

King Edward VI Aston School

Careers Strategy 2025–2028

Updated to incorporate the revised Gatsby Benchmarks (effective September 2025)

This strategy aligns with DfE statutory guidance (updated 8 May 2025), the Provider Access Legislation (six encounters Y8–13), the updated Gatsby Benchmarks (from Sept 2025), the CDI Career Development Framework, and Ofsted 2025/26 expectations for Personal Development.

1) Vision & Intent

Vision. Every student leaves Aston informed, confident and prepared to pursue their best next step—whether A levels to university, degree apprenticeships, T Levels/HTQs, or employment with training—underpinned by a stable, inclusive and high-quality careers programme aligned to the updated Gatsby Benchmarks and statutory guidance.

Purpose. To ensure students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to manage learning and career progression throughout life. Provision will be impartial, equitable and curriculum-integrated, with parity between academic and technical pathways.

Strategic alignment. The strategy supports the School Development Plan (addressing disadvantage and cultural capital) and the School Strategic Plan (2022–2027) ambition to expand work experience, alumni engagement and destination diversity. It also prepares for Ofsted’s renewed framework (from Nov 2025) where Careers contributes centrally to Personal Development and to Leadership & Management and Sixth-form judgements.

2) Statutory & Policy Framework

- DfE statutory guidance (updated 8 May 2025): impartial guidance Y7–13, published careers programme and provider access policy, and use of the Gatsby framework.
- Provider Access Legislation (PAL): six provider encounters with approved technical/apprenticeship providers for all pupils Y8–13 (2 in Y8/9; 2 in Y10/11; 2 in Y12/13). Avoid counting the same provider twice within a phase; encounters occur in-day and meet quality criteria.
- Updated Gatsby Benchmarks (from Sept 2025): clarifications including strengthened Benchmark 6 (workplace experiences) and Benchmark 7 (encounters with FE/HE/technical).
- CDI Career Development Framework: six learning areas used to define progressive learning outcomes (Grow throughout life; Explore possibilities; Manage career; Create opportunities; Balance life & work; See the big picture).

3) Local Labour Market & Pathways Context

West Midlands context: tight labour market and growth clusters in advanced manufacturing/EV & aerospace, digital & cyber, logistics, health & care, and professional/financial services. The WMCA Careers Hub provides brokerage, CPD and events.

Technical & higher technical routes: T Levels continue to scale (with strong industry placement completion), while HTQs (L4/5) expand with student-finance eligibility. UCAS is integrating apprenticeships more fully into discovery/apply journeys—supporting parity with degrees.

4) Whole-School Roles & Governance

Careers education at King Edward VI Aston School is a whole-school responsibility. Every member of staff contributes to employability, personal development and future readiness.

Key roles

- Mr Matt Brady – Headteacher
- Mr Martin Downing – Deputy Headteacher, Strategic Lead for CEIAG
- Ms Tomina Noreen – Careers Leader
- Ms Barbara Whyte – Careers Advisor – Level 7 qualified
- Ms Natalie Fairhurst – PSHE Co-ordinator (careers in PD/PSHE)
- Mr Max Plackowski – Assistant Head with Strategic oversight for Sixth Form
- Mr Tim Amann – UCAS Lead (HE & degree apprenticeships workflow)
- Mr Wright-Smith – Head of Sixth Form
- Mr Steve Hall – Assistant Head i/c Attendance
- Ms Michelle Simcox – Pastoral Leader (Year 11), Outreach and Partnerships Lead
- Ms Vicky Davies – SENDCo
- Ms Sarah Blundell – Director of Inclusion
- Mr Waheed Chaudrey – Careers Link Governor

Governance & external partners

Careers Link Governor (termly oversight); Careers & Enterprise Company – Birmingham Careers Hub; West Midlands Combined Authority; Titan Partnership; FE/HE; apprenticeship & technical providers; employer partners; alumni. These support PAL, work experience, mentoring and teacher CPD.

Compliance artefacts (published annually)

- Careers Programme (Y7–Y13) & Provider Access Policy (PAL)
- Destination data (KS4 & KS5) with equality analysis

5) Programme Architecture (Gatsby-aligned)

1. Benchmark 1 – A stable programme

Annual, costed plan; termly SLT/governor review; pupil/parent/employer voice; Compass+ cycle.

2. Benchmark 2 – Learning from LMI

Termly WMCA sector briefings; subject-specific LMI mini-lessons; parent bulletins.

