

## **Seven gaps schools discover at external assessment - that self-assessment missed**

An honest guide for careers leaders considering the Quality in Careers Standard

Schools working towards the Quality in Careers Standard often have more in place than they realise, and a few significant gaps they didn't see coming. After years of supporting schools through external assessment, these are the seven areas where self-assessment and external assessment most commonly diverge.

### **THE SEVEN GAPS**

#### **1. Evidence of impact, not just activity**

Schools often record what they've done - encounters with employers, CEIAG lessons, assemblies. Assessors are looking for evidence of what changed as a result: what did students know, do, or decide differently because of that activity? Activity logs without impact evidence rarely satisfy external assessment criteria. It's also, crucially what Ofsted are looking for – demonstration of impact.

#### **2. Student voice that shapes provision**

Many schools gather student feedback. Fewer use it to demonstrably change what they do. Assessors want to see a clear line between what students said and how the programme responded. A feedback form filed away is not the same as student voice embedded in provision. Consultation is paramount. This leads to confidence that your students can articulate what the careers offer is and why.

#### **3. Senior leadership engagement, not just awareness**

Schools often cite the headteacher's support for careers. Assessors look for active involvement: a named senior leader with strategic responsibility, careers appearing in the school development plan, and governors who can speak to careers provision. Passive endorsement is not the same as strategic ownership.

#### **4. Coherence across the whole programme**

Schools frequently have strong individual elements - good employer encounters, solid personal careers guidance provision, Compass data - but assessors assess the whole programme as a coherent, planned journey from Year 7 to Year 13. Isolated good practice is not the same as a sequenced, intentional programme.

**5. Up-to-date,  
accessible careers  
information**

Schools can underestimate how much assessors scrutinise the quality and currency of the information available to students. Outdated displays, a careers section of the website not updated since 2022, or LMI that doesn't reflect local or regional context are common findings that schools didn't anticipate.

**6. The Careers Leader's  
capacity and  
positioning**

Assessors consider not just what the Careers Leader does, but whether they have the time, authority and access to senior leaders to do it properly. A Careers Leader buried in a pastoral role with four hours a week for careers, and no direct line to the SLT, is a structural problem, not just a workload one.

**7. Documentation that  
reflects actual practice**

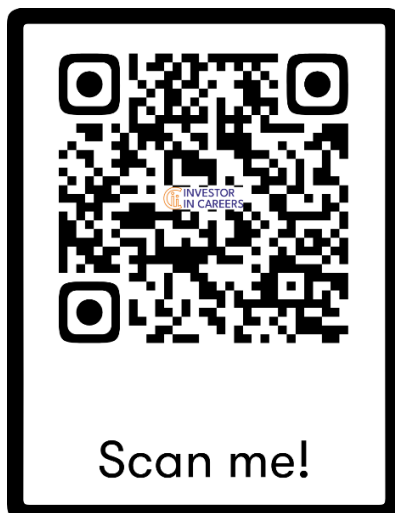
Self-assessment is often optimistic and sometimes too pessimistic. Assessors triangulate the written evidence against what staff, students, governors and parents say in interviews. Where written claims don't match the lived reality of the programme, this becomes a significant gap. The question is not 'do we have a policy?' but 'does our policy describe what we actually do?'

**Ready to find out where your school really stands?**

Investor in Careers offers a no-obligation discovery call to give you an honest, independent assessment of your readiness for the Quality in Careers Standard — and a clear picture of what, if anything, you need to address before going forward.

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