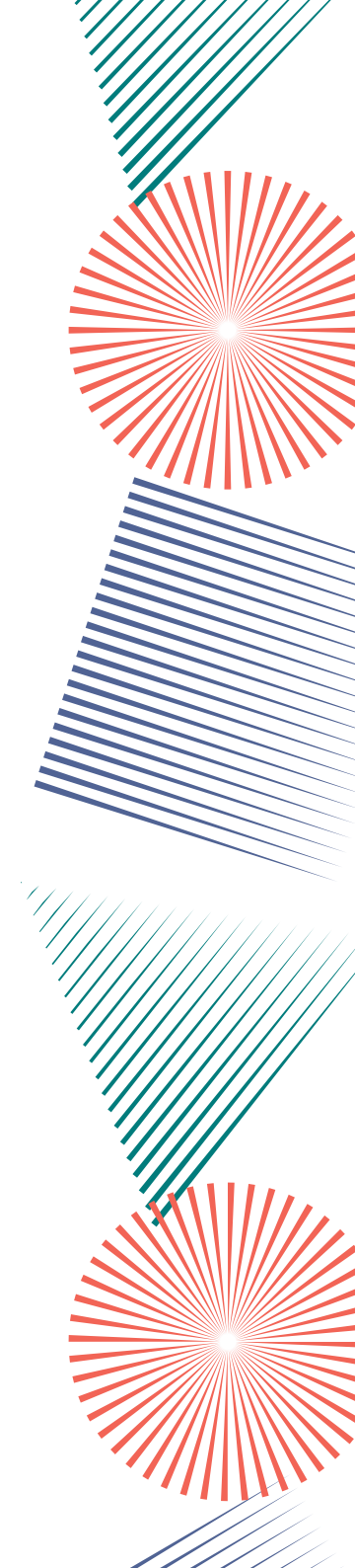
How to Use This Guide

Schools may wish to read this guide in full or focus on the sections most relevant to their current priorities and stage of development.

The examples, reflective questions and suggested approaches can be used alongside existing curriculum planning, enrichment activity, employer engagement, SEND provision and school improvement processes to help strengthen meaningful encounters and experiences within career-related learning.

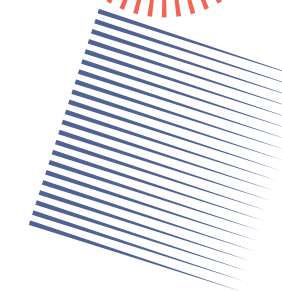
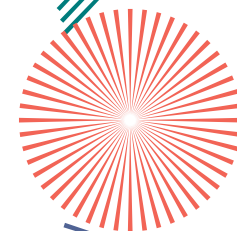
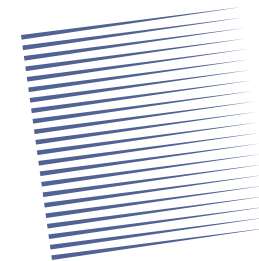
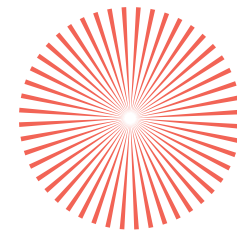
This guide is intended as a reflection and development tool rather than a checklist or assessment framework. Schools may wish to use it to support discussions about current practice, identify strengths and consider possible next steps.

References to tools, frameworks and supporting materials have been brought together in the Tools and Resources section at the end of this guide so that schools can easily access further information and support when needed.



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What Makes an Encounter or Experience Meaningful?

Secondary schools and colleges use the Gatsby Benchmarks, a best practice framework for careers education, which includes a definition of what makes an experience meaningful. We have adapted this definition for primary schools to help ensure encounters and experiences are purposeful, age-appropriate and designed to have a meaningful impact on pupils.

