

Strategic Leadership and Planning in Career-related Learning

**Guidance to Support Theme 1 of the Careers
Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools**



Purpose of This Guidance

Career-related learning (CRL) in primary schools is most effective when underpinned by a clear vision, strong leadership and a strategic, whole-school approach. At this stage, CRL is not about preparing pupils for immediate employment or encouraging early career decisions. Instead, it supports pupils to develop confidence, broaden their horizons and aspirations, challenge stereotypes, and understand the wider world, while helping them recognise how their learning in school connects to real-life opportunities.

Strategic leadership plays a central role in ensuring that career-related learning is coherent, inclusive, embedded within whole-school practice and sustainable over time. When CRL is planned intentionally and aligned with wider school priorities, it becomes part of everyday practice rather than a series of isolated activities. This helps ensure all pupils benefit from consistent, meaningful experiences that support their development.

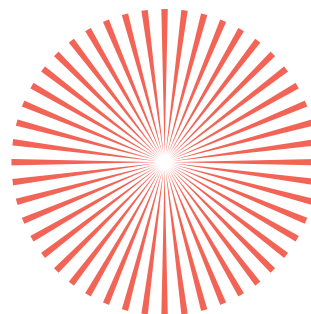
This guidance has been developed to support schools in strengthening leadership, vision and strategic planning for CRL. It complements Theme 1 of the Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools by offering practical examples, reflective prompts and supportive approaches that schools may wish to explore as they continue to develop provision.

Schools will be at different stages in their journey. Some may already have a well-developed strategy, while others may be beginning to consider how career-related learning can be planned more intentionally. This guidance is not intended to provide a checklist or formal assessment tool, but to support reflection, discussion, and gradual development, helping schools build approaches that are meaningful, manageable, and sustainable within their context.

The guidance explores how schools may begin to:

- Develop a clear and shared vision for CRL.
- Strengthen leadership and build capacity across staff.
- Plan strategically for CRL over time.
- Align CRL with curriculum learning and school improvement priorities.
- Engage senior leaders and governors in driving development.
- Build staff confidence through professional development.
- Maximise existing opportunities across school life.

Strategic approaches do not need to be complex. Thoughtful, connected, and well-communicated planning can help create a culture in which career-related learning is visible, valued, and embedded, supporting all pupils to develop confidence, curiosity, and a sense of possibility about their futures.



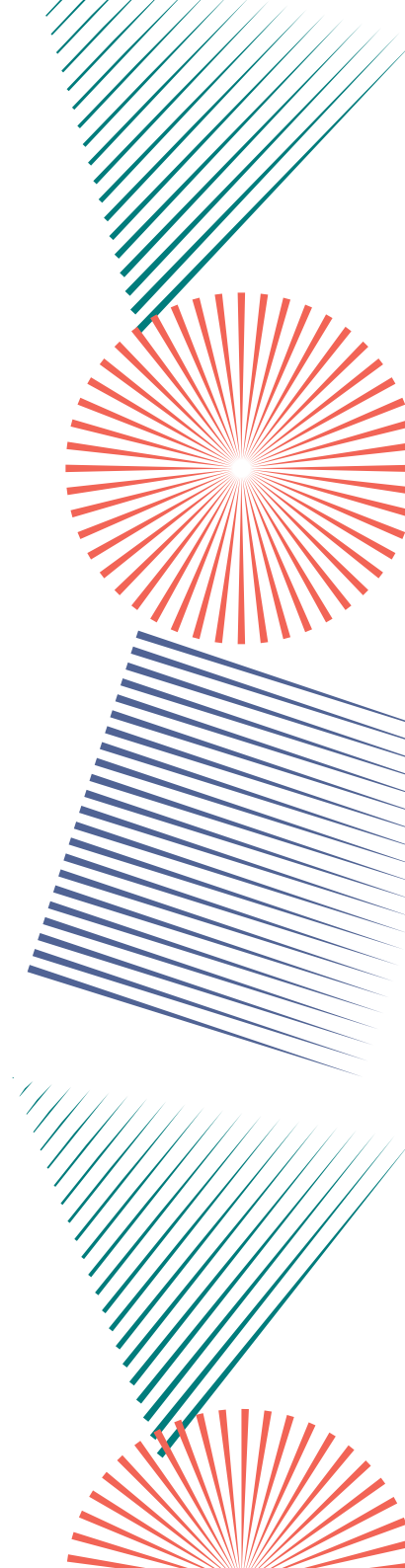
How to Use This Guide

This guidance is intended to be a practical companion to Theme 1 of the Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools. Schools may choose to read the document in full or focus on the sections that are most relevant to their current priorities and stage of development.

