Edge Grant Research

School outreach programmes and legal employers: how do school outreach programmes promote the solicitor apprenticeship route to qualification as a lawyer?

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1. Introduction

This report examines legal employers' school outreach programmes, and how they promote access to the solicitor apprenticeship as a route to qualification as a lawyer. Professional careers are acknowledged as significant to social mobility, and moving from a semi-routine occupation to a 'salariat' occupation is recognised as a marker of social mobility (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2019 p113). The report focuses on early career opportunities and advice in relation to the legal profession, but the potential barriers to access also apply to other professions. For example, the social background of entrants to the medical profession has come under scrutiny (Sandhu, 2009), and concerns have been raised regarding a lack of social diversity.

The social profile of the legal profession has also been criticised as unrepresentative of the social make up of Britain, with significant overrepresentation in relation to legal practitioners with private school backgrounds (Milburn & Lampl, 2019). In order to address issues of access to the legal profession and to create a 'non-graduate' route into the profession (LETR, 2013) the solicitor apprenticeship was introduced in 2015 following a comprehensive review of legal education (LETR, 2013). However, the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx) non-graduate route into the profession has long been available, and there are concerns that those accessing via this route are not regarded as having parity with graduate entrants (Slingo, 2021) with reports of bullying, and discrimination against those who qualify in this way (Slingo, 2021). While choice of career can affect social mobility, equality of opportunity is also affected by early choices, and indeed, disadvantage can be compounded throughout the education process (Belsky et al., 2007; Boudon, 1974; Bourdieu, 2010). The Rt Hon Robert Halfon, the Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education under the last government has stated that careers advice and support should begin in primary school, and that careers advice programmes should be 'nurturing aspirations and challenging

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stereotypes' (Halfon, 2023). The guidance and expanded requirements set out in the Gatsby Benchmarks (Holman, 2014) indicate that the importance of careers advice and support in schools is being recognised. Further, school students are being encouraged to 'dream big' [ibid], particularly those from less advantaged areas where aspirations may not be as high.

Where school students' aspirations towards professional careers are limited, this may be, at least in part, due to environmental, or family factors (Rivera, 2012). For example, the British Medical Association's (BMA) literature in this area acknowledges that if a school student does not have a role model in the medical profession, such as a family member, or someone to whom they can relate, they may not consider medicine as a possibility. Further, it is less likely that parents or carers with no connection to the medical profession will have an understanding of how to find more information if the school student does have an interest in pursuing a medical career (Sandhu, 2009).

Government initiatives, and a commercial imperative to demonstrate responsible business practices, have increased engagement with these issues by employers. The introduction of programmes involving organisations such as The Careers and Enterprise Company (Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024) has shown supporting fair access to be a priority. Further, the concept of the apprenticeship as a pipeline of talent is becoming established, and employers are examining new 'pools' of talent, including earlier recruitment onto the apprenticeship route, which in turn opens up the profession to non-graduates. The first cohorts of solicitor apprentices are now qualified, and this also appears to have led to a shift in how the recruitment of school students is perceived. The view of school students as a source of early talent provides an incentive to engage with schools as a possible pipeline into the apprenticeship, or longer term, the graduate

route. The implications of this shift to a more commercial imperative are considered in more detail in the discussion of participating employer interviews.

Finally, the effects of Covid on many school students, for example in relation to mental health and the development of social skills (Harmey & Moss, 2023), together with issues in relation to the use of technology and social media, influence the strategy of employers when engaging with school students. For example, many employers now have a YouTube channel, or Instagram, and have a presence on other social media as part of their marketing and recruitment.

2. Literature review

The literature in relation to school outreach initiatives examines a range of issues. In relation to careers information and guidance, the Gatsby Benchmarks (Holman, 2014) were introduced to promote equality of opportunity, and this is the subject of a significant body of literature. For higher education, equality of opportunity is a policy focus, for example guidance issued by the Office for Students in relation to Access and Participation Plans (APPs) (Office for Students, 2024).

Equality of opportunity in relation to access to higher education has long been recognised as important, and the APPs require institutions to publish their strategy for promoting equality of opportunity in relation to access to and participation in higher education. But it is important that school students should 'get to understand the full range of opportunities available to them, including apprenticeships, T Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications, not just a traditional academic route.' (Halfon, 2022b). The 'Baker Clause' was introduced in 2018, requiring schools to inform students about vocational routes, including apprenticeships. This obligation was strengthened in 2023, imposing an enforceable obligation on schools to provide opportunities for school students to learn

about technical education, as well as university (Halfon, 2022a). The careers policy requirements set out in the Gatsby Benchmarks emphasise choice, and the provision of guidance on the experiences that will enable school students to make informed choices about careers. There is also an acknowledgment that an earlier start is vital to promoting equality of opportunity in careers support (Holman, 2014). For schools in areas where 'schools outcomes are weakest', careers awareness and support will be rolled out at primary level, rather than in years 8-13, giving school students a 'kick start … to boost their ambitions' (O'Brien, 2023). This may help avoid the compounding of disadvantage that can otherwise occur throughout the education process.

2.1   Gatsby Benchmarks

The eight Gatsby Benchmarks were first published in 2014 and were the result of consultation with a number of schools and colleges (Holman, 2018). The benchmarks emphasise the importance of good quality, timely careers advice. They also state that schools should make information about their careers provision public on their website. In the introduction to the benchmarks, Lord Sainsbury stated that:

> *Very few people would disagree that good career guidance is critical if young people are to raise their aspirations and capitalise on the opportunities available to them. Yet … so many young people are kept in the dark about the full range of options open to them* (Holman, 2014).

The benchmarks are based on research in six countries, and five independent schools, with the aim of determining 'what "good" looks like' (Holman, 2014 p4) in relation to careers advice: 'good careers guidance means linking different activities together to form a coherent whole' (Holman, 2014 p5). In effect, this approach suggests that careers guidance and employability are a process, rather than an event, and suggests a need to

build relationships between education providers and employers, rather than ad hoc engagement.

> *Good career guidance is important for social mobility, because it helps open pupils' eyes to careers they may not have considered* (Holman, 2014 p6).

In a doctoral study of how young people choose the qualifications that they study at Level 3, and the impact of those choices, a number of sources of influence over those choices were identified: 'peer influence; career aspirations; parental or family influence; advice from careers officers; media influences' (Lewis, 2020 p3). Further, schools played a substantial role in 'shaping' young people's choices (ibid), and the recognition of the importance of sound guidance and resources for young people is reflected in the Gatsby protocols discussed above, and in more detail later in this report.

The recognition of the importance of providing careers guidance, and the impact of high quality provision is not new. For example, a 2013 article refers to 'young people's choice processes [as] the interplay of structure and agency' (Haynes et al., 2013), with parents frequently taking 'the role of 'chief adviser'' (ibid p460-461). The Gatsby protocols were introduced following the publication of 'Good Career Guidance' in 2014 (Holman, 2014), in order to address these issues. The protocols are discussed in more detail later in this report, but in summary, the eight benchmarks emphasise the importance of:

- an embedded careers programme;
- labour market information and contact with both employers and higher education, which informs the programme; and
- personal guidance for each student that meets their needs.

2.2   Employers' views of careers policy

Policy has been influenced by 'skills shortages', a view amongst employers that young people were 'not ready for the world of work', and a concern that an emphasis on 'rote learning' was problematic (CBI, 2019). The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) report of June 2019 noted that 'employers [had] a huge part to play in helping young people have access to the opportunities to develop their readiness for the world of work' (CBI, 2019 p28), while also acknowledging that education was 'intrinsically a social good in its own right', and that 'work readiness' was not the only purpose of education (ibid p28). The skills and traits that the report emphasised (ibid pp23 & 29) were presented as infographics, but in summary:

Table 2.1: Skills and Traits for Work-Readiness

Work- Readiness			
Skills		**Traits**	
Team work	Listening, Managing time	**Personal-Reflection**	Self-awareness
Leadership	Planning, creativity, an ability to think outside the box	**Self-regulation**	Self-control, self-management, self-efficacy
Management	Prioritising tasks, problem solving	**Grit and resilience**	Persistence, stickability, perseverance, ability to bounce back
Communication	Debating, reflection, presenting	**Empathy**	Being able to stand in someone else's shoes, sensitivity to global concerns

		Inclusivity	Commitment to value of diversity, citizenry and sense of community
		Aspiration	Ambition, curiosity

The CBI's 2019 report (CBI, 2019) acknowledges that these lists, and the facets of the skills or traits are not exhaustive, and that some young people would naturally develop these skills or traits even if they were not included in the curriculum. However, the report was explicit that '[i]n a similar way to character traits and knowledge, essential skills must also be *Taught not Caught'* (ibid p29 emphasis in the text). The phrase 'taught not caught' refers to the title of Nicky Morgan's book on educating for 21st century character (Morgan, 2017). The book emphasises the importance of developing character as an integral part of education, what Lord James O'Shaughnessy describes as 'the academics plus character education that [young people] need to flourish' (Morgan, 2017 p10). This aligns with Ofsted criteria, which examine personal development in school students as part of the inspection framework (Ofsted, 2024).