A meaningful encounter	A meaningful experience
A meaningful encounter is a chance for pupils to find out what jobs are like, what skills people use at work, how people get their jobs and what helps them do well. A meaningful encounter should: • Have a clear purpose, so everyone understands why it is taking place and what pupils will learn. • Help pupils learn something appropriate for their age and needs. • Give pupils opportunities to talk, listen and ask questions. • Provide time for pupils to reflect on what they have learned and how it connects to their future.	A meaningful experience is a chance for pupils to explore what it is like in a real workplace, find out what skills people use, how people get their jobs and what helps them do well. A meaningful experience should: • Have a clear purpose, so everyone understands why the experience is taking place and what pupils will learn. • Help pupils learn something appropriate for their age and needs. • Give pupils opportunities to talk and ask questions with people in the workplace. • Allow pupils to encounter a range of people, roles and workplace environments. • Include opportunities for pupils to try a simple task or activity linked to the workplace. • Include opportunities for feedback and discussion. • Provide time for pupils to reflect on what they learned and how it connects to their future.

Meaningful Encounters and Workplace Experiences

Meaningful encounters and workplace experiences are most effective when they are planned with clear learning outcomes in mind. The Career-related Learning Outcomes and Objectives for Primary Pupils provide a useful framework for helping schools identify what pupils should learn, experience and reflect upon at different stages of their development. By starting with intended outcomes, schools can design encounters and experiences that support progression rather than treating activities as isolated events.

Encounters with employers and experiences of workplaces help pupils make connections between learning, everyday life and the world beyond school. Through conversations, visits, projects and shared experiences, pupils can explore different roles, workplaces and pathways in ways that are engaging, age-appropriate and relevant to their stage of development.

Meaningful encounters are strengthened through diversity, inclusion, preparation and reflection. When pupils encounter a broad range of people, sectors and workplaces, they are better able to challenge stereotypes, broaden their understanding of future possibilities and recognise the relevance of their learning.

Developing Meaningful Practice Over Time

Career-related learning (CRL) is most effective when it develops gradually and becomes embedded within everyday school life. Schools do not need to introduce a wide range of activities immediately. Many begin by making use of existing opportunities and then build a more planned and progressive approach over time.

Meaningful CRL is underpinned by clear learning outcomes and objectives. Before introducing an activity or encounter, it can be helpful to consider what pupils should know, understand or be able to do as a result. This helps ensure that experiences are purposeful and connected to wider CRL provision.

Schools may choose to develop provision through a range of approaches, including:

- Inviting visitors into school to share their experiences, skills and career journeys.
- Making links between curriculum learning and careers, pathways and the wider world.
- Organising encounters with employers, volunteers and community partners.
- Using virtual encounters, videos and online resources to introduce pupils to a wider range of sectors and workplaces.
- Drawing on the experiences and expertise of parents, carers and the wider community.
- Creating opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning, interests, strengths and aspirations.

As provision develops, schools may wish to consider how experiences build progressively across year groups. This can help ensure that pupils encounter a broad range of opportunities over time, revisit key themes and develop a greater awareness of themselves, future pathways and the world of work.

Throughout all activities, inclusion should remain a central consideration. Schools may wish to consider how learning, encounters and experiences can be adapted to support meaningful participation for all pupils, ensuring that opportunities are accessible, representative and relevant to different needs, backgrounds and experiences.

When planned with clear intent, meaningful CRL can help pupils broaden their horizons, challenge stereotypes, develop essential skills and build a greater understanding of the opportunities available to them.



Regular Reflection

Developing meaningful encounters with employers and experiences of workplaces is an ongoing process of reflection, adaptation and growth. Schools do not need to have extensive employer networks or large programmes in place before beginning to strengthen provision. In many cases, the most valuable developments begin with small conversations, shared reflection and a growing awareness of the opportunities already available within the school and wider community.

