

Effectiveness of careers guidance in supporting participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET)

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This Data Insight explores the influence careers guidance can have on transitions to Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) in Wales. The analysis examines rates of transition to PCET in Wales, whether the receipt of careers guidance during key stage 4 supports transition to PCET and, if so, whether it benefits some groups of pupils more than others.

Background

The transition from learning to work is becoming increasingly complex and the provision of careers guidance to those in school is felt to play a critical role, particularly among those pupils from poorer backgrounds. Research has demonstrated that children's aspirations and careers choices are influenced by their experiences at home and school, exposure to employment, and encouragement from significant adults (Moote and Archer 2018)¹. Some research has suggested that parents of lower socio-economic status have lower aspirations for their children (Bandura et al. 2001)² and are generally less informed about particular career routes (Wikeley and Stables 1999)³. Careers guidance is therefore felt to be particularly important among those from families who have a history of unemployment or low-skilled employment (Haynes et al. 2013)⁴. Careers guidance can help to fill these gaps in social capital by increasing occupational knowledge, self-esteem and raising aspirations (Watts and Kidd 2000)⁵.

So can the provision of careers guidance within schools be demonstrated to influence the transitions subsequently made by pupils following their completion of compulsory education? Within Wales, [Careers Wales](#) is responsible for providing an independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance service. Under its new [Brighter Futures](#) five-year delivery strategy, Careers Wales aims to offer a personalised service, targeting support at those most likely to face barriers to moving into a sustained positive transition from statutory education. An important aspect of Careers Wales' work is to support pupils so that they do not become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

What we did

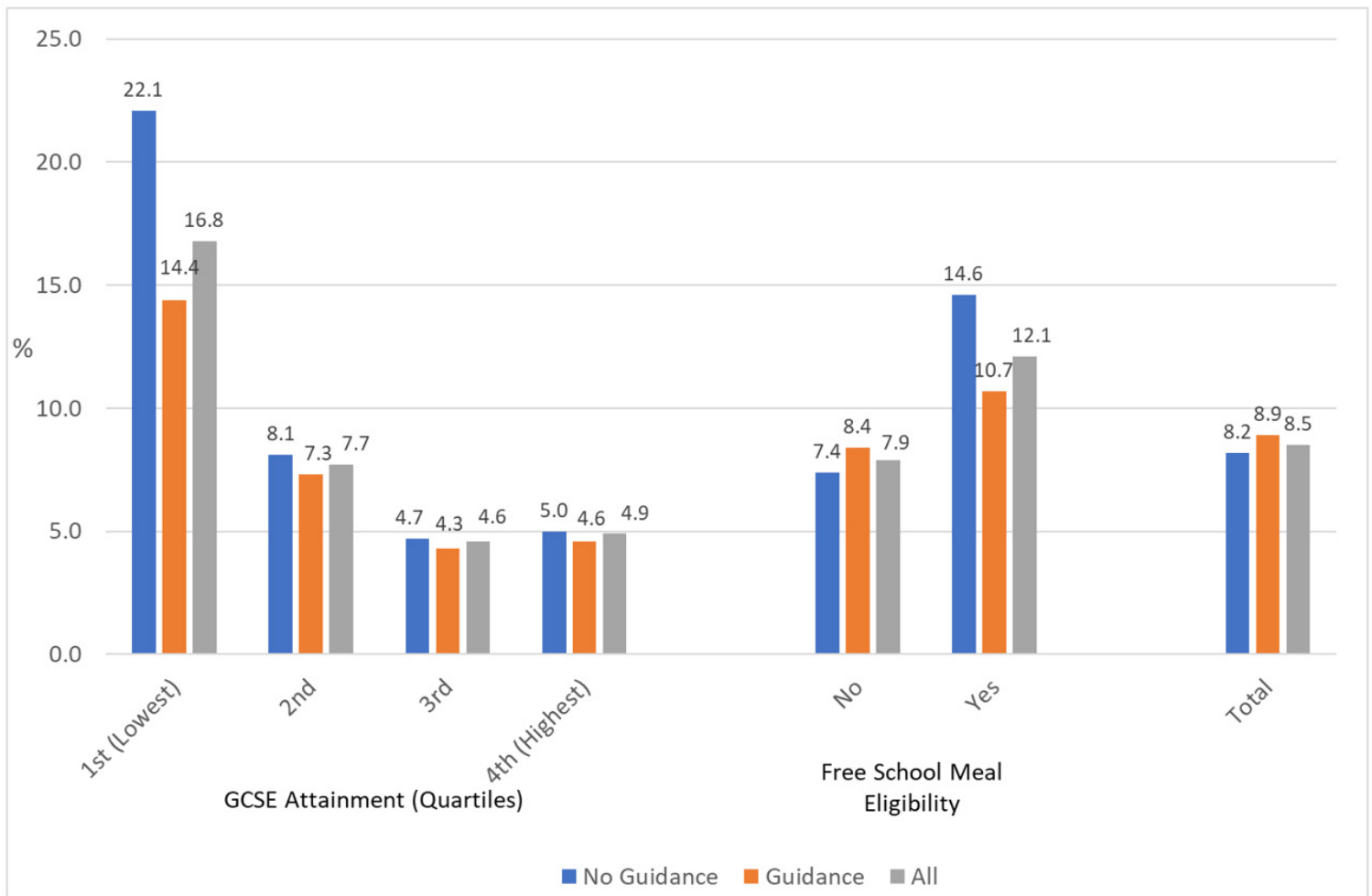
For the purpose of our analysis, we linked the Welsh National Data Collection Pupil Level Annual School Census (NDC PLASC), the Post-16 Pupil Level Annual School Census (Post 16 PLASC), and the Lifelong Learner Wales Record (LLWR). Linking these administrative records allowed us to identify those pupils who moved into PCET following the end of key stage 4. These transitions cover those who either remain within a Sixth Form (captured by Post 16 PLASC) or those who moved to the further education (FE) sector – including those registered for work-based learning (captured by LLWR). Data relating to the interactions that Careers Wales has with pupils is available from 2015/16 onwards. To examine the effect of careers guidance received during key stage 4 (Years 10 and 11), our analysis therefore examines the transitions to PCET made by two cohorts of pupils: those who were in Year 11 during 2016/17 and 2017/18. Our estimates reveal that approximately 92% of pupils progress to PCET. This figure is very similar to results from the annual survey of leavers undertaken by Careers Wales for the same two cohorts (93%).