The list of skills and traits that the CBI considers to be central to an education that prepares young people for the workplace includes aspiration, and it is notable that the levelling up 'capitals' that act as policy drivers for levelling up include both social and human capital, for example strong communities, and skills (Secretary of State for levelling up, 2022). The definition of levelling up used in the white paper states that 'Levelling up means giving everyone the opportunity to flourish' (ibid p xii). Further, the white paper refers to the need for skills and training in order to support people 'to realise their career aspirations without having to leave their communities' (ibid p193). However,

in order for individuals to benefit from this support, there is a need to make informed decisions regarding their career aspirations.

2.3   Raising aspirations

The 2010 government response to the report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions was entitled 'Unleashing Aspirations' (McFadden, 2010), and it referred to the need to provide quality careers advice to inform future options. Although the report was published over a decade ago, initiatives such as the British Medical Association's 'People like us don't become doctors' site (British Medical Association, 2022) still appear to be necessary. The site presents case studies of people from backgrounds where medicine was not considered to be a viable aspiration. Initiatives like the BMA site help to remove the barriers to realising aspirations, not least by ensuring that school students are aware of aspirational careers like medicine or law, and consider them attainable. For example, The Careers and Enterprise Company (Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024) offers resources in the form of activity plans for teachers which will 'broaden children's horizons and link what they are learning in school to the wider world.' (ibid). This need is also emphasised in the Gatsby Benchmarks (Holman, 2018), which require school students to have more than one form of contact with employers, increasing the likelihood that they will be brought into contact with a potential career path that they might not otherwise have considered. Initiatives in relation to school outreach are not new, but with increased numbers entering higher education since 1992 before entering the labour market, an assumption that school students' default destination on leaving school will be higher education appears to have developed. Further, the perception that employers regard a degree as a pre-requisite (Coughlan, 2010), and the emphasis on graduate recruitment risk relegating school outreach to an entirely corporate social responsibility activity.

2.4   Corporate social responsibility initiatives

The significance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities has increased over time, with many providers of legal services and other professional organisations being asked to provide details of their CSR activity when bidding for work (SRA, 2020). Where school outreach activities were undertaken these were, in general, historically regarded as CSR activities. If the majority of early talent management is focused on graduate recruitment, this is logical, and the commercial justification for this type of activity is the CSR expectation of clients and customers in relation to responsible business practice. The introduction of the trailblazer apprenticeships, and the policy shift towards greater acceptance of vocational education mean that school outreach can be more realistically regarded as a recruitment activity, rather than solely CSR. In short, school outreach is becoming more about talent pipelines, given the apprenticeship route, and the funding available through the apprenticeship levy (Institute for Apprenticeships, 2022), but the CSR motivation remains a factor. Melanie Simms' 2017 article discusses these perspectives in terms of two different 'logics'; corporate social responsibility and early talent management, (CSR and HR) involved in employers' decisions in relation to whether they should 'help young people into work' (Simms, 2017 p548). These 'logics' can be regarded as 'competing', although Simms' view is that employers engaging with outreach, using policies which bring young people into the workplace regard them as 'reinforcing each other (ibid p562). In effect, employers who do engage, for example by offering apprenticeships, are able 'both to develop the skills they require and promote their CSR. Employers that are less engaged tend to see tensions between the costs and benefits within these two logics (ibid p562). 'Typically, they see these programmes as either bringing complexity – and therefore costs – to what is usually a routine activity of hiring and training, and/or they are concerned for reputational risk.' (ibid p562). The experiences of participating employers in this space will be examined in section 4.

2.5   Pipelines of talent

As discussed in section 2 above, the current policy recommendations for schools' careers advice indicate that careers activities, including embedding the skills and traits examined above, should begin at primary school level (Holman, 2018). The literature in this area indicates that school students benefit significantly from sustained engagement with employers, for example local business education partnerships (Weller & Dillon, 1999). However, engagement levels can be uneven, and less advantaged areas often lack local employers with the capacity to engage (Hayward & James, 2004). The 2024 Careers and Enterprise Company report's findings indicated that 'employer outreach should focus on skill development, particularly helping young people through application processes, and starting as early as possible' (Careers and Enterprise Company, 2023 p9). Further, the 'next steps' recommended by the report included 'outreach to intake' and 'interest to uptake', both of which are focused on moving young people into jobs, and on removing the barriers which might prevent access. This firmly establishes outreach as a pipeline of early talent, and essential to businesses, rather than solely as an addition to corporate social responsibility activities.

2.6   Online training and Covid

Recruitment into early talent positions was impeded during Covid, and the disruption to the education of school students at all levels is well-documented (Harmey & Moss, 2023). During the pandemic itself, many employers suspended recruitment and furloughed existing employees (Johnstone, 2024). In addition, where there was recruitment, the way in which early career talent was inducted, and the experiences that it was possible to offer them during the pandemic itself had to adapt. In situations where there had been a move to hybrid or remote working following the pandemic, practices also had to adjust (Innstrand et al., 2022). These circumstances inevitably meant that early talent management, recruitment, and the way in which the talent pipeline was

generated had to be re-examined. In addition, the 'millennial' generation, born between 1981 and 1996, and thus entering the workforce in the first two decades of the 21st century, is now giving way to generation Z, individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who are beginning to enter the workforce (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

3. Methodology

The experiences of participating legal employers were important when examining how they were engaging with schools, as were the approaches they were taking. The solicitor apprenticeship is becoming more established, and the commercial and social mobility aspects of the apprenticeship are becoming more recognised. Focusing primarily on the qualitative experiences of employers allows for a more detailed examination of their practices, and the effect of their experiences as early adopters of the solicitor apprenticeship on their recruitment strategies. Further, consideration of the impact on employer strategies of the shift in policy discussions which have challenged the view that higher education is the default destination for all school leavers (Halfon, 2022b) and the increase in the number of legal apprentices (Law Society, 2021) is likely to make a useful addition to the literature. As the primary focus of the project was the experiences of those engaged in school outreach, this suggests that a qualitative approach would be more appropriate. Further, the effect of the pandemic on recruitment in the wider labour market, and on the legal sector in particular would be difficult to examine using quantitative methods. In addition, the relatively small numbers of solicitor apprentices in comparison with graduate recruits mean that a quantitative focus would be less likely to yield statistically useful data. I adopted semi-structured interviews for employers and combined this with a review of publicly available information on schools (for example, Ofsted, local authority, and government data) involved in the initiatives discussed in this report. Examining the experiences of employers was likely to provide a detailed picture

of the current initiatives and strategies as well as the context in which the employers were conducting these initiatives.

3.1   Interviews

The research design involved the use of semi-structured interviews in order to enable the interviewees (who quoted using pseudonyms in order to avoid identifying them), to be discursive (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), and to allow an exploration of their experiences and views. The use of this form of interview to discuss the experiences of employers was also considered to be more likely to provide a rich picture of how schools are working with employers to address the requirements of the Gatsby benchmarks, and their approach to compliance with the requirement to provide advice on apprenticeship. Early talent team leaders from two employers with ambitious and developed school outreach programmes were interviewed. Both organisations, A and B, were commercial legal services providers, and both had been early adopters of both the solicitor and the paralegal apprenticeships. In both cases, there was a strong history of school outreach, and leadership in relation to building communities of practice in this area. The two interviews with the organisations' early talent managers were analysed using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017), and the following broad themes emerged:

Policy and strategic themes	Actions
Corporate Social responsibility v. early talent pipelines Widening access to the profession Raising aspirations Generational shifts	A range of initiatives Covid adaptations Technology Targeted support Collaboration

These emergent themes will be considered in more detail in sections 4-5 of this report.

3.2   Analysis

An initial literature review was conducted prior to the interviews, and further literature reviews were undertaken in response to the emerging themes. In addition, publicly available information in relation to schools which were involved in the initiatives discussed during the interviews was accessed, and their careers strategies and profiles were analysed. Four schools which were actively engaged in the initiatives discussed by the employers were examined in more detail. The publicly available information in relation to each school was considered, and is summarised in the appendices to this report.