Creating regular opportunities to reflect can help schools consider how encounters and experiences are supporting pupils over time. These reflections may take place informally during curriculum planning discussions, after visits or encounters, through pupil voice activities or as part of wider school improvement conversations. Schools may also find a Careers Impact internal leadership review helpful when reflecting on the quality, inclusivity and impact of encounters and workplace experiences and identifying priorities for future development.

Schools may find it helpful to consider questions such as:

- Which employers, workplaces and sectors are pupils currently encountering?
- Do encounters reflect the diversity of the local community and wider workforce?
- Are pupils meeting people from a broad range of backgrounds, pathways and roles?
- How are encounters and experiences connected across year groups?
- Are experiences linked meaningfully to curriculum learning where appropriate?
- How are pupils prepared before encounters or workplace experiences?
- How do pupils reflect on what they have learned afterwards?
- Are all pupils able to participate meaningfully and confidently?
- What adaptations or support might help some pupils engage more fully?
- What experiences have pupils found most memorable, inspiring or surprising?
- How do we know that encounters are helping pupils broaden their understanding of future possibilities?
- How do we know that encounters and workplace experiences are influencing pupils' confidence, curiosity and engagement?

These questions are not intended as a checklist or assessment tool, but as prompts to support discussion and gradual development over time. Some schools may begin by reviewing the range of employers pupils encounter during a school year, while others may focus initially on strengthening preparation and reflection activities around existing experiences.

As practice develops, schools may notice patterns in pupil engagement, participation and feedback. For example, pupil reflections may reveal which encounters pupils connected with most strongly, whether stereotypes are being challenged successfully or whether some groups of pupils may benefit from additional support or representation within provision. These insights can help schools adapt experiences, so they remain relevant, inclusive and meaningful.

Some schools may also begin to use simple observations, pupil reflections or light-touch recording approaches to help understand how pupils' confidence, awareness and aspirations develop over time. These approaches do not need to be complex but can support increasingly connected planning and shared understanding between staff.

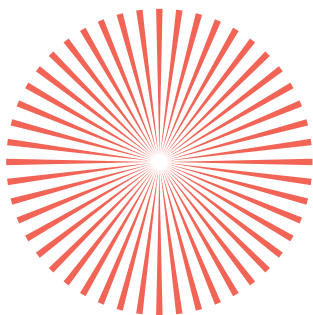
Importantly, meaningful employer encounters and workplace experiences should feel achievable and sustainable. Schools are encouraged to build on existing strengths, recognise the valuable practice already taking place and develop provision gradually in ways that reflect the needs, interests and context of their pupils and wider community.

Getting Started

Schools do not need extensive employer networks before beginning to develop meaningful encounters and experiences. Many schools already have valuable resources within their existing community.

For some schools, this may involve inviting a visitor linked to a curriculum topic, identifying employers within the parent and carer community or exploring opportunities for virtual encounters. Others may begin by reviewing existing visits and considering how preparation and reflection activities could help strengthen their impact.

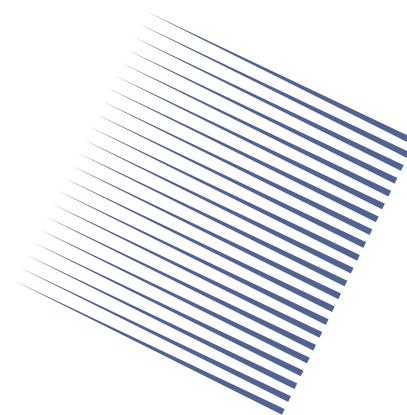
These manageable steps can help create increasingly connected and meaningful experiences for pupils.



Next Steps

Schools may wish to consider the following actions as they continue to develop their approach:

- Review the range of sectors, roles and pathways pupils encounter.
- Audit existing employer, family and community connections across the school to identify opportunities for more connected, sustainable and progressive employer engagement.
- Strengthen links between encounters and curriculum learning.
- Develop preparation and reflection activities.
- Engage a broader range of employers, families and community partners.
- Review how encounters help challenge stereotypes and broaden aspirations.
- Consider how encounters and experiences progress across year groups.