The guide can be used by career-related learning leads, senior leaders, governors and wider staff teams to support discussion, planning and improvement. It may be particularly helpful when reviewing existing provision, identifying priorities for development, or considering how CRL can contribute to wider school improvement objectives.

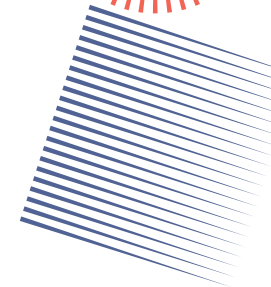
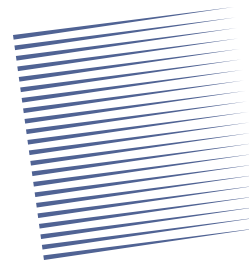
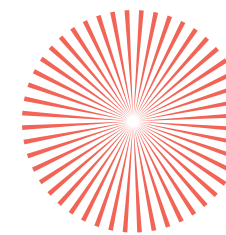
Throughout the guide, schools will find practical examples, reflective questions and suggested approaches linked to the themes of leadership, vision, planning and strategic development. These can be used during leadership discussions, school improvement planning, curriculum reviews, staff development activities or as part of a Careers Impact internal leadership review.

Supporting tools, frameworks and further resources are included at the end of the guide to help schools explore areas in greater depth and identify appropriate next steps.



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Vision, Leadership and Strategic Planning

Strategic leadership creates the conditions for career-related learning (CRL) to flourish. In many schools, this begins with a named member of staff who takes responsibility for CRL, but over time it can develop into a distributed leadership approach where responsibility is shared and embedded across the wider staff team.

A clear vision helps define what the school wants pupils to gain from CRL. Effective visions are typically focused on the intended impact for pupils and aligned with the school's values, ethos, and wider priorities. They often emphasise inclusion, aspiration, and personal development, while providing a shared understanding of the purpose of CRL among staff, leaders, governors, and families.

This vision can then be translated into action through strategic planning. Schools may use a Careers Impact internal leadership review to support reflection, identify strengths and priorities, and inform future planning. Rather than relying on isolated events or one-off activities, schools begin to plan CRL more intentionally and progressively, aligning it with curriculum learning, personal development, and wider school priorities. This helps ensure that pupils benefit from coherent experiences that build over time and contribute to a broader learner journey.

The Role of Senior Leaders and Governors

Strong leadership is central to the successful development of career-related learning (CRL). While a named lead may coordinate activity on a day-to-day basis, lasting and sustainable approaches are supported by the active involvement of senior leaders and governors.

Senior leaders play a significant role in setting the direction for CRL and helping staff understand its place within the wider life of the school. When CRL is aligned with school values, improvement priorities, and curriculum development, it is more likely to become embedded rather than being viewed as an additional initiative. Senior leaders can support this by promoting a shared vision, allocating appropriate time and resources, and creating opportunities for career-related learning to be discussed within wider school planning and review processes.

Governors can also help strengthen strategic approaches by providing support, challenge, and oversight. This does not require detailed knowledge of CRL, but rather an understanding of the school's ambitions, priorities and intended impact for pupils. Through thoughtful discussion and review, governors can help ensure that CRL remains visible within school development and continues to evolve.

In practice, leadership involvement may include:

- Discussing CRL within school improvement planning.
- Reviewing how CRL supports personal development and wider school priorities.
- Ensuring appropriate leadership responsibility is identified.
- Providing opportunities for staff development and collaboration.
- Reflecting on progress and identifying future priorities.

Strong leadership can help create the conditions for career-related learning to become a coherent and meaningful part of school life, supporting pupils to broaden their horizons and develop confidence and a sense of possibility about their futures.



Activity to Strategy

In many schools, career-related learning (CRL) begins with individual activities such as visits, visitors, or themed days. While these experiences can be valuable, a strategic approach moves beyond this by focusing on why activities take place and what difference they make.