3.3   Positionality

With regard to my positionality, I am an 'insider' (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014) in relation to legal education and recruitment, particularly in relation to apprentices, due to my background as a non-practising solicitor, with over two decades of experience in legal professional education. As an experienced law teacher in higher education, I had existing knowledge of employers' initiatives with schools, and the processes by which they created an apprentice pipeline. I also had experience of their strategies in relation to the recruitment and development of employees, and their cultures as organisations. Further, I worked closely with the participants over a number of years in relation to the recruitment, education, and support of their junior lawyers. In addition, I have undertaken school outreach activity over a number of years, for example, conducting careers workshops and mock interviews for school students. I have addressed any potential biases by ensuring that the data and literature drive the analysis, rather than my own experience.

3.4 Limitations

The study focuses on an area in the South of England, but excludes London. The area includes both rural and urban communities. All schools in the geographical area chosen for the study were contacted by email and invited to participate. Employers who recruited apprentices, and whose publicly available information indicated that they undertook school outreach were approached. Follow up communications, including emails were also sent out, and discussed informally with potential participants on Teams. The response rate was very low, with only one school responding, and later declining to take part on the grounds that they did not have the resources to do so. Two of the employers who were contacted agreed to be interviewed, and also agreed to email the schools with which they worked to invite them to participate. Some of the schools had previously invited me to attend careers events, CV workshops, and mock interview sessions, and I offered to support their careers team in this way in order to build the relationship, and to gain insight into their work. As this also did not elicit a response, the study is based on two in depth interviews with recruiting employers who are highly involved in the school outreach space, and on publicly available information on schools in the geographical area who participated in the outreach initiatives described in the interviews.

4. Employers' experiences of school outreach

The Gatsby benchmarks have been discussed earlier in section 2, and they are considered in the context of the legal profession below, with examples of how legal employers are working with schools to address them. The participating employers acknowledged that engaging with schools in this way is valuable to their businesses, and that while graduate recruitment remains important, and the primary route to entry into the legal profession, widening access to the profession is also valuable:

we want to open as many doors as possible to different people … to apply for a graduate vacation scheme, you have got to have gone to university. … so to have the opportunity while you are still at school … it's really providing those opportunities … for students who might never make it to university (Gemma, Organisation B).

In addition, there was a recognition that 'pipelining' school students, possibly over a very long period of time, could be beneficial to the organisation, providing students with information about routes into a legal career, enabling them to make informed choices:

we've got to get these people interested in careers in law before they even come to us. …We … are looking more broadly at how we improve access to the legal profession. Not just about getting people into our business, how do we get people more interested in legal careers more generally, because that ultimately benefits us further down the line as well (Susannah, Organisation A).

The recognition that there is a 'commercial imperative' (Susannah, Organisation A) to nurture young talent, and raise awareness of opportunities, is reflected in commentary surrounding the Gatsby benchmarks, with the Sir John Holman referring to the 'push' and 'pull' factors in relation to careers advice (Holman, 2014 p7), with the 'pull' factors emanating from employers. As will be considered in more detail below, employers recognise that building relationships with schools, and working with them to address the requirements of the benchmarks provides opportunities to ensure that school students are prepared for working life, and that employers are able to create talent pipelines.

The detailed benchmarks are set out in the appendices, but are summarised below, together with comments on how their requirements might be addressed.

Table 4.1 Applying the Gatsby Benchmarks

Gatsby Benchmark	Programme element or employer action	Comments
A stable careers programme	Stakeholders developing programmes together	Susannah: 'building relationships with schools, not just doing one-offs'
Learning from career and labour market information	Closer ties with schools, more organised ways of working with schools. Use of market information tools to help school students make informed choices.	Roles such as commercial advisors shown on the school's websites
Addressing the needs of each pupil	Offering virtual work experience, and a variety of activities	Mentoring schemes, individual initiatives such as employees returning to their schools to help raise aspirations
Linking curriculum learning to careers	Enterprise advice, relationship building	Working closely with schools to develop outreach that works with their curriculum
Encounters with employers and employees	Talks, sessions, CV reviews etc	Online work experience, and live work experience programmes (considered below)
Experiences of workplaces	Range of different types of work experience	Virtual work experience platform with links to other forms of work experience, and the work experience itself, indicate that there are other roles within a legal employer
Encounters with further and higher education	Involvement of higher education providers as a collaborative programme	Partnership between universities, the local Law Society and legal employers
Personal guidance	Mentoring	Mentoring schemes set up as part of the outreach

4.1   Covid learnings and virtual work experience

The disruption caused by Covid indicated that it would be useful to open up access in new ways, including the use of online or virtual work experience. Although Organisation A designed this experience for school students in KS5, years 12 and 13, it is interesting to note that the webpage shows several reviews from university students. The programme is approximately 5-6 hours long, and combines employability, business, and legal tasks. It is designed to be a progressive programme, with a certificate at the end for the person who has completed it; a confidence builder and a 'taster' for the kind of tasks that might be involved in legal work. It is shared through hubs, and is accessible on the organisation's website, and although it can be accessed anywhere, it is specifically shared with students across the local area. Where the organisation bids for work out of that area, they need to demonstrate commitment to social value, and this programme is sufficiently accessible to allow them to do so, and also to share it more widely.

The programme is part of a series of initiatives including placements during the summer, and insights programmes delivered via webinars, which are available to 'students, parents, careers advisors and care givers' (Susannah, Organisation A). The topics covered in relation to skills and awareness of the profession include interviews, CVs, apprenticeship programmes, and information about routes into the legal profession. The virtual work experience programme addresses a number of recruitment and training challenges, not least the difficulties experienced by many employers following Covid:

> it was intended to replicate the work experience in year 10. You know all of us were struggling in 2022 to offer those work placement experiences, most people weren't back in the office in quite the same way, and so I think a lot of us were just saying no to it, which just felt wrong! (Susannah, Organisation A).

The virtual work experience programme allowed for a much wider reach, and remained available during the post-pandemic period. This allowed the programme to provide an initial taster for those who wanted to understand more about a possible career in law, and to demonstrate commitment. Susannah commented that the organisation would generally expect applicants to undertake the virtual experience first before applying for in-person experience; 'If they haven't completed that, … we'd look for reasons why, but we might be a bit thoughtful about work experience placements'. The scheme also potentially serves as a transition into the work environment for school students in the way described by Holliman et al. above (Holliman et al., 2023). Further, it allowed the organisation to offer the virtual work experience module in response to: 'those requests from clients, and partners who want to bring nieces, nephews etc in for work experience. We're just sending this their way so that they're not taking places from those who need work experiences' (Susannah, Organisation A).

4.2   Resourcing

The legal employers who participated in the study were larger employers, whose people management functions were internal, rather than outsourced. However, there was a recognition that school outreach initiatives and work experience programmes were resource intensive, and that there was reliance on goodwill and volunteering to at least some extent:

> running any sort of work experience programme takes quite of lot of time, effort, resource of the firm (Gemma, Organisation B).

Involvement in outreach places additional pressure on an employer's resources, but including it in the organisation's early talent strategy does allow it to be integrated into other aspects of the organisation's strategic planning, such as talent development. Some

individuals in the participant organisations offered to contribute to outreach by returning to their schools as alumni, particularly those from social mobility cold spots, raising awareness of both the organisation, and the profession. In addition, there was an expectation that trainee solicitors and apprentices would have at least some involvement in outreach. For potential applicants, the apprentices in particular would be effective advocates, and closer in age to the school students; it was anticipated that the school students would relate to them better. This could also provide an opportunity for junior employees to develop their interpersonal skills, and for more experienced employees to prepare for promotion to management roles:

> If they're not managing people, they're not developing the skills that we are measuring them against as part of that promotion process. So we sell this to them as a really good way, … these mentoring opportunities, these supervisory roles are a really good opportunity to [develop] those skills (Susannah, Organisation A).

Although the participants did not suggest that there were insufficient volunteers to undertake the work, the level of work required to provide a good standard of support, and to build strong relationships with schools, appeared to be high. For smaller organisations, this was likely to be a deterrent to participating in outreach. While there were central organisations, such as the Careers and Enterprise Company which could help co-ordinate outreach, legal employers, the local Law Society, and higher education providers have also collaborated to provide work experience. This collaborative approach meant that each organisation need only provide part of the experience in, for example, a week of in-person work experience. This also served to provide a variety of different employer experiences for the school students:

> we have established an insight week [with] five schools, six law firms, 25 students … and essentially what they did was one day at each law firm. …And … it grew … [to] twelve law firms, one in-house team, one judge, and three universities. We have 25 schools, and 92 students … across four weeks (Susannah, Organisation A).

Participants also reported several different initiatives and collaborations with local and national third sector organisations, and support for several local and national initiatives to provide more targeted support for particular demographics. While resourcing remained an issue, the importance not only of establishing diverse talent pipelines, but of 'doing the right thing' and being able to demonstrate that this was the case appeared to justify the required resources. As will be considered below, the participants also acknowledged the business drivers for undertaking outreach activity.