Review and Action Planning Tool

This tool is intended to support reflection, discussion and continuous improvement. Schools may wish to use the questions during curriculum reviews, school improvement discussions, learning walks, pupil voice activities or wider evaluation of career-related learning (CRL). The questions are not intended to function as a checklist or assessment framework and may be adapted to suit individual contexts and priorities.

Strategic Approach

- Do pupils have regular opportunities to meet employers and experience workplaces?
- Are encounters planned as part of a progressive learning journey rather than isolated events?
- Are encounters linked to intended learning outcomes and pupil development?
- Do experiences help pupils broaden horizons, develop curiosity and understand the wider world?

Meaningful Encounters

Does each employer encounter:

- Have a clear purpose?
- Support age-appropriate learning?
- Allow pupils to listen, ask questions and engage?
- Include opportunities for reflection afterwards?
- Help pupils understand why the encounter is taking place?

Meaningful Workplace Experiences

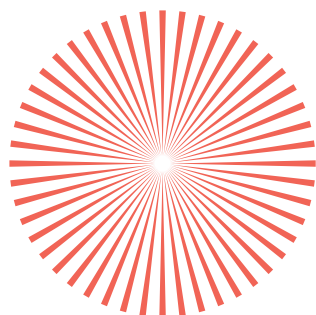
Does each workplace experience:

- Have a clear purpose?
- Support age-appropriate learning?
- Allow pupils to encounter a range of people, roles and workplace environments?
- Include opportunities to ask questions?
- Include a practical task or activity where possible?
- Include feedback and discussion?
- Include reflection afterwards?

Diversity, Representation and Inclusion

Do pupils meet people from a wide range of:

- Sectors?
- Roles?
- Backgrounds?
- Pathways?
- Are stereotypes actively challenged?
- Do pupils encounter relatable role models?
- Do pupils see examples that reflect the diversity of society and the workforce?
- Do all pupils have equitable opportunities to participate?



Curriculum Connections

Are encounters linked to curriculum learning where appropriate?

Do pupils see how school subjects connect to real life and future opportunities?

Are employer encounters integrated into topics and projects across the curriculum?

Examples:

- Science → health professionals, engineers, scientists
- Geography → environmental and sustainability careers
- Computing → digital and technology careers
- English → publishing, journalism, media
- Arts → creative industries

Preparation

Do pupils prepare before encounters and visits?

Do we:

- Explain the purpose of the activity?
- Introduce key vocabulary?
- Share information about the visitor or workplace?
- Support pupils to develop questions?
- Make appropriate adjustments made to support all learners?

Reflection

Do pupils reflect on experiences afterwards?

Do they discuss:

- What they learned?
- What surprised them?
- Skills they observed?
- Roles they found interesting?
- Links to their learning?
- Is pupil feedback used to improve future experiences?

Building Over Time

- Have we mapped encounters and experiences across year groups?
- Does provision become broader and more varied as pupils progress through school?
- Do younger pupils explore familiar community roles?
- Do older pupils encounter a wider range of industries, sectors and pathways?
- Can we demonstrate progression in experiences across the primary years?

Partnerships and Community Engagement

Do we engage:

- Employers?
- Parents and carers?
- Governors?
- Community organisations?
- Local businesses?
- Volunteers?
- Are partnerships sustainable and mutually beneficial?
- Are local opportunities being maximised?

Range of Experiences

Do pupils access a variety of:

- Classroom visitors?
- Workplace visits?
- Virtual encounters?
- Curriculum-linked projects?
- Community-based experiences?
- Enterprise activities?
- Are pupils exposed to a broad range of sectors and pathways?

