

Moving on: Who receives careers advice and guidance following compulsory education?

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This Data Insight explores the factors that are associated with the receipt of careers advice and guidance among young adults in Wales. We explore the interactions that Careers Wales has with a cohort of Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils during the two years following their completion of compulsory education. We find that determinants of Careers Wales interactions during Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) include attainment at GCSE and socio-economic background. Prior engagement with Careers Wales at KS4 is also demonstrated to increase the likelihood of receiving careers advice and guidance. This effect cannot be attributed to other characteristics of these young adults, highlighting the importance of establishing an early relationship with Careers Wales.

What we did

Data relating to the interactions that Careers Wales has with pupils has been available to ADR Wales from 2014/15 onwards. To examine the effect that careers guidance received during KS4 (Years 10 and 11) has on the subsequent receipt of careers guidance among 16–18-year-olds, our analysis focuses on one cohort of KS4 pupils who were in Year 11 during 2015/16. Data contained within the Welsh National Data Collection Pupil Level Annual School Census (NDC PLASC, formerly the National Pupil Database (NPD)) provides information on the characteristics of these pupils during KS4. We supplemented NDC PLASC data with information collected from the Careers Wales Career Check Survey, a diagnostic tool that helps careers advisors identify KS4 pupils who are most in need of support. Responses to a selection of questions included within Career Check were quantified into a Career Check 'score', ranging from 0–20, with lower scores indicating higher uncertainty in career planning. This score was then analysed

Background

The transition from education to work is becoming increasingly complex, and the provision of careers guidance to those in education and training is felt to play a critical support role, particularly among pupils from poorer backgrounds (Hooley et al., 2015; Kintrea et al., 2011). Within Wales, Careers Wales has been responsible for providing independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) services for all ages since 2012. A significant amount of Careers Wales activity is focused on engaging with school pupils, and previous research undertaken by ADR Wales has examined the provision of CIAG to pupils within compulsory education during KS4. This work has considered how Careers Wales prioritises support for pupils at KS4 (Huxley and Davies, 2023), the particular difficulties faced by pupils from low-income backgrounds (Davies, Huxley and Yunus, 2021), and how careers guidance supports the transition of pupils into Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) in Wales (Huxley and Davies, 2023).

Much less is known about the provision of careers guidance in post-compulsory settings. This is particularly important in Wales compared to other UK nations, given that Wales has a higher proportion of individuals who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), and lower rates of learners moving into tertiary education, including sixth forms, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) (Robson et al., 2024). In this Data Insight, we summarise research which explores the receipt of careers guidance during the two academic years following the completion of compulsory education (i.e. equivalent to National Curriculum Years 12 and 13). We examine which groups were most likely to have received careers guidance, whether there were any differences in provision between sixth form and FE settings, and how the receipt of CIAG at KS4 relates to support received subsequently.

in relation to the support provided by Careers Wales to those aged 16–18. We also flagged pupils who did not respond to Career Check, as their lack of engagement may identify a group of pupils who are particularly in need of support.

We tracked these pupils in the Post-16 Data Collection, which covered attendance at sixth forms, and the Lifelong Learner Wales Record (LLWR), which covered those in FE and Work Based Learning (WBL). This allowed us to examine whether learners attending sixth form or FE were more or less likely to receive careers guidance at this stage. Pupils who did not subsequently appear within our PCET records could include those who were in employment, were being privately educated, or had moved out of Wales. These pupils were retained within our analyses so that the provision of CIAG to those who are no longer in PCET could be considered.

In addition to linkage between educational datasets and the Career Check survey, we included data from the 2011 Census. This provided additional information on the personal and family or household characteristics of young people that was not captured by routinely collected educational records. The availability of 2011 Census data allowed us to examine the receipt of careers guidance by a variety of background characteristics, such as household social class and measures of deprivation.