4.3   Commercial and social drivers

Both participant employers had historically regarded school outreach as part of corporate social responsibility. Commercially, this remained part of the corporate social responsibility strategy for both organisations at the time of the interviews. Clients and potential clients often require legal services providers submitting tenders for legal work, or for membership of panels of legal advisers, to provide details of initiatives in relation to social mobility, corporate social responsibility or other evidence of responsible business practices; 'the right thing to do'.

> while it's easier for me to get a business case for something through when there's a commercial imperative, … we do a huge amount around responsible business. … we focus on supporting our local communities, part of our wider business strategy is around providing opportunities, not just for young people, but for communities that we are operating in. (Susannah, Organisation A).

The shift in perception with regard to school outreach may be linked to the introduction of professional apprenticeships. In law, the introduction of the Trailblazer Apprenticeships, including the solicitor apprenticeship, in 2015 (Institute for Apprenticeships, 2022) enabled school leavers to join a legal services organisation, but on a programme which would provide a direct route to qualification as a solicitor for non-graduate entrants (LETR, 2013). This arguably represents a return to the system of 'articles' (Mayson, 2011), an apprenticeship-style form of qualification with a long history in the legal profession, ending in the 1970s when the profession became graduate only. But it also represents an opportunity to access new 'pools of talent', with a longer pipeline to qualification, a strong business case to present for outreach:

> it's more commercially sensitive to see it as a scheme which can bring talent, because we're running it, we're putting it on, we should be thinking about bringing the right sort of people through on it, who could potentially end up working for us (Gemma, Organisation B).

However, it is notable that school outreach is not necessarily focused exclusively on the school leaver recruitment point. Graduates would generally join the organisation much later, following their degree, but for many organisations, targeted graduate recruitment is undertaken two years in advance (Chambers Student, 2022). In contrast, recruitment onto the apprenticeship route is generally much earlier:

> It's probably only since 2022 the first year it moved into the resourcing team to run, and that was the start of a sort of drive to pull the scheme together, to see the scheme as more of a talent pipeline, rather than just a sort of CR initiative and to really try and make use of the connections that we're making through that scheme to feed people into our opportunities for school leavers such as our apprenticeship scheme, but also training contracts as well (Gemma, Organisation B).

The requirement from clients to demonstrate inclusion, and a commitment to, for example, social mobility considered earlier in this section are well established, with, for example Coca Cola (Coca Cola, 2022) publicly stating that their criteria for their advisers include this requirement. In essence, there is already a commercial imperative in place in relation to corporate social responsibility, over and above 'impression management' (Rivera, 2012).

As discussed above, the strategy of an organisation in relation to the recruitment and training of suitable junior talent also has a commercial imperative. However, moving school outreach from a corporate social responsibility team to an early talent team demonstrates recognition of the potential benefits of not only accessing a pool of school leaver talent to feed into apprenticeships, but also of raising aspirations, and building relationships with schools. The commercial imperative therefore relates not only to the activities in relation to school outreach, and the commitment to responsible business that they demonstrate, but to the ultimate outcomes of attracting and retaining early talent. The participants were very clear that the aim of raising aspirations involved raising awareness of the law as an accessible profession, and this included both apprentices and graduate recruits. Susannah describes a discussion with a collaborative partner from a higher education organisation, with which her employer had collaborated to provide the work experience plan described in Table 4.2 below. Susannah's colleague had contacted her following a discussion with a student who had participated in the organisation's work experience programme:

> [she said] "this is why we do what we do!" (laughs). … she had just come across a student
> who sought her out, approached her and said "…I never thought about a career in law until

I came on the programme, and now here I am looking at [HE provider] for my law degree"

(Susannah, Organisation A).

The process of raising awareness and aspirations involves the need to build relationships with individuals, both by providing experience and support, and by keeping in touch. The participants discussed this aspect of their initiatives in some detail.

4.4   Building relationships

The Gatsby benchmarks considered above require that school students have access to work experience, and that they are able to have encounters with both employers and higher education, introducing them to the tertiary sector as a whole. The tertiary sector has traditionally been regarded as formal post compulsory education (World Bank, 2023), which suggests higher and further education, but which the Gatsby benchmarks and the Baker Clause (Halfon, 2022a) indicate should also include apprenticeships. In order for employers to be able to contribute to these requirements effectively, it is important to build relationships with schools, and for the parties to have effective communication. There was an acknowledgement in the interviews that for employers, it was often easier to be reactive, but that this approach was not necessarily achieving the employers' strategic objectives:

it's easier to just resort to who's getting in touch with us, who's the most keen, who wants us there? Then I feel a bit sad, because it's a school where a careers advisor is not sort of taking up these opportunities, and what else is going on for these students? Hopefully it's just that they've been inundated with offers from other businesses, and they just don't need us! (Gemma, Organisation B).

In addition, participants reported that individuals often drove the initiatives forward, for example by returning to their schools and delivering initiatives there. However, it was acknowledged that it was important to ensure that employers were:

> getting out and running all these extra sessions, all these employability sessions, it's something great that we can be doing. We can try and think about the schools, and in particular, not forgetting the schools where they particularly won't have the resource to do this (Gemma, Organisation B).

The participating employers indicated that they were targeting particular schools, using tools such as the social mobility index (Social Mobility Commission, 2022), and working with other organisations such as Business in the Community, and the Careers and Enterprise Company (Business in the Community, 2024; Careers & Enterprise Company, 2024) in order to target schools which would benefit from that relationship. It was also acknowledged that schools with access to fewer resources, and in particular, those which did not have dedicated careers resourcing, would need more support, but might have less time to plan and approach potential employers proactively:

> Financial constraints are very real for so many schools … I work with a school at the moment, they are so lucky they've got two people dedicated to careers provision within their school, and they're brilliant, they absolutely nail it. They've got another school in their same trust, they've got somebody dedicated half a day a week, and it's just a disaster. (Susannah, Organisation A).

In addition, having someone within the school leading on careers who is a 'senior leader' (Susannah) was considered important, as they would be able to 'influence the rest of the school' and ensure that the teachers 'get it'. Finally, the relationships which some employers are building with schools, and with their local communities are vital:

> schools don't want you parachuting in, doing something, and then [disappearing] never to be seen again. … what they really value is building that long term sustainable relationship (Susannah, Organisation A).

Part of the relationship building could involve roles such as acting as a school governor, although none of the participants indicated that they served in this role. However, one participant referred to their role as an enterprise adviser in an organisation with which their organisation worked very closely.

4.5   Enterprise advisers

The role of enterprise adviser is described by the Careers and Enterprise Company as a way to 'use your business experience to help demystify the world of work to education leaders and ensure careers education remains reflective of the fast-changing labour market' (Careers and Enterprise Company, 2022b). There are more than 4,000 Enterprise Advisers nationally [ibid], and the benefits include:

- Closing skills gaps.
- Developing skills and a pipeline of future employees.
- Raising awareness of your sector or business organisation.
- Developing closer connections with the local community (ibid).

It is possible to either work within an individual school, or as an advisor for several institutions within a Careers Hub (Careers and Enterprise Company, 2022a).

Susannah described her work as an enterprise advisor to a particular school, which she considered had deepened their mutual understanding:

I've been able to give them some real insights into what the challenges are for business, and they've been able to give me insights into what the challenges are for schools. And so we work really well, because we've got that understanding, and I've kind of been able to take that away and I guess imprint that onto some of my other school relationships (Susannah, Organisation A).

Susannah's experience had been a useful learning opportunity in terms of budgetary and political challenges. Gemma also referred to the funding challenges which schools often faced, and the need to ensure that that schools were able to provide a high-quality careers service. In addition, there was an acknowledgement that the language used by schools and by business was not necessarily the same, a potential barrier to relationship building and the provision of resources.

4.6 Consistent language and adapting to the audience

The importance of communication between schools and employers was considered above, with the enterprise adviser role providing an opportunity to ensure high quality communication, to build beneficial relationships, and to support the talent pipeline. Participating employers commented on the need to adapt their approach and materials to suit the level of the school students; for example, Susannah commented that in line with the requirements of the Gatsby benchmarks, there had been increased engagement with school students below year 6. For younger students the focus was on 'the concept of work' and law as a potential career, introducing law in a 'fun' way by asking about whether some 'archaic laws' are real or 'made up', as well as introducing the concept of law as rules, and discussing why we might need rules. For year 10 students, the organisation used Harry Potter themed exercises to introduce the concept of intellectual property, and a negotiation exercise which could be made more or less advanced for different year groups. Susannah noted that many schools used the

Skillsbuilder framework, and that working within a recognised format used by many schools was likely to be valuable in terms of accessibility (Skillsbuilder Partnership, 2024):

> if we are using that language, with the schools that are using it, we've got some consistency throughout education, outreach, employment. ...we're looking at helping them develop around communication skills, around their teambuilding skills, around their creative thinking, their resilience, all these things (Susannah, Organisation A).