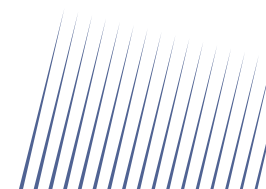
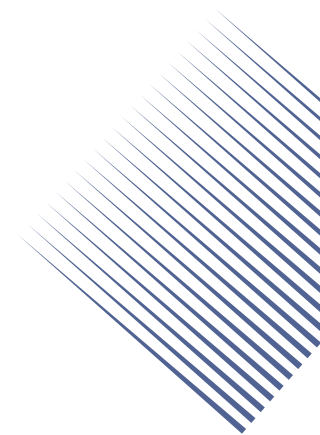
A strategic approach often begins with reflection:

- 1| What is currently happening across the school?
- 2| What is working well?
- 3| What strengths can we build upon?
- 4| Where is there opportunity to strengthen provision?

From here, schools can begin to identify priorities and plan for impact. This may start with developing a clear vision for career-related learning and identifying the intended impact on pupils. Schools may then choose to focus on a small number of priorities for development, supported by agreed actions and responsibilities. Creating opportunities to review progress and reflect on the effectiveness of provision can help ensure that CRL continues to evolve in response to pupil needs and school priorities.

Strategic planning will look different in every school. It may include developing a simple action plan, identifying how CRL supports wider school improvement priorities, mapping opportunities across year groups to create a more progressive learner journey, or reviewing how curriculum learning, enrichment activities and employer encounters work together to support pupil development. Some schools may choose to identify a small number of annual priorities, while others may develop a longer-term plan that sets out how provision will develop over several years.

These approaches may develop into a more structured, long-term plan that supports consistency, progression, and sustainability across the school. By moving from isolated activities towards a more intentional and connected approach, schools can help ensure that career-related learning becomes an integral part of pupils' wider learner journey.



Building Strategic Approaches

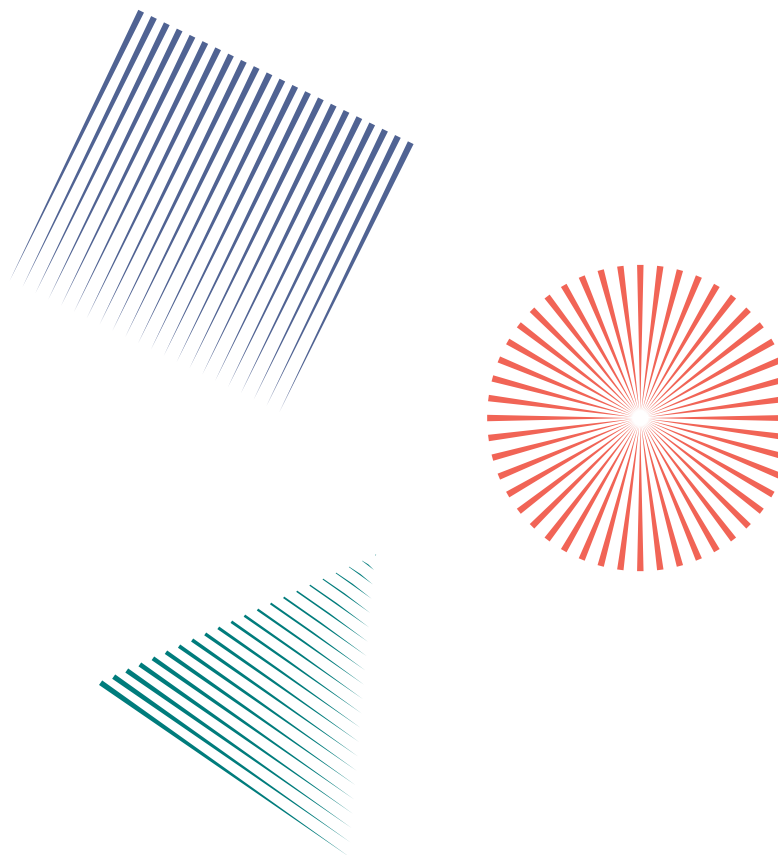
Developing a strategic approach to career-related learning (CRL) is an ongoing process. Schools may begin with informal or emerging practice before moving towards provision that is increasingly connected, planned, and embedded across the wider life of the school.