Monitoring and Review

Do we review:

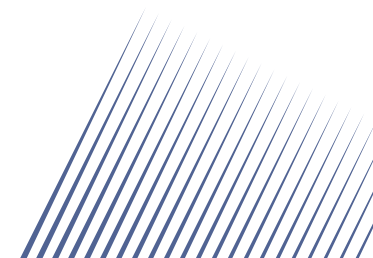
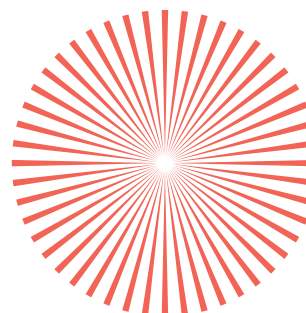
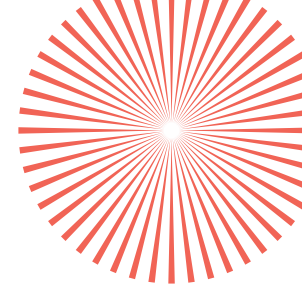
- Which sectors pupils encounter?
- Diversity and representation within encounters?
- Participation by different pupil groups?
- Curriculum links?
- Pupil voice and feedback?

Do we know which experiences pupils find most memorable and impactful?

Can we identify how encounters are broadening aspirations and understanding?

Action Planning

- Review the range of sectors, roles and pathways pupils encounter.
- Strengthen links between encounters and curriculum learning.
- Improve preparation activities before encounters.
- Embed reflection opportunities after experiences.
- Engage a wider range of employers, families and community partners.
- Review representation and inclusion within encounters.
- Map progression of encounters across year groups.



Tools and Resources

A range of tools and resources are available to help schools develop meaningful encounters with employers and experiences of workplaces over time. Schools may wish to explore different resources depending on their context, existing partnerships and the needs and interests of their pupils.

[The Primary Platform](#) provides guidance, resources and examples of practice to support primary career-related learning, including approaches to employer engagement, curriculum links and progressive encounters. Schools may find it useful when identifying starting points for development or strengthening existing provision.

[The Careers & Enterprise Academy](#) offers a range of free online courses for primary educators, including:

- 1| [Getting Started with Career-related Learning in Primary](#)
- 2| [Career-related Learning: Embedding Practice in Primary](#)
- 3| [Building and Sustaining Leadership for Career-related Learning in Primary](#)
- 4| [Strengthening Career-related Learning with the Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools](#)

The [Career-related learning outcomes and objectives for primary pupils](#) can support schools in thinking about progression and intended impact. Schools may use these outcomes to help shape activities, reflection and curriculum planning over time.

The [Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools](#) and the Careers Impact internal leadership review can support reflection, quality assurance and continuous improvement when reviewing encounters and workplace experiences.

[Primary Encounters Checklist](#): This checklist supports primary schools to plan and deliver meaningful encounters with employers and volunteers. It can help ensure activities are purposeful, inclusive and aligned to intended learning outcomes, while supporting quality and consistency in career-related learning (CRL).

[Inclusion and Impact in Career-related Learning](#) explores representation, accessibility and meaningful participation in greater depth and may help schools strengthen the inclusive design of encounters and workplace experiences.

[Local Careers Hubs](#) can provide opportunities for collaboration, networking and sharing effective practice. Schools may also benefit from exploring opportunities to build employer and community partnerships through local networks and contacts.

[Primary Futures](#) can support schools in connecting with volunteers from a broad range of sectors, backgrounds and professions. Many schools use Primary Futures to help pupils encounter relatable role models, challenge stereotypes and broaden awareness of future pathways through classroom-based or virtual encounters.

[The Gatsby Benchmarks](#) can provide useful context when considering employer encounters and workplace experiences, although they were originally developed for secondary-age careers programmes.

Some schools may also choose to use skills frameworks, such as the [Skills Builder Universal Framework](#), to support a shared language around essential skills including teamwork, communication and problem solving.

The [CDI Framework](#) may be helpful for schools wanting to explore careers learning in greater depth or consider progression into secondary education and beyond.

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Our Impact

Our evidence