



Developing a careers curriculum to inspire and empower

A Leadership Legacy Project think-piece by Nathan O'Boyle, Ian Ramsey CofE Academy

In November 2023, I began my role as the CEAIG and Careers Co-ordinator for Ian Ramsey CE Academy. An effective careers education creates opportunities for students; it broadens perspectives, develops ambition and facilitates personal growth. In this regard, my role is to empower students to discover and pursue their aspirations.

To provide context, when I started this new role, careers was viewed as a peripheral 'add-on' to the curriculum by many staff and students. This may still be some people's viewpoint within our organisation, but the narrative surrounding careers has changed for the critical mass over the short period of a few months – more value is being placed on the careers programme. Whilst my work focused primarily on curriculum development, it also complemented the broader development of careers provision within the academy, greatly increasing the opportunities for students to engage with employers and higher education providers.

Intent

To achieve the goal of establishing careers as a core aspect of our students' education, the careers lead and I established two overall aims for our program:

- ▶ To create a celebratory culture around careers.
- ▶ To improve the value of careers amongst staff and students.

Before replanning the curriculum, I identified four key areas for development:

1. Improve pupil engagement in careers lessons.

2. Improve pupils' exposure to contemporary labour market information.
3. Improve the frequency and quality of opportunities for pupils to be reflective.
4. Improve the accessibility of the resources for teachers of the careers curriculum.

The four key areas of progress were identified by completing an assessment of the previous year's careers curriculum and an audit of the curriculum against the Careers Development Institute's (CDI) framework. The justification for each target is outlined below:

1. There was limited variation in teacher input and lesson activities.
2. The information about pathways to careers (particularly apprenticeships) was outdated.
3. There were limited opportunities for pupils to reflect on their skills, interests and values.
4. There was a lack of clarity in how lesson resources and activities directed progress towards the learning objectives. The curriculum was also non-cyclical which made it difficult to make connections to previous learning and progressively challenge students throughout their careers education.

Having completed the assessment and audit, it was clear replanning the curriculum was a task of significant importance and was therefore prioritised with immediate effect.

Implementation

I began by using the CDI framework to identify the requirements of an effective curriculum. Then, I started the long-term planning of the new cyclical curriculum, which provides students with opportunities to explore reoccurring key themes at an increasingly challenging level from year 7 to 11. I created a careers curriculum roadmap which has been displayed in each classroom. This illustrates the 'learning journey' each student takes throughout their careers education at Ian Ramsey CE Academy in a simple and accessible way for staff and pupils alike.

All the lesson resources were produced first hand under a new branding for the careers programme. The lesson resources display the learning objectives, pupil instructions and challenge tasks in a consistent manner to provide clarity to teachers and pupils.

Impact

The impact of re-designing the curriculum is evidenced through the improvement in staff voice feedback. Staff were asked four questions about the careers curriculum in November 2023 and in June 2024, showcasing the impact of replanning the curriculum.

The results show evidence of improvement in all four measures of progress identified in November 2023. An improvement in pupil engagement allows pupils to make better academic progress (Kuh, 2009). This was an essential area for improvement as we were also aiming to improve the value pupils place on careers.

Pupils' exposure to contemporary labour market information was a desired, but also compulsory requirement under the CDI framework. The curriculum development has improved pupils' understanding of the future opportunities available to them – and the pathways to pursuing their ambitions.

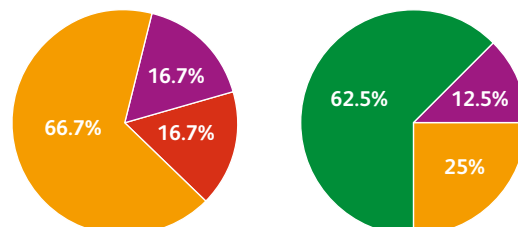
Naturally, developing a cyclical curriculum has created many opportunities for pupils to be reflective. This has assisted students in understanding how their attitude towards careers changes and matures throughout their time at secondary school.

The final measure of improvement is especially significant as all teachers of careers lessons in our academy are non-specialists. It is of great importance that staff have felt increasingly empowered to provide students with sound knowledge and understanding of their future career paths and aspirations.

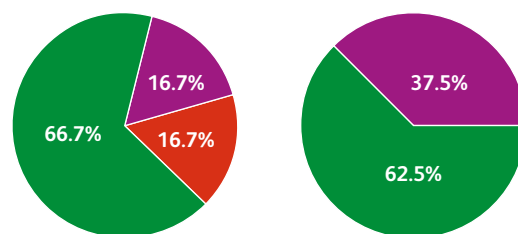
Staff voice - Careers Curriculum (Before and after re-planning the curriculum)



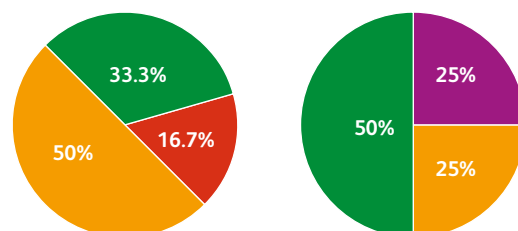
To what extent do you agree with the statement:
"The lessons are engaging for all students".



To what extent do you agree with the statement:
"The lessons enable students to explore a variety of potential career paths".



To what extent do you agree with the statement:
"The lessons provide students opportunities to reflect on their own skills, interests, and values".



To what extent do you agree with the statement:
"It is easy to understand and deliver lesson resources".