3. Benchmark 3 – Addressing individual needs

Compass+ target groups (PP, SEND, first-gen HE, late joiners); bursaries; alumni mentoring.

4. Benchmark 4 – Linking curriculum learning to careers

Each subject plans ≥ 2 careers learning points per year; assessment via reflection tasks/portfolios.

5. Benchmark 5 – Encounters with employers & employees

Talks, industry projects, mock assessment centres, alumni panels.

6. Benchmark 6 – Experiences of workplaces (strengthened)

Yr10 & Yr12 structured placements or high-quality virtual/onsite projects with prepare–experience–reflect model.

7. Benchmark 7 – Encounters with FE/HE/technical (updated)

Annual Routes at 16 & 18 covering FE, HE, T Levels, apprenticeships and HTQs; integrates PAL six encounters.

8. Benchmark 8 – Personal guidance

Every student receives 1:1 guidance by end of KS4 and again in KS5 (L6+ adviser).

6) Provider Access Legislation (PAL) – Our Offer

- Six meaningful provider encounters for each pupil across Y8–Y13: 2 in Y8/9; 2 in Y10/11; 2 in Y12/13.
- Encounters occur during the school day, are impartial, include Q&A, and cover apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical options. The same provider is not counted twice within a key phase.
- Timing windows: for Y9 and Y11, at least one encounter by 28 February; Y13 encounters offered by 28 February.
- Provider Access Policy is published and reviewed annually; reasonable access will not be restricted.

7) Implementation Plan (2025–2028)

Year 1 – Build & Comply (2025/26)

- Publish programme and Provider Access Policy; confirm Link Governor cycle.
- Compass+ baseline (Dec '25); Careers Impact internal leadership review (Nov '25); staff CPD on updated Gatsby & PAL (Summer'26).
- PAL: 2 encounters in KS3 and KS4 within statutory windows
- Routes at 16 & 18 showcase (FE/HE/T Levels/HTQs/apprenticeships) - Post16&18 Education Fair
- Workplace experiences: Yr10 & Yr12 meaningful placements with preparation and reflection.
- Curriculum: map CDI outcomes to KS3/4; each department integrates 2 careers learning points per year group.
- Sixth-form programme integrates UCAS/Apprenticeships/Higher Education providers
- Parental engagement
- Unifrog

Year 2 – Deepen & Diversify (2026/27)

- Annual encounters grid shared in Sept
- Annual educational visits grid shared in Sept
- Peer to Peer review with Careers and Enterprise Company
- Updated Gatsby benchmarks fully embedded (esp. Benchmarks 6 & 7).
- Subject-linked employer projects; assess reflection evidence; teacher CPD on using LMI.
- Equity: mentoring for PP/SEND; travel bursaries; virtual encounters; parent workshops.
- Deep dive into destinations at Post 16 and Post 18.

Year 3 – Embed & Evidence Impact (2027/28)

- Consider Quality in Careers Standard; publish Careers Impact Report.
- Student careers leaders co-design events; alumni platform embedded; multi-year provider MOUs.
- 2028–31 strategy based on destinations deep dive and Ofsted toolkit evidence.

8) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- Statutory compliance: PAL 6/6 encounters per cohort/phase; programme & access policy published.
- Gatsby: All 8 updated benchmarks met/substantially met (Compass+ evidence).
- Workplace experiences (B6): ≥95% Y10 and ≥95% Y12 complete a meaningful experience.
- Personal guidance (B8): 100% Y11 and 100% Y13 receive 1:1 guidance with action plans.

- Destinations & parity: sustained positive destinations at/above 3-year average; +50% apprenticeship/degree apprenticeship acceptances vs 2024/25 baseline; +5pp progression into under-represented sectors for boys.
- Curriculum integration: each subject evidences ≥ 2 career learning points per year group and uses LMI annually.

9) Benchmarking & Quality Assurance Framework

- Compass+ (termly): Gatsby evaluation, logging encounters, Future Skills Questionnaire (career readiness).
- Careers Impact review (annual): SLT self-evaluation focusing on conditions for success and impact.
- Ofsted alignment: evidence portfolios curated around intent–implementation–impact; destinations triangulated with data and voice.
- External validation: Careers Hub enterprise adviser; consider Quality in Careers Standard.

10) Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting

Termly data review

- Compass+ Gatsby scores and participation by group (PP, SEND, EAL, late joiners).
- PAL encounter logs; work experience completion; guidance coverage.
- Future Skills Questionnaire (career readiness) and follow-up actions.

Annual reporting

- Careers Impact Report to SLT & Governors (summary published) including destinations, KPIs, equality analysis, and improvement actions.
- Provider Access Policy and Careers Programme updated and re-published.

Pupil/parent/employer voice

- Post-activity surveys and focus groups.
- Alumni and employer feedback.
- Parent forum (Routes at 16 & 18).

11) Risk Management

Risk	Likely Impact	Mitigation
Insufficient provider capacity to meet PAL windows	PAL non-compliance	Publish annual encounters grid in Sept; Careers Hub brokerage; blend in-person/virtual; diversify providers.
Limited placements for work	Reduced Benchmark 6 quality	Early brokerage; use

experience		project-based/virtual experiences; prioritise WMCA growth sectors.
Narrow aspirations (HE-only)	Imbalanced destinations	UCAS apprenticeships apply workflow; technical fairs; alumni role models; unbiased messaging.
Equity gaps (PP/SEND)	Unequal access to guidance/experiences	Compass+ targeted groups; bursaries; accessible formats; parent outreach.

12) Safeguarding, Inclusion & Impartiality

All encounters and experiences are risk-assessed and inclusive, with reasonable adjustments for SEND. Provider access and curriculum materials are impartial and non-discriminatory, challenge stereotypes and promote equality of opportunity—aligned with DfE and Ofsted expectations.

Appendix A — Three-Year Action Plan (Editable)

Use this editable table to plan, monitor and update actions. Add or remove rows as needed.

Year	Objective / Outcome	Actions / Milestones	Owner	Deadline	Resources / Budget	Evidence of Impact	Status / Notes
2025/26	PAL compliance across KS3–5	Publish encounters grid; secure providers; deliver Y8/9 & Y10/11 encounters by Feb; Y12/13 offer live	Careers Leader / Y8–Y13 leads	Feb 2026	Staff time; events budget	Compass+ PAL log; student feedback	
2025/26	Yr10 & Yr12 workplace experiences ≥85%	Broker placements; pre-brief; reflection tasks collected	SLT KS4 / Head of Sixth Form	July 2026	Trip bursaries; admin support	Completion %; reflective logs; employer feedback	
2026/27	Updated Gatsby embedded	Subject projects; CPD on LMI; provider MOUs	Careers Leader / HoDs	July 2027	CPD time	Compass+ 7/8 achieved	
2027/28	All 8 Gatsby substantially met	Target weaker benchmarks; external validation	Careers Leader / Link Governor	July 2028	CEIAG budget	Compass+; Impact Report	

Appendix B — KPIs & Milestones

- By July 2026: PAL compliant in KS3 & KS4; Compass+ +2 benchmarks from baseline; ≥85% Y10/Y12 experiences; 100% Y11/Y13 guidance.
- By July 2027: ≥7/8 Gatsby substantially met; ≥92% experiences; +25% apprenticeship acceptances vs 2024/25; access gaps <3pp.
- By July 2028: All 8 Gatsby met; ≥95% experiences; +50% apprenticeship/degree apprenticeship acceptances; +5pp progression into under-represented sectors for boys.

Appendix C — Provider Access Statement (Summary)

- We welcome requests from approved technical education and apprenticeship providers to access pupils in Y8–Y13.
- We will ensure six meaningful encounters per pupil across key phases; provide suitable facilities and time; and publicise events appropriately.
- Our full Provider Access Policy (reviewed annually) sets out procedures and contacts.

Appendix D — Data, Systems & Reporting

- Compass+: single source for encounter logging, learner-level tracking, Future Skills Questionnaire and reporting to SLT/Governors.
- Destinations: analyse KS4/KS5 sustained destinations and parity of routes; feed into action planning and Ofsted conversations.

Appendix E — Key References

- DfE: Careers guidance and access for education and training providers (updated 8 May 2025)
- Provider Access Legislation – six encounters Y8–13 (timings and quality requirements)
- Updated Gatsby Benchmarks – adopted into government guidance from Sept 2025
- Ofsted: Education Inspection Framework & State-funded school inspection toolkit (Nov 2025)
- CDI Career Development Framework – six learning areas
- WMCA Careers Hub resources and LMI
- UCAS apprenticeships – discovery/apply; T Levels & HTQs information