

Smestow Academy Careers Plan 2026-2027

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At Smestow Academy, careers education and guidance is an integral part of our curriculum and personal development offer. We work with employers, education and training providers, careers professionals, alumni and families to help every pupil understand the full range of pathways available and make well-informed, ambitious and realistic decisions about their future.

Our programme is inclusive and progressive from Year 7 to Year 13. It is designed to raise aspirations, challenge misconceptions and stereotypes, develop employability and career-management skills, and provide every pupil, including pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who are absent and other vulnerable groups, with the information, encounters, experiences and personal guidance they need to progress successfully.

The programme is aligned with the updated Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance and the Department for Education statutory guidance updated in June 2026. It is reviewed through Compass+ and academy evaluation, with provision adapted in response to pupil need, destination information and feedback from pupils, parents and carers, staff, employers, providers and careers professionals.

The commitments below set out how Smestow Academy will deliver and continue to strengthen its careers programme during 2026-2027.

Benchmark 1: A stable careers programme

- Smestow Academy will maintain a stable, structured careers programme from Year 7 to Year 13, with explicit backing from the Headteacher, Senior Leadership Team and Local Governing Body. The Careers Leader will lead the programme with appropriate training, authority, time, and resources.
- The programme will be linked to academy improvement priorities, sequenced appropriately by year group and underpinned by clear learning outcomes and pupil entitlements. It will be tailored in response to pupil need and academy context.
- The careers programme, key contact details and information for pupils, parents/carers, staff, employers and providers will be published and kept up to date on the academy website.
- Parents and carers will be engaged throughout the programme through the website, parent events, communications, options and transition information, and opportunities to support career conversations at home.
- Progress against all eight Gatsby Benchmarks will be self-evaluated termly using Compass+ and reviewed by the Careers Leader and senior leaders. The programme will be reviewed formally at least annually.
- Evaluation will draw on feedback from pupils, parents/carers, staff, the Careers Adviser, employers and education/training providers, alongside participation, destination and impact data, to identify strengths and priorities for improvement.
- Appropriate annual funding and resources will be allocated in the context of whole-academy priorities and the needs of pupils.

Benchmark 2: Learning from career and labour market information

- During each Key Stage, every pupil will use current careers, pathways and labour market information to inform decisions about subjects and next steps.
- Local, Regional and National labour market information (LMI) will be embedded within the careers programme, personal development curriculum, assemblies, option processes and careers guidance, rather than being presented as a stand-alone activity.
- Pupils will be supported by informed staff and the Careers Adviser to interpret LMI, compare routes and understand how opportunities, skills need, pay, entry requirements and patterns of employment may affect their choices.
- Parents and carers will be encouraged and supported to use careers and LMI information through the academy website, parent events and targeted communications at key transition points.
- Information will be presented accessibly and adapted where needed for pupils with SEND and their families.

- Staff will receive regular updates and professional development so they can signpost pupils confidently to current pathways and labour market opportunities. Employer and alumni encounters will provide additional first-hand insight into sectors and changing skills needs.

Benchmark 3: Addressing the needs of each pupil

- The careers programme will actively challenge misconceptions and stereotypical thinking, showcase diverse role models, promote equality of opportunity and raise aspirations for all pupils.
- Systematic records will be maintained from Year 7 onwards of each pupil's participation in careers activities, employer/provider encounters, workplace experiences, personal guidance, agreed actions and key decisions. Compass+ and academy systems will be used to support this process.
- Pupils will be supported to access and use their careers records before key transition points. Where pupils join Smestow during the secondary phase, available previous careers information will be integrated into their record.
- The academy will collect, maintain and use information on aspirations, intended destinations and immediate education, employment or training destinations to provide personalised support and identify pupils at risk of not securing a sustained destination.
- Sustained and longer-term destination information, where available, will inform evaluation of the programme. Alumni will be used to broaden networks, provide relatable role models and support careers learning.
- Additional and differentiated support will be provided for pupils who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, have SEND, are looked after or previously looked after, are persistently absent, are at risk of becoming NEET, or face other barriers to progression.
- The Careers Leader, Careers Adviser, SENDCO, pastoral and attendance teams will work together to ensure pupils can access careers provision. For pupils with an EHCP, preparing for adulthood and employment will inform planning from at least Year 9 onwards.
- Year 11 and sixth-form pupils will receive focused transition and application support, including access to appropriate academic, technical, vocational, apprenticeship and employment pathways.

Benchmark 4: Linking curriculum learning to careers

- Every year, in every subject, every pupil will have opportunities to understand how the knowledge and skills developed in that subject connect to a wide range of careers and progression routes.
- Subject leaders and teachers will make relevant careers links explicit within curriculum planning and classroom practice. Careers links will be mapped through curriculum and medium-term planning and reviewed through academy quality-assurance processes.
- Teachers will highlight the qualifications, pathways and transferable skills associated with their subjects, helping pupils understand how curriculum choices can open or close future opportunities.
- Careers will form part of ongoing professional development for teachers, tutors and staff who support pupils so that careers education is a whole-academy responsibility.
- The personal development and tutor programmes will provide planned careers learning alongside subject-based activities, including career-management, employability, option and transition learning.
- National Careers Week, National Apprenticeship Week and other themed activities will enrich, rather than replace, the academy's year-round approach to linking curriculum learning to careers.
- Employers, alumni and education/training providers will be used, where appropriate, to bring curriculum learning to life and demonstrate authentic applications of subject knowledge and skills.