In the early stages, this might involve identifying a member of staff to take responsibility for CRL, beginning to make links between activities and curriculum learning, or developing a simple vision for what career-related learning should achieve for pupils. These initial steps can help create a stronger sense of purpose and provide a foundation for future development.

As provision develops, schools may begin to clarify roles and responsibilities across the staff team, strengthen connections between CRL, curriculum learning and personal development, and identify priorities that align with wider school improvement objectives. This can help ensure that career-related learning becomes more coherent and consistently understood across the school.

As approaches become more established, schools may develop longer-term plans and integrate career-related learning within wider school improvement and quality assurance processes. This enables schools to build a more progressive and sustainable approach that evolves in response to pupil need and school context.

Importantly, this development does not need to happen all at once. Strategic approaches are often built through small, intentional changes that accumulate over time. By reflecting on existing strengths and identifying manageable next steps, schools can create meaningful and sustainable improvements that support pupils throughout their learner journey.



Maximising Existing Opportunities

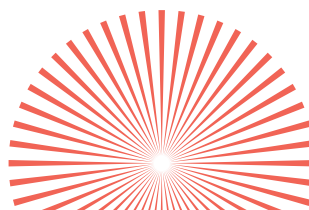
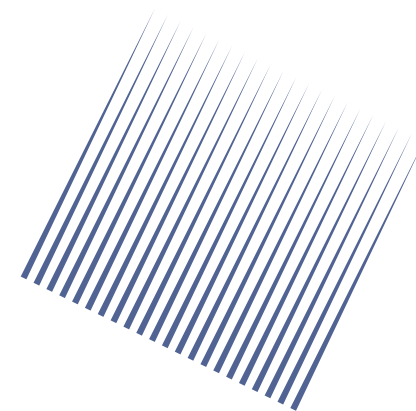
Career-related learning does not need to sit separately from existing school activity. Many schools find that the most effective approaches come from recognising and strengthening opportunities that already exist.

These may include:

- Curriculum lessons and cross-curricular learning.
- PSHE and personal development.
- Assemblies, visits, and enrichment activities.
- Books, displays, and classroom environments.
- Conversations with pupils about their interests and strengths.

These opportunities can become more intentional and connected, helping to ensure that CRL is embedded across everyday school life.

The wider school community can also play a key role. Families, carers, staff, and local contacts can all contribute to providing relevant, relatable insights that help pupils make connections between learning and the wider world.



Professional Development and Staff Confidence

Staff confidence plays a vital role in embedding career-related learning effectively across the school. When staff understand the purpose of CRL and recognise how it supports pupils' development, they are more likely to make meaningful connections between learning, skills, and future possibilities within their everyday practice.

For some schools, this may begin with providing access to guidance, resources or introductory training that helps staff develop a shared understanding of what career-related learning is and why it matters in the primary phase. These early opportunities can help build awareness and confidence, making it easier for staff to identify where CRL naturally aligns with their existing roles and responsibilities.

The Careers & Enterprise Academy offers a range of free online courses designed specifically for primary educators. These courses provide practical guidance on getting started with career-related learning, embedding CRL across the curriculum and developing sustainable approaches within primary settings. Schools may find these resources useful when building staff confidence and developing a shared understanding of effective practice. Links to these courses, along with other useful tools and resources, can be found in the Tools and Resources section at the end of this guide.

As practice develops, professional development can support a more consistent and strategic approach across the school. Staff may begin to integrate CRL more intentionally into curriculum planning, develop a shared language around skills, aspirations, and futures, and feel increasingly confident in helping pupils make connections between their learning and the wider world. This can also create opportunities for wider staff ownership, with different members of the school community contributing to the planning and delivery of career-related learning.

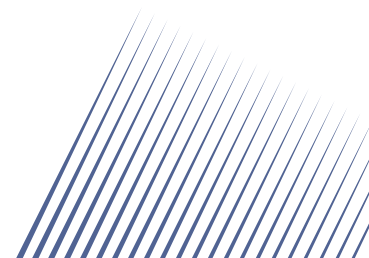
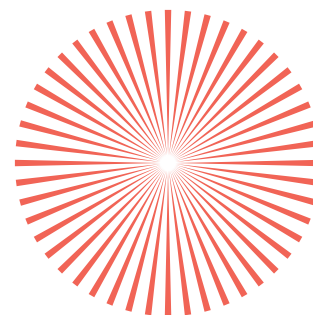
As staff confidence grows, career-related learning can become a shared responsibility rather than the role of a single individual. This can help create greater consistency across the school and support a more sustainable approach to delivery.