In a similar way, involving apprentices and junior employees was seen as a sound approach, because the school students are more likely to relate to someone in very early career, or with a similar background.

4.7   Attitudes towards apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have in the past been regarded as a route for 'other people's children' (Crawford-Lee & Moorwood, 2019). The solicitor apprenticeship has grown significantly since its introduction in 2015, and the first cohort of solicitor apprentices qualified in 2022 (Fouzder, 2024). The participants commented on the increase in interest, with Gemma advising that the first open day for apprenticeships had around 30 attendees, while more recent open days for prospective applicants and their parents were oversubscribed. With regard to the views of schools, these too have evolved:

> I know in the past when turning up to a school to talk about apprenticeships ... I think they thought "oh, this is an apprenticeship, it's a great opportunity for this person who is not going to get into uni", not "oh, this is a great opportunity for this person who is just ... really talented!" (Gemma, Organisation B).

Schools' views that higher education was the default destination for all but the least academically able students is also changing:

> When we first launched our legal apprenticeship … we were knocking on doors and being told "why would we? … our students are going to university, why would we offer this to them?" And we're not … getting that now (Susannah, Organisation A).

Both employers advised that there were still 'pockets' of resistance to the idea of apprenticeships as a real alternative to full time higher education, but far more schools were receptive to the possibility. Where this was the case, the participants suggested that it could be due to resourcing, or to the individual or team responsible for careers at the school, with some schools depending on one individual with a fractional allocation to careers, rather than having dedicated resource.

4.8   Working with other organisations, and scaling up

Both participants referred to several organisations with which they worked. The wordcloud below lists the organisations to which they referred:

Figure 4.1 Wordcloud of partner organisations

The Careers and Enterprise Company, and the regional career hubs, were important to the participants, and they valued the opportunities that the introduction of an organisation which could coordinate employer participation brought to them. For example, coordination of opportunities for outreach through a hub allowed resources to be used efficiently. This included helping to ensure that employers were engaging with a wider range of schools, for example, rural schools in areas in which fewer employers were based, rather than maintaining existing relationship with a small number of schools closer to the employer's location. While there were many valuable outreach initiatives in which the participant employers were involved, they discussed how they might develop relationships with schools which might benefit.

> What we would like to do ... is to have a bit more of a look at the stats of schools across the city, and making sure that we are sending opportunities to those schools which aren't the top performing schools (Gemma, Organisation B).

The participants also advised that it was important that schools were rated in a way which gives equal weighting to apprenticeships. The longstanding approach of rating schools in accordance with their numbers of higher education entrants was not regarded as a valid method of determining the quality of a school, or of the opportunities available to its students.

4.9   In person work experience programmes

The participating organisations offered in person work experience to school students as part of their outreach. The approaches were broadly similar, and are summarised below:

Table 4.2   Examples of initiatives from employers

	Organisation A	Organisation B
Duration	3 days as part of a wider programme	One week
Work experience areas available	As this was a pilot, legal roles, but other work experience areas are available.	A variety; for example marketing, finance, client support. Employer asks work experience candidates to give an indication of what might be of interest when applying.
Which schools?	Piloting the programme with a particular school in an area where 38.6% of households are deprived in one or more dimensions according to the 2021 census.	Currently, schools which have contacted the employer; 'reactive'. Moving towards more targeted relationships with schools; 'proactive', using social mobility data to target the schools that would be able to derive the most benefit from the relationship.
Recruitment	As the initiative is a pilot, the recruitment process is aimed at A level students, and is based on students in the school's cohort who have an interest in a career in law.	Cycles of application through the employer's website. 24 – 28 applications for each summer. For school students, they need to be in years 10-13, and they need the support of their careers advisor.
What do they do?	A structured programme beginning with an introduction to law as a career, and introduction to the organisation. This is followed by a series of skills development workshops and webinars. The workshops include 'practical skills building work', which involves the organisation's trainee solicitors, and are a mixture of on-	Induction, including health and safety, IT etc. Candidates are divided into two groups for a group project on which they work for at least one hour each day of their work experience. Culminates in a presentation to an audience of parents, teachers, and a partner in senior management. Work shadowing in their chosen area

	Organisation A	Organisation B
	site at the school, and in the organisation's office. For example, the school students undertake a negotiation exercise. The programme concludes with three days' work experience in the organisation's offices, and is followed up with ongoing mentoring for those school students.	Information talks Responsible business talks Sessions with different employee groups, such as LGBTQ+ and diversity groups CV workshops, using LinkedIn, careers sessions.
Why those activities	The programme was piloted with students who had expressed an interest in law, and focuses on the development of the skills that the students would need in order to succeed in a law firm environment. The programme included an introduction to the organisation, so that students could get a sense of the culture. It included practical experience of what it would be like to work in that environment, and the kinds of tasks that might be undertaken.	The project promotes group work, engagement, builds confidence, leads to an achievement created as a team. Creating a social media campaign for recruitment engages their peers, and builds on their 'digital native' experience. Work shadowing allows them to experience different areas of a legal employer's business, provides information on opportunities and career paths. Careers and practical workshops help prepare them to apply for employment opportunities in the future. Sessions with employee groups promote an inclusive environment.
Resourcing	The relationship with the school which piloted the initiative was managed by the early talent team, and involved apprentices, and a range of colleagues who volunteered their time.	Networks of legal employers mean that there is a more co-ordinated approach. Within the organisation, there is a lot of interest in school outreach; 'people want to do it'. Involvement with the work experience often relies on the

	Organisation A	**Organisation B**
		same people, 'we are always asking for volunteers, and it's often the same people who get asked, and not everyone wants to do it.'
Who drives the projects	A very passionate leader in the early talent management team, who is very involved with the pilot school. The leadership and management of school outreach has moved from a corporate responsibility focus since the pandemic.	Highly committed early talent and resourcing team. School outreach has moved to early talent and resourcing from corporate social responsibility since the pandemic.
Rationale	Opening up access to the profession, opening new pipelines of talent, social responsibility, raising aspirations. Recognition of the commercial rationale, and the importance of that, but definitely acknowledging that this is 'the right thing to do'. Part of responsible business, which combines both elements.	Opening up access to the profession, opening new pipelines of talent, raising aspirations, ensuring that candidates who do not go to university have access. Social responsibility and a commercial imperative; access for people that the organisation would otherwise not have met. Commercial imperative, but also an emphasis on the importance of responsible business.
Plans for the future	The pilot was well-received, and is now established, with a roll out to other schools as those relationships develop. Overall, improving tracking, keeping in touch with those who have engaged, offering them further opportunities.	Alumni network to keep in touch with people, running alumni events to have more formal touchpoints, reminders about application dates. LinkedIn group to do this at the moment, but expanding into a more effective system to keep in touch with people.

Both organisations worked extensively with third party organisations, particularly organisations which supported marginalised school students and provided opportunities to undertake work experience (see wordcloud above). In the appendices to this report, the Key Stage 4 destinations for the schools involved in the programme show that in each case apprenticeships have decreased as a destination for KS4 students between 2018 and 2022. However, they remain higher in all cases than the national figure for each school. It is possible that this is in part due to the effects of the pandemic, but this would require further data relating to future cycles of recruitment to substantiate.

5. Discussion

The employers' outreach initiatives indicated that they served various purposes, and represented examples of good practice, both in relation to individual initiatives, and to wider collaborations. These collaborations involved schools, other legal services providers, and organisations such as the Careers and Enterprise Company. The initiatives considered indicate a shift in the way in which school outreach programmes are incorporated into the strategy of legal employers, and while CSR remains a driver for outreach initiatives, the move towards treating school leaver recruitment as a new pipeline of talent, both in the longer term as potential graduate recruits, and in the shorter term as apprentices, is significant. The recognition of the importance of early, consistent contact with school students, in order to support them in the development of employability skills, and of building relationships with schools, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage was an important strand of these initiatives. There was also recognition that some school students would not necessarily wish to be lawyers, or that they might still go to university, rather than taking up apprenticeships. For example, Susannah's report of a conversation where a school student who had attended workshops and events, and had been inspired to apply to study law at university, something that the student would not have regarded as an option before. Overall, there were many different strands to the school outreach programmes, and employers considered these initiatives as a key part of their business strategy, rather than a 'nice to have' which could potentially be regarded as 'impression management' (Rivera, 2012). The disruption of the Covid pandemic appears to have generated new initiatives such as the introduction of virtual work experience, but it has also created new dynamics in terms of how we work, and where we work.