Benchmark 5: Encounters with employers and employees

- Every pupil, every year from the age of 11, will participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer or employee.
- Meaningful encounters will have a clear purpose and relevant learning outcomes, include preparation, provide genuine two-way interaction with employers or employees, and be followed by opportunities for pupils to reflect on what they learned.
- Encounters may include employer talks, mentoring, enterprise and curriculum projects, careers fairs, mock recruitment activities, workplace visits, sector events, alumni engagement and other employer-led learning.
- The academy will strengthen partnerships with local and national employers, SMEs, professional bodies, apprenticeship providers, alumni and the Careers Hub/Enterprise Adviser network.
- Employer activity will expose pupils to a diverse range of sectors, occupations, routes and role models, including areas of local and national skills demand.
- Participation will be recorded so that the Careers Leader can identify gaps, target additional opportunities and ensure that all pupils receive their entitlement, including those who are absent or who need additional support.

Benchmark 6: Experiences of workplaces

- By the age of 16, every pupil will have had multiple meaningful workplace experiences; by the age of 18, every pupil will have had at least one further meaningful workplace experience.

- During 2026-2027, Smestow Academy will reform its programme in line with DfE guidance towards the government's two-weeks-worth work experience guarantee: one week's worth of progressive work-experience activities across Years 7-9 and one week's worth of work-experience placement(s) across Years 10-11.
- Years 7-9 experiences will consist of varied, employer-led activities that enable pupils to explore different industries and careers. Activities will mostly be in person and, wherever practicable, take place within workplaces.
- Across Years 10-11, pupils will work towards five days of meaningful, in-person and immersive work-experience placement(s). This may be with one or more employers and may be organised flexibly across the two years.
- A meaningful workplace experience will have clear learning outcomes, extensive two-way interaction with employees, opportunities to meet different people in the workplace, a relevant task or piece of work, employer feedback and structured pupil reflection.
- Sixth-form pupils will undertake at least one further meaningful experience in a workplace, supported by the academy as appropriate to their pathway and intended destination.
- The academy will remove barriers to participation through careful planning and reasonable adjustments. Experiences for pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and other vulnerable groups will be matched to their needs, abilities, interests and aspirations, with additional preparation or employer support where required.
- Workplace experiences will be planned progressively, recorded and evaluated so that each experience builds on previous learning and contributes to pupils' future choices, employability skills and networks.

Benchmark 7: Encounters with further and higher education

- All pupils will understand the full range of learning opportunities available to them, including academic, technical and vocational routes through school sixth forms, further education colleges, independent training providers (ITPs), universities, apprenticeships and learning in the workplace.
- By the age of 16, every pupil will have had meaningful encounters with providers of the full range of learning opportunities. Encounters will be sequenced, prepared for, and followed by reflection so pupils can compare routes and environments.
- By the age of 18, every pupil considering higher education will have had at least two visits to higher education providers and opportunities to meet staff and learners.
- Smestow Academy will comply with Provider Access Legislation by ensuring pupils in Years 8-13 receive the required six opportunities to meet providers of technical education or apprenticeships, timed to support post-14, post-16 and post-18 decision-making.
- The annual Careers Fair, assemblies, visits, open-day information, provider sessions and curriculum/personal development activities will give pupils repeated opportunities to explore qualifications, entry requirements, learning environments and progression routes.
- Information and encounters will be impartial. The academy will not disproportionately promote its own sixth-form provision and will ensure that technical and apprenticeship routes are presented alongside academic routes.
- Additional preparation and support will be provided where needed for pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and other pupils who may face barriers to accessing provider encounters.

Benchmark 8: Personal guidance

- Every pupil will have at least one personal guidance meeting with a Careers Adviser by the age of 16 and a further meeting by the age of 18. Meetings will be planned within the careers programme and scheduled to meet individual needs.
- Personal guidance will be available when significant study or career choices are being made, and additional targeted guidance will be offered to pupils who need further support.
- The Careers Adviser will be trained to an appropriate professional level, work in line with relevant ethical standards and use current, impartial information about academic, technical, vocational, apprenticeship and employment pathways.
- The Careers Leader, Careers Adviser, SENDCO, sixth-form, pastoral and other key staff will work together so that guidance is informed by each pupil's strengths, interests, aspirations, needs and prior careers experiences.
- Guidance meetings will lead to clear actions or next steps. Records will be maintained and used to support follow-up, transition planning, and future guidance.
- Information about personal guidance, who provides it and how pupils and parents/carers can request support will be communicated clearly, including through the academy website.
- Additional guidance will be prioritised for pupils with SEND, disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils, those at risk of NEET, and pupils requiring earlier or more frequent support.

Additional Matrix Academy Trust commitment: Alongside the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, Smestow Academy recognises the importance of helping pupils develop the wider skills, experiences and confidence that support successful transitions into further study, training and employment. This additional area is referred to locally as "Benchmark 9" and complements, rather than replaces, the Gatsby framework.

Benchmark 9: Skills for Life (additional academy/trust commitment)

- All pupils will have opportunities to take on leadership and responsibility within the academy, for example through pupil leadership, School Council, anti-bullying work, subject or sixth-form ambassador roles and other pupil voice opportunities.
- A broad extra-curricular and enrichment offer, including opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, will help pupils build teamwork, resilience, communication, problem-solving and self-management skills.
- Pupils will be supported to recognise, record and explain the skills they develop through curriculum, enrichment, volunteering, leadership and careers activity so they can use them confidently in applications and interviews.
- Personal development and careers learning will make explicit links between self-awareness, strengths, values, employability skills and next-step planning.
- Sixth-form pupils will receive structured support to become next-step ready, including applications, personal statements, CVs, interview preparation and understanding expectations in higher education, apprenticeships and employment.

Monitoring and review

This plan will be monitored termly through Compass+ and academy quality assurance and reviewed formally by the Careers Leader and senior leadership team by September 2027. Progress, participation, pupil voice, and destination information will be used to refine provision and identify further actions.