Monitoring and Reviewing Progress

Strategic approaches benefit from regular opportunities to review, quality assure and refine provision. Reviewing a range of evidence can help schools understand strengths, identify priorities and inform continuous improvement.

Schools may choose to review curriculum plans, gather staff and pupil feedback, reflect on enrichment activities, or consider how career-related learning is supporting wider school priorities. These discussions can help schools identify strengths, celebrate progress, and agree future development priorities.

Simple monitoring and review processes can help ensure that career-related learning remains purposeful, responsive, and aligned with the needs of pupils and the wider school community.



Reflection

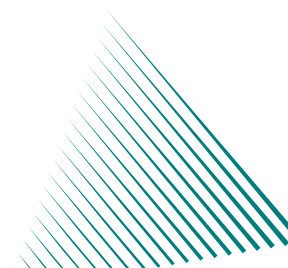
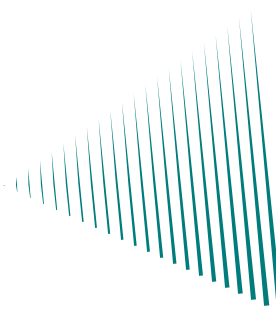
Developing strategic leadership for career-related learning is an ongoing process of reflection and improvement. Schools do not need to have a fully developed strategy in place before beginning to strengthen their approach.

Regular reflection can help schools identify strengths, priorities, and next steps. These conversations may take place as part of leadership meetings, curriculum planning, or wider school improvement discussions.

Schools may find it helpful to consider questions such as:

- Do we have a clear and shared vision for career-related learning?
- What is the intended impact of our CRL provision on pupils?
- How is CRL currently planned and delivered across the school?
- How does CRL link to our wider school priorities?
- Who is responsible for leading and supporting CRL?
- Where is there opportunity to strengthen or connect practice?

These reflections do not need to lead to immediate large-scale change. Instead, they can help schools identify priorities, clarify direction, and inform future planning.



Getting Started

Schools do not need to have a fully developed strategy in place before strengthening career-related learning. In many cases, effective strategic approaches begin by building on existing strengths and identifying a small number of manageable next steps.

For some schools, this may involve identifying a member of staff to lead and coordinate CRL, while others may choose to start by reviewing existing activities and considering how they contribute to pupil development. Schools may also find it helpful to explore how career-related learning already supports wider priorities such as personal development, aspiration, inclusion, and curriculum enrichment.

Developing a shared understanding of the purpose of CRL can provide a useful starting point for discussions with staff, senior leaders, and governors. From here, schools can begin to consider their long-term ambitions for pupils and how career-related learning can contribute to these outcomes.

Some schools may find it helpful to start with one or two simple actions, such as developing a vision statement, identifying opportunities within existing curriculum plans, or introducing regular opportunities to reflect on and review provision. Over time, these small steps can help create a stronger foundation for a more strategic and sustainable approach.

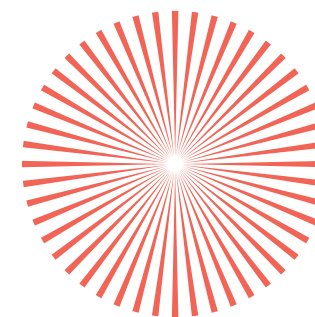
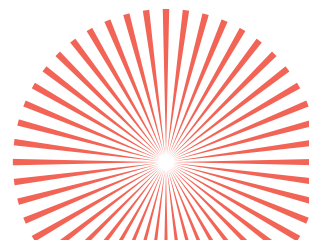
Next Steps

As strategic approaches become more established, schools may wish to consider how career-related learning can become increasingly connected, progressive and embedded across school life.

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

- Share the school's CRL vision with staff and governors.
- Review leadership responsibilities and identify any gaps.
- Map current CRL activity across year groups.
- Agree one or two strategic priorities for the next academic year.
- Explore how CRL can support wider school priorities.

Schools may find that their priorities evolve as provision develops. Maintaining a reflective approach can help ensure that career-related learning remains meaningful, relevant, and responsive to the needs of pupils.



Review and Action Planning Tool

Vision and Purpose

Do we have a clear vision for career-related learning (CRL)?