5.1   The significance of online initiatives

The disruption to education during and following the pandemic has led employers such as PWC and Deloitte to develop different types of training, for example in relation to teaching social skills, and networking (O'Dwyer, 2023). Both employers acknowledged that a lack of contact with an office or professional environment was a factor in the skills gaps identified in new recruits. Although O'Dwyer's report relates to graduate recruits, participating employers identified that it was just as important to support school students in the development of 'employability skills'. The introduction of virtual work experience was driven in part by the difficulties for most employers with offering work experience when many team members were still working remotely for at least some of their normal working week. As Susannah noted, it felt 'wrong' to simply decline to offer work experience, and offering a virtual version appeared to be an effective way to continue to provide experience which both schools and employers considered valuable, while taking into account the resourcing issues in 2022. Further, the accessibility of virtual work experience allowed the employer to offer it to school students who might otherwise have access to opportunities to undertake in-person work experience already, such as colleagues' or clients' relations, thereby ensuring that there were enough were spaces for those who needed them. In addition, the value-add of offering virtual work experience to a wide range of students is that it provides a gradual transition into what might otherwise be a potentially intimidating environment. For school students who have experienced interruptions in their social development and education, the virtual experience may also provide a transitional opportunity into in-person work experience.

5.2   Policy initiatives and employers' responses

The participating employers referred to their ambitions in relation to school outreach, and acknowledged that the shift from regarding outreach as primarily a CSR programme to an early talent programme was helpful in furthering these ambitions. Social mobility

remained an important driver in relation to developing relationships with schools, and in terms of programme content. The participant organisations were clear that this was a responsible business model, and that they were building relationships with local communities, evidence of an ethical culture. Participating employers described working with schools to develop content, using programmes such as Skills Builder (Skillsbuilder Partnership, 2024) to ensure a consistent use of language and approaches, and piloting initiatives with schools. Employers' responses to the introduction of the Gatsby benchmarks, and the increased emphasis on vocational learning suggest not simply a willingness to engage, but a recognition that there is more of a need to include school outreach programmes in the organisation's recruitment strategies, particularly for apprenticeships. Further, actively building relationships with schools, and the increases in co-ordination between employers, schools, universities, third party organisations such as the Careers and Enterprise Company, and local Law Societies, indicate that employers are responding positively to the call for greater involvement with education. The 'skills gaps' and lack of 'readiness for work' issues identified by the CBI (CBI, 2019) can be addressed much more effectively with employer engagement, and the outreach initiatives described indicate that employers, including SMEs, are engaging with schools to address these issues. Susannah's description of the initiative that allowed SMEs to take work experience students for a day as part of a collaborative programme, rather than having to commit to a full week, is a good example of the benefits of this more co-ordinated approach. Further, the use of resources such as Careers Hub (Careers and Enterprise Company, 2022a), which allowed organisations to respond to requests for workshops or careers fairs based on their availability as part of a pool of employers, also allowed resources to be more fairly allocated. This addresses the risk that uneven coverage of an area may result from each organisation acting alone with their preferred schools. It was, however, noted that the attitude of careers advisors, and the resource which the school had available made a significant difference to how the employers

could engage with the schools. For example, Susannah discussed the importance of having a senior leader in the school engaging with careers, and contrasted one school in a trust, which had dedicated careers advisors, with another in the same trust which had an individual on a fractional appointment, the latter being described as a 'disaster'.

5.3 A shift in attitudes towards apprenticeships

The importance of engagement with careers on the part of schools, of having access to dedicated resource, and support from, for example, enterprise advisors, was noted by the participating employers. In relation to schools' engagement with employers, there had been a definite shift in attitude towards apprenticeships, with negative or dismissive attitudes towards apprenticeships as a possible destination for school leavers moving to a much more positive mindset in most cases. The solicitor apprenticeship is a lengthy commitment, with apprentices who join as school leavers taking between five and seven years to qualify, (SRA, 2022) although it should be noted that the graduate route is of similar duration, but divided into a three year degree, postgraduate professional study, and two years of qualifying work experience (SRA, 2022). The first cohort of solicitor apprentices qualified in 2022, and this may have contributed to a change in perception of the route, and the significant growth in numbers of apprenticeship starts (Fouzder, 2024). Policy recommendations in relation to the need for 'high quality alternatives to higher education' (Turner, 2022) suggest a move towards more positive perceptions of vocational pathways and apprenticeships. These recommendations are also likely to have contributed towards greater acceptance of these routes by schools and employers. Further, the reinforcement of the Baker clause requirement to provide information about apprenticeships, and the introduction of the Gatsby benchmarks emphasise the need for school students to have contact with both employers, and with further and higher education providers. These developments indicate that school

students are being offered a range of possible choices, rather than higher education being a default option.

5.4   Raising aspirations

Higher education has traditionally been regarded as an aspirational option, and a powerful tool of social mobility (BIS, 2016). The policy shift in relation to tertiary options to include a range of possibilities, such as apprenticeships and university, has not necessarily resulted in complete parity of esteem for all schools. Employers acknowledged that some schools' careers advisers still did not regard apprenticeships or other alternatives to higher education as aspirational choices. The school outreach programmes were intended not only to support school students when making their choices with employability skills, mentoring, enterprise advice and other forms of support, but also to raise their aspirations. As noted in the introduction to this report, some careers, such as law or medicine, are not even considered by some school students who have no family or friends already pursing those careers. The participants referred to their programmes as intending to 'make the legal profession more accessible', and to 'raise aspirations' among school students. If school students are regarded as a pool of talent, rather than solely as a CSR initiative, then one of the key drivers of school outreach is to raise aspirations to encourage school students who might otherwise not have even considered law as a career to do so.

6. Conclusion

In examining the question of how legal employers' school outreach programmes affect the promotion of the solicitor apprenticeship as a route to qualification as a lawyer, a number of key themes have emerged. The employers who participated in the study saw their outreach programmes as 'the right thing to do', but also regarded them as an opportunity to create a new pipeline of talent. This was intended to raise aspirations for

school students who were less likely to have considered law as a career, and to open up access to the profession to those who might not have gone to university. In the latter case, as Gemma pointed out, where recruitment into trainee solicitor roles involved graduate recruitment schemes, anyone who had not attended university was excluded, and school outreach, together with the apprenticeship, provided an opportunity to widen access to the profession, and to the organisations which offered apprenticeships. This represents a change in emphasis from regarding school outreach as a primarily corporate social responsibility initiative, to framing it as an initiative which was driven forward by the early talent and resourcing teams. This introduced an additional commercial motivation for outreach. Further, in responding to a policy shift in relation to promoting the apprenticeship as a high quality alternative to higher education (Turner, 2022), employers are providing opportunities, and supporting schools in developing the skills that are needed to take advantage of those opportunities.

The employers also referred to the changes that they had made to their recruitment processes, with the introduction of more collaborative approaches with other employers, higher education providers, and third parties. Working with other stakeholders, and building strong relationships with schools enabled the employers to respond to schools' needs in relation to careers support. Further, it allowed the employers to develop programmes which addressed the needs of different year groups, beginning with younger students.

This closer involvement of employers in schools' careers initiatives shows an acknowledgement of the need for more collaborative relationships between employers and schools generally (e.g. the enterprise advisor role discussed in section 4.5). In addition, employers recognised the need to support the transition into the workplace, and to move towards processes and exercises which would engage school students

more effectively, such as making videos for use in social media marketing. The employers discussed their crucial role in supporting schools and school students in developing the employability skills that employers wanted to see in their recruitment. Recruitment processes and criteria which developed these skills opened up new pools of talent. The movement away from regarding work with schools in less advantaged areas as entirely CSR driven appears to have fostered new, and more ambitious approaches and programmes in this space. The Ofsted comments in relation to the outcomes and aspirations of disadvantaged students, and the need to work closely with schools in order to prepare school students from less advantaged demographics is recognised in the employers' strategies, and in the approaches that they have taken to working with schools:

> If school is not preparing them, you know, 100% for the transition into the world of work, they're just not … equipped to do that. And the only way that we can do that, to my mind, is if schools and business work much more closely in partnership. I don't think that's happening enough at the moment, [and until it does] I think that transition piece is still going to be a bit bumpy for kids (Susannah, Organisation A).