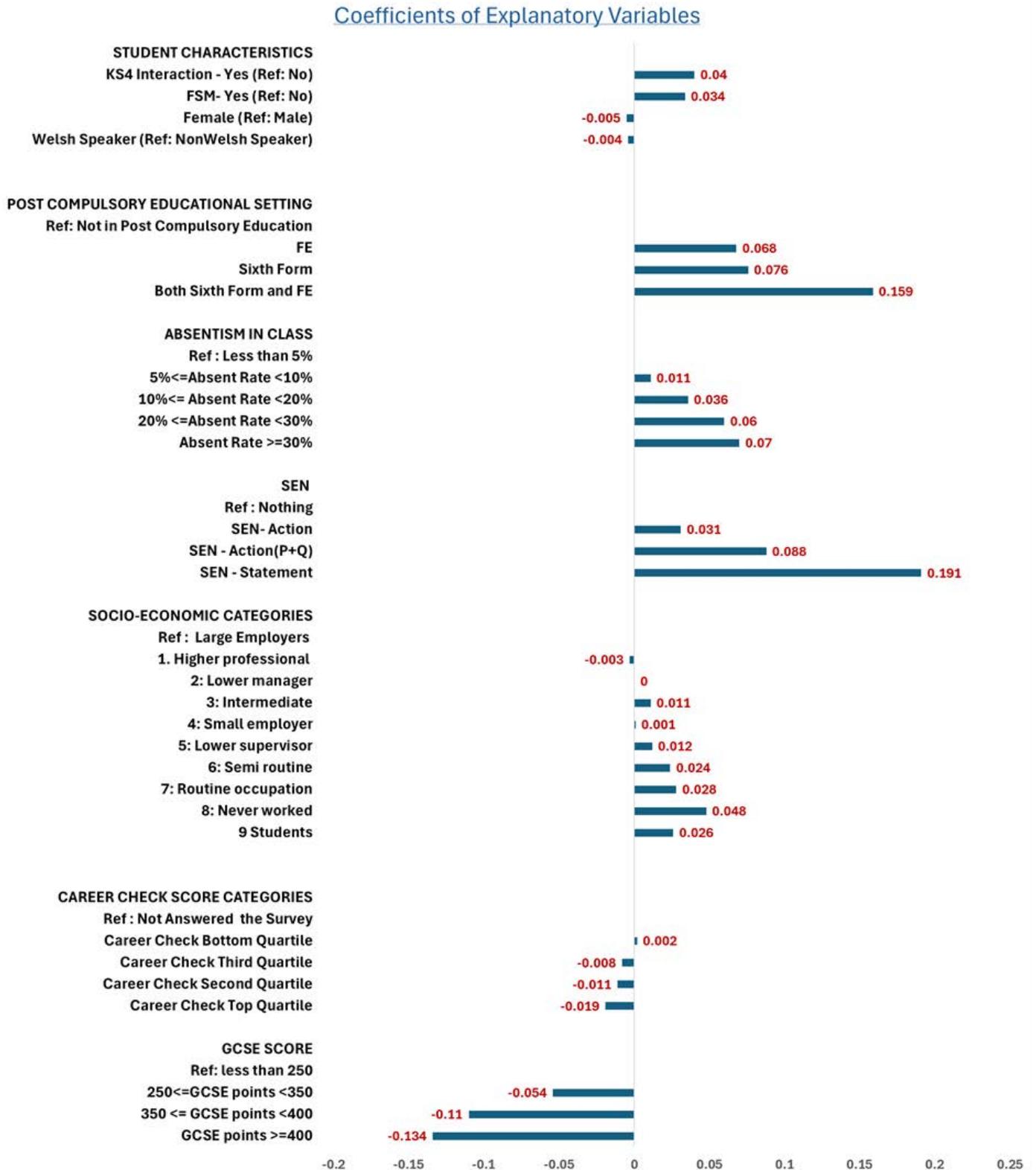
Data on Careers Wales interactions categorise services into information, advice and guidance, each representing increasing levels of support. We defined interactions with Careers Wales (in both KS4 and PCET) as the receipt of advice and/or guidance, due to the more targeted and intensive nature of such support. We examined how the receipt of such support at KS4 was associated with the likelihood of receiving similar support during the two years that followed.

What we found

We examined which personal, household and educational characteristics are associated with the likelihood of receiving support from Careers Wales among those aged 16–18. Multivariate techniques (logistic regression models) were used to identify the separate and additional effects of these characteristics on the likelihood that an individual within our KS4 cohort would receive an interaction with Careers Wales during the two academic years following the completion of Year 11. The results of our analysis are presented in Figure 1. Points to the right of the vertical line signify that the characteristic is associated with an increased likelihood of receiving a Careers Wales interaction after compulsory education, whilst those to the left signify a negative effect.



Figure 1: Factors associated with receipt of Careers Guidance in Year 12 and Year 13



The analysis reveals that the following groups of pupils are more likely to receive the support of Careers Wales during the two years following their completion of compulsory education:

- those who were eligible for Free School Meals during KS4
- those who had received support from Careers Wales (advice or guidance) during KS4
- those with higher levels of Special Educational Needs during KS4, reflecting the statutory role that Careers Wales performs in supporting the transitions of these pupils
- those participating in post-compulsory education and training
- those who had higher levels of absenteeism during KS4
- those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those whose parents were recorded as having never worked in the 2011 Census
- those with lower levels of attainment at GCSE

Those with high Career Check Survey 'scores' at KS4 were also less likely to receive the support of Careers Wales between the ages of 16 and 18 than those in the bottom quartile and those who did not complete the survey. These effects are, however, small compared to factors such as socio-economic background, attainment or absenteeism at KS4.

There was no difference in the likelihood of receiving careers advice or guidance when comparing those in sixth form with those attending FE settings, after taking account of the characteristics of the students attending these settings. Careers Wales therefore appears to be equally adept at engaging with students in both types of settings. Those not in education or training were, however, least likely to receive support. Those who were observed to have attended both a sixth form and an FE college were most likely to have received the support of Careers Wales. This could reflect learners who swap settings having sought the advice of Careers Wales before doing so.

Why it matters

Engaging with students in KS4 is important for Careers Wales, as it establishes a foundational relationship with pupils that carries on beyond compulsory education. Interactions at KS4 allow career advisors to identify students' interests, strengths, and potential barriers, enabling tailored support that fosters informed decision-making and goal setting (Gibbons et al., 2021). By initiating this engagement during KS4, Careers Wales can build trust and rapport, making students more likely to seek and value continued support in PCET. This continuity ensures that career planning evolves with students' development, leading to more coherent and long-term career strategies (Watts, 2001). Moreover, sustained engagement from KS4 through PCET promotes a culture of proactive career planning, ultimately contributing to smoother transitions into higher education or the workforce, and better long-term career satisfaction and stability (Hughes et al., 2002). Therefore, early and continuous engagement with career guidance supports long-term professional development and adaptability in a dynamic labour market.

What next

The analysis will next examine the impact of engagement with Careers Wales in post-compulsory settings. We will explore whether these interactions at KS4 and PCET positively influence pupils' academic performance. By providing students with support and dedicated time to consider their skills, aspirations, barriers and opportunities, we ask, are these associated with improved levels of performance in tertiary education? This includes asking whether students who attend university are less likely to drop out if they have received the support of Careers Wales during earlier phases of their education.

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