Is our vision focused on developing pupils':

- Confidence?
- Aspirations?
- Curiosity?
- Understanding of the wider world?
- Awareness of future possibilities?

Is our vision aligned with our school's values, ethos and priorities?

Have we shared the vision with staff, governors and families?

Leadership and Responsibility

- Is there a named member of staff leading CRL?
- Are leadership responsibilities clearly defined?
- Is responsibility for CRL beginning to be shared across the school?
- Do senior leaders actively support CRL?
- Are governors informed and engaged in CRL development?

Strategic Planning

- Do we have a planned approach to CRL rather than relying on one-off activities?
- Have we identified clear priorities for development?
- Do we have an action plan or development plan for CRL?
- Are roles, actions and responsibilities clearly identified?
- Do we regularly review progress against priorities?

Aligning CRL with School Priorities

Does CRL support wider school priorities such as:

- Personal development?
- Inclusion?
- Raising aspirations?
- Curriculum enrichment?
- School improvement goals?
- Is CRL discussed within school improvement planning?

From Activities to Impact

Have we reviewed current CRL activities across the school?

Do we know:

- What is working well?
- What strengths we can build upon?
- Where are improvements needed?
- Are activities planned with clear intended outcomes for pupils?

Curriculum and Learner Journey

- Have we mapped CRL opportunities across year groups?
- Does learning build progressively over time?
- Are curriculum learning, enrichment activities and employer encounters connected?
- Can we demonstrate a coherent learner journey for pupils?

Maximising Existing Opportunities

Are we making the most of opportunities within:

- Curriculum lessons?
- Cross-curricular learning?
- PSHE?
- Assemblies?
- Visits and visitors?
- Books, displays and classroom environments?

Do staff regularly help pupils connect learning to the wider world?

Staff Confidence and Professional Development

- Do staff understand the purpose of CRL?
- Have staff accessed relevant guidance, resources or training?
- Do staff feel confident discussing aspirations, skills and future possibilities?
- Is CRL becoming a shared responsibility across the school?

Engaging the Wider School Community

Do we involve:

- Families and carers?
- School staff?
- Employers and local contacts?
- Community partners?

Do these contributions help pupils understand the wider world and future opportunities?

Monitoring and Review

Do we regularly review CRL provision?

Do we gather feedback from:

- Pupils?
- Staff?
- Governors?
- Families and partners (where appropriate)?

Do we review:

- Curriculum plans?
- Enrichment activities?
- Links to school priorities?
- Progress towards strategic goals?

Action Planning

- Share the school's CRL vision with staff and governors.
- Review leadership responsibilities and address any gaps.
- Map CRL opportunities across all year groups.
- Agree 1–2 strategic priorities for the next academic year.
- Strengthen links between CRL and wider school priorities.
- Embed CRL within school improvement and quality assurance processes.
- Develop a longer-term approach that is progressive, sustainable and inclusive.



Tools and Resources

A range of tools and resources are available to support schools in developing strategic approaches to career-related learning.

[The Primary Platform](#) provides guidance, resources and examples of practice to help schools develop and embed CRL. Schools may find it particularly useful when exploring curriculum links, employer engagement, and whole-school approaches.

[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](#)

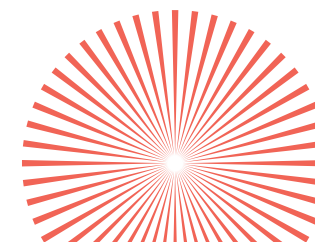
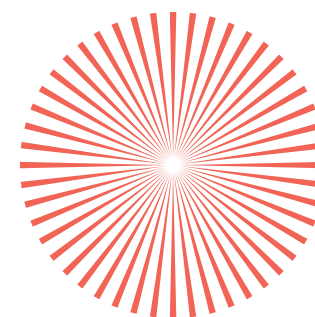
The [Career-related learning outcomes and objectives for primary pupils](#) can help schools think more strategically about progression, intended impact and the development of a coherent learner journey from EYFS to Year 6.

The [Careers Impact Maturity Model for Primary Schools](#) and the Careers Impact internal leadership review can support reflection and improvement planning by helping schools identify strengths, areas for development and potential next steps.

[Local Careers Hubs](#) can provide access to resources, networks, examples of practice and opportunities to collaborate with other schools.

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