

LMI, GATSBY AND THE FUTURE OF WORK: A NEW APPROACH FOR SCHOOLS



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LOOKS AT A NEW
APPROACH TO LMI

Many young people today may live and possibly even work into the 22nd century. Predicting the jobs they might be doing so far into the future is unimaginable but with a growing mismatch between the rapidly-changing needs of the labour market and the available skills of those seeking work, the pressure on schools to prepare young people for the demands of employment is mounting.

The current drive to encourage better employer links with schools is an initiative that should help to create a realism around working life for young people. Another – and employers have a part to play in this too – is the growing importance of high-quality labour market information (LMI). There’s no avoiding the references to LMI in recent research and as a labour market information specialist it’s a big cheer from me to see the term partnered with ‘careers information’ as if it had always been that way.

One such piece of research is *Good Careers Guidance* from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (affectionately referred to as ‘Gatsby’) published half way through 2014. Of all the research to come out recently, none has had such an impact on the careers world and its influence is still gathering momentum; the CDI, for example, refers to Gatsby in its revised Framework for careers.

Based on international research, the report identifies eight benchmarks of good practice around careers learning for UK schools and colleges providing clear recommendations. These benchmarks, along with the CDI Framework, can support schools in helping their students plan and prepare for a complex and competitive world of work.

“At present it is clear that young people’s understanding of what the labour market wants is often weak.”
Good Careers Guidance, Gatsby Charitable Foundation

For young people to build up a “full and realistic picture of the job market” and be ambitious in their career ideas, access to up-to-date information – and from a young age – is critical, says Gatsby (Benchmark 2 ‘Learning from career and labour market information’).

Making current LMI freely available is no longer a mountainous task for schools as changes in the way we view and share digital content has made it much easier to access live data. The UKCES’s pivotal *LMI for*

All project which pulls together various reliable sources of LMI, means the latest labour market data can now be embedded into the familiar careers information resources we know and love. Finding out the latest average salary levels, skills demands and predicted future employment prospects alongside job profiles means individuals become more informed about a particular job area which they can then directly compare with others. So far so good, but the data is only half of the story.

‘Labour market *information*’ (statistics, datasets, trends) has become a catch-all term for any nugget of knowledge about the job market when actually, it’s the much more meaningful ‘labour market *intelligence*’, derived from the numbers, which helps us understand the local, national and international landscape of employment. Data on its own without any context is meaningless, and without mediation, users are liable to interpret the figures in any way they can. It’s only when someone helps them to pull the different strands together that they can start to build a picture for themselves.

That ‘someone’, of course, is a school’s most vital asset to encouraging good practice around LMI – the trained careers guidance practitioner. Where an employer is most likely only knowledgeable about his or her related sectors, the careers adviser will not only understand how to interpret the nuances of labour market data but will also be constantly absorbing new knowledge across the whole current and potential future labour markets.

I would recommend that everyone involved in giving careers advice in school cast a critical eye over a few National Careers Service job profiles to understand why the untrained eye may struggle to interpret the data. Motor vehicle technician is a good example: the job falls into the broad occupational category of ‘skilled trades’ which covers a range of sectors and the indicated salary levels between the job profile and job market information differ hugely. Guidance would help to explain why there are a significant number of skills shortage vacancies when the employment forecast shows a declining trend; a good adviser would also want to talk about future opportunities in diagnostics and driverless vehicle technologies and the local situation.

For someone interested in this area of work, they’d now understand the figures better and could compare them against other roles but may still not fully grasp what it would be like to do that job. However, add to this newly



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acquired knowledge a visit to a careers fair where they can see how an engine works, a chat with an employer about what it's like to be a motor vehicle apprentice plus a visit to a workshop and they'll have a much clearer idea of not only that job, but working life.

There's no 'one size fits all' in careers guidance and the same goes for LMI. Gatsby highlights the need for advice and support to be tailored to the individual needs of each student (Benchmark 3 'Addressing the needs of each student') and LMI can be an effective tool in helping individuals to develop themselves and stretch their ambition. It has always been at the heart of challenging stereotypical thinking and can help to raise aspirations by showing the possibilities of lesser-known careers. And it's not only helpful with students – a piece of LMI viewed in black and white is somehow more believable and can be a good insight for parents when discussing their child's career planning.

There's a buzz around employer engagement in the careers world at the moment and an employer's perspective - while up to a point subjective – can be a valuable source of LMI (Benchmark 5 – 'Encounters with employers and employees'). A good speaker can emphasise the realities of recruitment and what they expect from their employees. Much of this will be unknown to a young person who's had little contact with day-to-day working life. And although no substitute for experience of the actual workplace, employer ambassadors can provide awareness of working culture, a particular industry and the local job market.

But there's another advantage to bringing employer and student together, and that's to remind employers that young people are worthy candidates for employment. With fewer entry level roles available – more traditionally filled by young people - creating opportunities for employers to see the merits of someone they can shape into a valuable employee can only be a good thing.

Just as there's a shift towards better LMI and more engagement with employers, there's also a shift towards a whole-school, cross-curricular, community approach to careers education with everyone from governors to parents 'buying in'. Not all schools will be at the same stage and each will have their own priorities but the Gatsby report, DfE statutory guidance and CDI framework all talk quite specifically about making links between careers and the skills learnt in school subjects, in particular the STEM-related, where the dropping of a subject early can limit future career options (Benchmark 4 – 'Linking curriculum learning to careers').

With a greater emphasis on experience when recruiting for many new and emerging jobs it's critical we teach young people to develop a 'mindset' which matches the changes in employer needs. Employability skills such as resilience and entrepreneurship should be developed through a variety of teaching and activities, clearly demonstrating how these skills can be translated to the workplace.

It really is time to shelve the notion that LMI is inaccessible, incomprehensible and dull! Take advantage of all the aspirational careers resources out there (explore beyond the obvious), use digital media to be creative in careers activities, use online maps and live jobs feeds to look at the local labour market and link with employers to inspire and inform. That way, you really can give young people the tools they need to start out on whichever career path they end up taking.

References

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