The growth in the numbers of solicitor apprenticeships since the first cohorts started in 2016 (Fouzder, 2024) indicates that these strategies and approaches are proving effective. Further, the changes in attitude towards the apprenticeship in schools described by the participants indicates that the apprenticeship route into the legal profession is established, and that the role of school outreach programmes is helping to create a pipeline of talent. The participants acknowledged that there were ambitions to set up systems for keeping in touch with potential apprentices, and to target particular schools more effectively, and that these would be valuable in terms of identifying and maintaining a relationship with early talent. Overall, increased school outreach appears to promote the apprenticeship route by raising aspirations, building skills and

confidence, raising awareness of the route's advantages, and by building relationships

with schools that have encouraged a shift in attitude towards the apprenticeship route as

a valuable alternative to higher education.

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Appendix One: The Benchmarks

1. A STABLE CAREERS PROGRAMME	Every college should have an embedded programme of career education and guidance that is known and understood by learners, parents, teachers, employers and other agencies.
– Every college should have a stable, structured careers programme that has the explicit backing of the senior management team, and has an identified and appropriately trained person responsible for it. – The careers programme should be published on the college's website in a way that enables learners, parents, college staff and employers to access and understand it. – The programme should be regularly evaluated, with feedback from learners, parents, college staff and employers as part of the evaluation process.	
2. LEARNING FROM CAREER AND LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION	Every learner, and their parents (where appropriate), should have access to good quality information about future study options and labour market opportunities. They will need the support of an informed adviser to make best use of available information.
– During their study programme, all learners should access and use information about career paths and the labour market to inform their own decisions on study options. – Parents should be encouraged to access and use information about labour markets and future study options to inform their support to the learners in their care.	
3. ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF EACH STUDENT	Learners have different career guidance needs at different stages. Opportunities for advice and support need to be tailored to the needs of each learner. A college's careers programme should embed equality and diversity considerations throughout.
– A college's careers programme should actively seek to challenge stereotypical thinking and raise aspirations. – Colleges should keep systematic records of the individual advice given to each learner, and subsequent agreed decisions.	

– The records of advice given should be integrated with those given at the previous stage of the learner's education (including their secondary school) where these are made available. Records should begin to be kept from the first point of contact or from the point of transition. – All learners should have access to these records to support their career development. Colleges should collect and maintain accurate data for each learner on their education, training or employment destinations.	
4. LINKING CURRICULUM LEARNING TO CAREERS	All subject staff should link curriculum learning with careers, even on courses which are not specifically occupation-led. For example, STEM subject staff should highlight the relevance of STEM subjects for a wide range of future career paths. Study programmes should also reflect the importance of maths and English as a key expectation from employers.
– Throughout their programme of study (and by the end of their course) every learner should have had the opportunity to experience how their subjects help people gain entry to (and be more effective workers within) a wide range of occupations.	
5. ENCOUNTERS WITH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES	Every learner should have multiple opportunities to learn from employers about work, employment and the skills that are valued in the workplace. This can be through a range of enrichment activities, including visiting speakers, mentoring and enterprise schemes, and should include learners' own part-time employment where it exists.
– Every year, alongside their study programme, learners should participate in at least two meaningful encounters*1 with an employer. At least one encounter should be delivered through their curriculum area. – Colleges should record and take account of learners' own part-time employment and the influence this has had on their development.	
6. EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACES	Every learner should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities, and expand their networks.

– By the end of their study programme, every learner should have had at least one experience of a workplace, additional to any part-time jobs they may have.	
7. ENCOUNTERS WITH FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION	All learners should understand the full range of learning opportunities that are available to them. This includes both academic and vocational routes, and learning in schools, colleges, universities and in the workplace.
– By the end of their programme of study, every learner should have had a meaningful encounter*2 with a range of providers of learning and training that may form the next stage of their career. This should include, as appropriate, further education colleges, higher education and apprenticeship and training providers. This should include the opportunity to meet both staff and learners.	
8. PERSONAL GUIDANCE	Every learner should have opportunities for guidance interviews with a careers adviser, who could be internal (a member of college staff) or external, provided they are trained to an appropriate level.*3 These should be available for all learners whenever significant study or career choices are being made. They should be expected for all learners, but should be timed to meet individual needs.
– Every learner should have at least one such interview by the end of their study programme.	
*1 A 'meaningful encounter' is one in which the learner has an opportunity to learn about what work is like or what it takes to be successful in the workplace. *2 A 'meaningful encounter' is one in which the learner has an opportunity to explore what it is like to learn in that environment. *3 The college should ensure that access to a level 6 adviser is available when need	

Appendix Two: Oftsed reports and general public data

Note that the most recent full inspection is used in this table. Relevant comments from more recent short inspections are included separately.

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Year of reported full inspection	2014	2018	2019	2018
Overall rating	Good	Requires improvement	Good (Outstanding in effectiveness of leadership, and personal development, behaviour and welfare)	Good
Relevant positive comments	Inspirational headteacher who is creating an aspirational culture	Exclusions have fallen, and attendance is improving	Higher achievements than the national average in attainment. Strong collaborations with business and professions. Good initiatives to prepare students for the tertiary sector. Particularly	Leadership working to raise aspirations. Strong engagement with pupil-led initiatives. Very inclusive culture.

	School A	School B	School C	School D
			strong in relation to vocational courses.	
Relevant developmental comments	Teachers do not always make full use of information to set work at the right level.	Disadvantaged pupil progress is not monitored closely enough, and there is insufficient impact in relation to work on raising achievement.	Ensuring that academic achievements for years 12 and 13 are equivalent to those on vocational courses.	Disadvantaged students do not progress to the full extent of their ability. Higher levels of non-attendance for this group.
Short inspection date	2014	2022	2023	2019 (Previous inspections resulted in 'requires improvement', triggering this inspection)
Grade	Good	Good	Good	Requires improvement
Relevant comments from short inspection	Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from additional support, including additional advice when making	New leadership strives to ensure that students achieve their potential. Insistence on high expectations for all students. Improvements	Numbers of KS4 students following an academic curriculum is relatively low. Very positive comments about careers support	Need for stronger leadership, and to raise the achievements of particular demographics,

	School A	School B	School C	School D
	course choices for Key stage 4. Limited impact of initiatives to tackle low attendance in this group of pupils. Overall, there has been improvement in the achievements of disadvantaged pupils. The report also noted that aspirations in years 12 and 13 were not 'consistently high'.	to the quality and breadth of the curriculum to help students achieve.	showing full compliance with the Gatsby Benchmarks. Good links to local business.	particularly disadvantaged males.

Schools which have participated in early careers legal initiatives

School	(School A)	(School B)	(School C)	(School D)
Profile of school	Non-selective academy	Academy	Community School	Community School
Social profile of school area	2021 census shows 40% of households as experiencing deprivation	2021 census shows 41% of households as	2021 census shows 39% of households as experiencing deprivation	2021 census shows 46% of households as experiencing deprivation

School	(School A)	(School B)	(School C)	(School D)
	in one or more dimensions.	experiencing deprivation in one or more dimensions.	in one or more dimensions.	in one or more dimensions.
Ofsted Report	Good although the report notes that there is a significant achievement gap for disadvantaged students.	Good. Comments in relation to the Baker Clause (positive), but there was felt to be a stronger focus on vocational education, and a need for more information for students wishing to access HE.	Good, but with some minor variations in teaching quality between subjects	Good overall, but disadvantaged pupils, especially boys, do not make expected progress
Who provides careers advice?	Internal provision, team, no restriction on hours indicated	Part of a local career hub, and names an enterprise coordinator and an enterprise advisor on the website	Internal provision, team	List of business partners. Apprenticeship champion. Internal part time, single
Benchmark 1 – A stable careers programme	A statement on the school's careers webpage states that the school's careers programme is designed in accordance with the	A statement on the school's careers webpage states that the school's careers programme is designed in accordance with the Gatsby	Detailed information on the careers programme from year 6 to year 13 provided in an infographic, together with statements in a policy document that	Compass score shows 100% compliance for this benchmark

School	(School A)	(School B)	(School C)	(School D)
	Gatsby Benchmarks, and that this is reviewed annually. There is a link to the year planner, which provides a term by term analysis of careers elements included in the curriculum.	Benchmarks, and that this is reviewed annually.	the school complies with the Gatsby Benchmarks, and that this is reviewed annually.	
Benchmark 2 – Learning from career and labour market information	Labour market information in relation to salaries, working hours, information regarding projected growth, and where to find information about opportunities in relation to roles in that area.	Labour market information in relation to salaries, working hours, information regarding projected growth, and where to find information about opportunities in relation to roles in that area.	Link to LMI Data 2023 provided on the school's careers page. Further market information is provided through the advisor and mentor structure described in Benchmark 5 below.	Compass Score shows 100% for this benchmark Links to external information on a number of sites.
Benchmark 3 – Addressing the needs of each student	There is a quiz on making decisions about what kind of role would suit the individual student. The market information in	Description of events such as roadshows and workshops which allow students to explore their options.	Detailed infographic map of careers opportunities and integration into the curriculum from year 6 onwards. The school	Compass Score shows 100% for this benchmark. There is a detailed quiz, a resource to allow students to explore

