

# ADDRESSING INEQUALITY? THE PROVISION OF CAREERS GUIDANCE IN WELSH SCHOOLS

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**This Data Insight looks at careers guidance received by children in Welsh schools. It examines how this is influenced by pupils' demographic and academic characteristics.**

## Careers Guidance in England and Wales

Concerns have been raised in England that the provision of career services is insufficient to address the needs of young people. In 2010, the UK government withdrew funding for the Connexions Network. This Network provided a dedicated careers guidance service for young people. The 2011 Education Act gave schools and teachers in England the responsibility to arrange independent careers guidance for their students. Schools have been supported in this role by the creation of the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) in 2014, an advisory service that provides resources and supports the training of Careers Leaders within schools.

Yet there is concern that these arrangements will be unable to fill the gap left by Connexions leading to a decline in the delivery of careers guidance in schools. In a recent study of Year 11 students in England, less than two thirds of Year 11 pupils were found to have received careers advice. The research also found that the support was not reaching those in most need, including those with lower levels of social capital<sup>1</sup>.

Within Wales, schools are also responsible for the provision of careers education to their pupils. However, they are supported in this by Careers Wales, a publicly funded national careers information, advice and guidance service. Established in 2012, Careers Wales supports the Welsh Government's strategic objectives of ensuring the sustained progression of young people through education and into employment or further education/training. It has also been tasked with reducing the number of young people who are outside the education, training or employment system and prioritising its support to those who are most at risk of becoming disengaged or NEET. From a policy perspective, it is important to examine whether the apparent inequities in the provision of careers guidance to school children in England are also observed in Wales.

### Background

The transition from education to work has become increasingly complex. Young people have to navigate a complex array of educational and vocational choices as they progress towards their working lives. The transition period from education to work is also increasing and when they arrive in the workplace, labour market entrants are faced with a dynamic labour market where the ability to adapt and make appropriate career changes is critical. Within such an environment, the timely delivery of appropriate careers information, advice and guidance targeted at those who need it most is vital. This issue has been examined in a project carried out as part of the Administrative Data Research Programme for Wales.

### References

<sup>1</sup>Moote, J., and Archer, L. (2018). Failing to deliver? Exploring the current status of career education provision in England, *Research Papers in Education*, 33(2), pp. 187-215.

## What we did

The study has used the National Pupil Database (NPD) for Wales for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils between 2013-2016 combined data from Careers Wales. Careers Wales record details of their interactions with clients, including the date and nature of the service provided. Careers Wales provides a wide range of support to people of all ages. In terms of its work with those who are still within compulsory education, two of the main activities undertaken are interviews and group sessions. Interviews represent two-way discussions between careers advisers and clients and may include diagnostic or mentoring interviews or college or sixth form pre-course guidance interviews. Group sessions represent interactions which record involvement of more than one client at a given time, such as class level activities. Alongside these, Careers Wales also records when contact is made with clients, either in person or electronically. Pupils may have received multiple interventions from Careers Wales within any academic year.

Data linkage helps us to examine both the levels and nature of support provided by Careers to Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. Data linkage also helps us to see which pupils have benefited from the support of Careers Wales and how pupil characteristics relate to the type of support received. The characteristics looked at included gender, ethnicity, status with respect to Special Educational Needs, Free School Meal eligibility, medium of education, GCSE attainment (expressed in terms of their capped points) and absenteeism.

## What we found

Our analysis reveals that approximately 60% of Welsh pupils receive support from Careers Wales during Year 10, increasing to 85% in Year 11. No difference in levels of support are observed by gender. In terms of ethnicity, pupils of Asian and Chinese origin do appear less likely to receive support compared to White pupils in both Years 10 and 11, potentially reflecting the higher levels of educational attainment of these groups (see below).

The remit of Careers Wales includes the provision of support for developing Transition Plans for those

with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Students who are identified to have higher levels of SEN (i.e., statemented) consistently receive the highest levels of support (72% in Year 10 and 96% in year 11). All groups of SEN pupils receive higher levels of support from Careers Wales during Year 11.

Pupils eligible for Free School Meals are less likely to receive support from Careers Wales than non-FSM pupils in Year 10 (58% compared to 62%), but are then more likely to benefit from careers services in schools in the final year of their compulsory education (91% compared to 84%). A similar relationship emerges in terms of absenteeism. Among Year 10 pupils, those with higher levels of absenteeism are less likely to benefit from the services of Careers Wales. This pattern is reversed among Year 11 pupils. Likewise, whilst the provision of support does not vary by educational attainment among Year 10 pupils, the likelihood of receiving support from Careers Wales is higher among those with lower levels of educational attainment during Year 11.

These observations reflect the changing nature of support provided by Careers Wales between Year 10 and Year 11. During Year 10, interactions with pupils are more likely to take the form of non-targeted Group Sessions that introduce students to the support available to help them. Among Year 11 pupils, the emphasis of support however shifts towards more intensive interventions such as interviews with careers guidance professionals. These are more likely to be received by more vulnerable pupils. The data also reveals the increased efforts made to keep in touch with these pupils. Despite their absence from school, pupils with higher levels of absenteeism are more likely to receive support during Year 11.

## Why it matters

These findings highlight a promising picture for the delivery of careers guidance in Welsh schools and the role of Careers Wales in the providing these services. The analysis reveals that in Wales approximately 85% of pupils received some form of contact with the Careers Wales during the final year of their compulsory education (i.e., Year 11). The analysis confirms empirically that Careers Wales is fulfilling its remit of supporting those pupils with the greatest needs, including those who are eligible for free school meals, have lower levels of academic attainment and have higher levels of absenteeism. Methodologically, the analysis also demonstrates the more nuanced understanding of careers guidance provision that can be achieved through linked administrative data.

## What next?

This report highlights some early findings from an ongoing collaboration with Careers Wales. Future analysis aims to consider what factors underpin the careers aspirations and occupational preferences of Year 11 pupils; the role of Careers Wales in supporting transitions into post-compulsory education and training and how administrative data can be used to support Careers Wales in their work on tracking pupil destinations.

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