School	(School A)	(School B)	(School C)	(School D)
	relation to these roles (described in Benchmark 2 above).		states that each key stage has a programme which has been designed to support them.	options for job roles, qualifications, pathways, and links to short videos of individuals' experiences. This is followed by a report, action plan and other resources to help students follow up.
Benchmark 4 – Linking curriculum learning to careers	Statement that subject specific guidance in relation to careers is integrated into the curriculum. Further detailed statement regarding the integration of careers education and the school's wider values.	Clear statement on the website of the way in which careers guidance, and key points such as identifying and developing employability skills are integrated into the curriculum.	Careers overview document provides details of how the school integrates career guidance and the development of employability skills into the curriculum. There are dedicated 'careers in the curriculum' lessons in each subject.	Compass Score shows 100% for this benchmark The PSE curriculum includes employability skills throughout.
Benchmark 5 – Encounters with	The school's careers webpage sets out a	Clear policy statement which sets out the school's	The school provides details of their work	Compass Score shows 100% for this benchmark

School	(School A)	(School B)	(School C)	(School D)
employers and employees	detailed timeline for researching and arranging work experience, and a detailed procedure to ensure that this takes place. Emphasis on supporting students and parents to find placements, rather than allocating placements.	policy on provider access, including apprenticeships. Details of the process for access for providers is also provided.	experience and employer engagement co-ordinator, and their enterprise adviser, who is from a legal employer. The school also provides details of their enterprise co-ordinator, and academic mentor. Workshops and mock interviews are employer led and delivered.	The careers curriculum also involves regular events where different professions are showcased by members of those professions. Some examples of recent events provided, together with contact details for professionals who wish to take part.
Benchmark 6 – Experiences of workplaces	Examples of previous organisations provided in the presentation delivered to parents, which is available on the page.	Contact details for employers who wish to offer work experience. No details of previous employers offering work experience provided.	Details of work experience points included in the timeline infographic, with sessions to support students in securing work experience.	Compass Score shows 100% for this benchmark. Extensive list of local employers who have worked with the school, including providing industry days.
Benchmark 7 – Encounters with	The site includes links to Unifrog, which allows students to compare	Clear policy statement which sets out the school's policy on provider access,	Clear policy statement which sets out the school's policy on provider	Compass Score shows 91% for this benchmark. The careers page has a

School	(School A)	(School B)	(School C)	(School D)
further and higher education	opportunities and courses in the tertiary sector.	including providing access to technical vocational education options. Details of the process for access for providers is also provided.	access, including providing access to technical vocational education options. Details of the process for access for providers is also provided. Students have access to Unifrog in order to allow them to compare opportunities and courses in the tertiary sector.	link to the programme of events, including encounters with further and higher education providers throughout the year.
Benchmark 8 – Personal guidance	Careers advice interviews on a one to one basis are included in the timetable for the careers programme.	Careers advice interviews on a one to one basis are included in the careers programme.	CV workshops and mock interviews are available, and the school offers one to one careers sessions.	Compass Score shows 37% for this benchmark One to one careers guidance interviews are provided.

Not all of the schools referred to their Compass Scores, the Careers and Enterprise tracking tool for compliance with the benchmarks, but these are included where available. Statistics in relation to the destinations of the pupils from the schools are considered below. The schools' profiles were similar, and their Ofsted reports ((Ofsted, 2024) summarised in the appendices), gave similar ratings, with the exception of School B whose rating following a full inspection was 'requires improvement', and School D, which received a 'requires

improvement' rating on a short visit following a 'good' rating on a full inspection. The schools were all transparent in their approaches to compliance with the benchmarks, and set out detailed information in relation to how they supported school students in making informed choices about their future destinations.

Pupil destinations after KS4 between in 2018 and 2022

Note that 2020 and 2021 figures are not included as they relate to the period during the pandemic, and are therefore potentially distortive. Source: individual school websites

School A

2018

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	93%	79.85%	84.86%
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	175	150	140
Pupils staying in education	75%	68.62%	73.89%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Further education college or other further education provider	33%	26.46%	28.38%
School sixth forms	33%	31.54%	31.43%
Sixth form colleges	-	5%	9.11%
Other education destinations	-	0.15%	5.91%
Pupils in apprenticeships	14%	7.54%	2.97%
Pupils staying in employment	3%	3.38%	2.07%

2022

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	96%	88%	90.41%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	202	125	140
Pupils staying in education	89%	80.8%	86.28%
Further education college or other further education provider	27%	33%	34.06%
School sixth forms	34%	28.6%	30.68%
Sixth form colleges	27%	10.75%	10.44%
Other education destinations	1%	8.6%	11.12%
Pupils in apprenticeships	6%	4.15%	1.99%
Pupils staying in employment	1%	2.9%	2.15%

School B

2018

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	95%	79.85%	84.86%
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	234	150	140
Pupils staying in education	81%	68.62%	73.89%
Further education college or other further education provider	35%	26.46%	28.38%
School sixth forms	32%	31.54%	31.43%
Sixth form colleges	-	5%	9.11%
Other education destinations	-	0.15%	5.91%
Pupils in apprenticeships	9%	7.54%	2.97%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in employment	5%	3.38%	2.07%

2022

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	93%	88%	90.41%
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	171	125	140
Pupils staying in education	81%	80.8%	86.28%
Further education college or other further education provider	40%	33%	34.06%
School sixth forms	8%	28.6%	30.68%
Sixth form colleges	32%	10.75%	10.44%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Other education destinations	1%	8.6%	11.12%
Pupils in apprenticeships	8%	4.15%	1.99%
Pupils staying in employment	4%	2.9%	2.15%

School C

2018

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	98%	79.85%	84.86%
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	179	150	140
Pupils staying in education	93%	68.62%	73.89%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Further education college or other further education provider	35%	26.46%	28.38%
School sixth forms	58%	31.54%	31.43%
Sixth form colleges	-	5%	9.11%
Other education destinations	-	0.15%	5.91%
Pupils in apprenticeships	3%	7.54%	2.97%
Pupils staying in employment	2%	3.38%	2.07%

2022

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	97%	88%	90.41%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	179	125	140
Pupils staying in education	91%	80.8%	86.28%
Further education college or other further education provider	27%	33%	34.06%
School sixth forms	63%	28.6%	30.68%
Sixth form colleges	0%	10.75%	10.44%
Other education destinations	1%	8.6%	11.12%
Pupils in apprenticeships	6%	4.15%	1.99%
Pupils staying in employment	1%	2.9%	2.15%

School D

2018

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	95%	79.85%	84.86%
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	205	150	140
Pupils staying in education	84%	68.62%	73.89%
Further education college or other further education provider	29%	26.46%	28.38%
School sixth forms	45%	31.54%	31.43%
Sixth form colleges	-	5%	9.11%
Other education destinations	-	0.15%	5.91%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils in apprenticeships	8%	7.54%	2.97%
Pupils staying in employment	2%	3.38%	2.07%

2022

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
Pupils staying in education or employment	94%	88%	90.41%
Total number of pupils included in destination measures	142	125	140
Pupils staying in education	82%	80.8%	86.28%
Further education college or other further education provider	44%	33%	34.06%

Pupil destinations	School	LA	England
School sixth forms	35%	28.6%	30.68%
Sixth form colleges	4%	10.75%	10.44%
Other education destinations	0%	8.6%	11.12%
Pupils in apprenticeships	7%	4.15%	1.99%
Pupils staying in employment	4%	2.9%	2.15%

Information from the 2021 census in relation to region notes the following contextual points:

- City stats on persistent absence (16.4%) are higher than the national average (12.1%). Lower than national levels of HE access at 31.6% in comparison with 42.2%.

- Concentrations of deprivation, with 21.8% of children in the city living in low income families, and 8% of households experiencing food insecurity in 2022/23, doubling to 16% in the most deprived areas of the city.

- Ethnicity profile shows 71.6% white British, 18.9% Black and Asian minority ethnic, and 9.5% white minority ethnic.

- Lower than national rates of life expectancy, with 82.6 for women, and 77.7 for men, although life expectancy gaps are evident when comparing the most and least deprived areas of 9.9 years for men, and 6.9 years for women.

Although the percentages of pupils entering apprenticeships have fluctuated between 2018 and 2022, they remain higher than the national figures for apprenticeship as a destination after Key Stage 4. The profile of the region indicates that there are pockets of disadvantage, and the census information in relation to the areas in which the four sample schools indicate that their catchment areas have between 39% and 46% of households identified as experiencing deprivation in one or more dimensions.