Careers Wales interaction data is very detailed. Pupils can be recorded as having had multiple interactions of different kinds. Even details of texts or email correspondence with clients is recorded. The primary distinction made within the data are those interactions that involve the provision of careers information, advice and guidance. These three categories can be broadly regarded as representing increasing levels of support. Whilst careers information and advice can involve things like signposting to information about learning and work opportunities, a careers guidance interview is more in-depth and can only be undertaken by a professionally qualified careers guidance advisor. As opposed to more universal interventions such as group sessions, the one-to-one guidance interview represents the main targeted intervention. This enables advisers to identify the interests, skills and aptitudes of the client and explore how individuals might overcome any barriers that they face. We explore how rates of transition to PCET vary according to whether pupils received a careers guidance interview during Year 10 or Year 11.

What we found

Across our two cohorts of pupils, approximately 9% do not go on to participate in PCET (see Figure 1). This figure is marginally higher among those who receive a careers interview (9% compared to 8%). The problem with such comparisons is that they fail to consider differences in the circumstances of pupils who are prioritised by Careers Wales as being in need of support. For example, if Careers Wales concentrates resources among those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who have low levels of educational attainment, those pupils who receive a careers guidance interview would be expected to have lower rates of transition into PCET than those who do not. It is possible to take such factors into account by making comparisons between more detailed groups of pupils. Among the lowest quartile of GCSE attainers, 17% of pupils do not go on to participate in PCET. However, this figure increases to 22% among those who do not receive a careers guidance interview. Similarly, among those who are eligible for free school meals (FSM), 12% do not go on to participate in PCET. Once again, this figure increases to 15% among FSM eligible pupils who have not received a careers guidance interview. The analysis therefore suggests the careers guidance impacts upon the transitions of pupils with low levels of educational attainment and those who are eligible for FSM.

Figure 1: Pupils Not in Education or Training Following Year 11



The problem with such comparisons is that pupils will have a variety of characteristics (such as gender, ethnicity, additional learning needs) that will influence their transitions to PCET. Counterfactual Impact Analysis techniques provide a more refined way of making ‘like for like’ comparisons that simultaneously take account of different pupil characteristics. A careers guidance interview can be viewed as a ‘treatment’, whereby the receipt of an interview (treatment) could favourably affect subsequent outcomes. Any appraisal of their impact requires an account of what would have happened to these pupils if they had not received an interview. Statistical matching techniques have therefore been used to derive ‘control groups’ that allow us to compare the outcomes of these pupils to an otherwise comparable group of pupils who did not receive an interview. The differences in outcomes between these two groups provide an assessment of the impact of careers guidance interviews (see Figure 2).

The results derived from statistical matching are summarised in Table 2. Different matching techniques were applied to examine the robustness of our results. For ease of exposition, the figures in Table 2 are the average of the effects produced by these different specifications. Figures highlighted in bold indicate those instances where most of the specifications yielded results that were statistically significant at the 5% level (bold) or at the 10% level (bold italics). We can see that control group percentages (second column) show higher rates of being Not in Education or Training (NET) compared to those who do receive guidance (the treatment group, first column). In the final two columns, the percentage points difference shows the raw difference, whilst the percentage rate shows the proportionate change in the likelihood of being NET for those who receive guidance interviews.

Figure 2: Counterfactual Impact Assessment

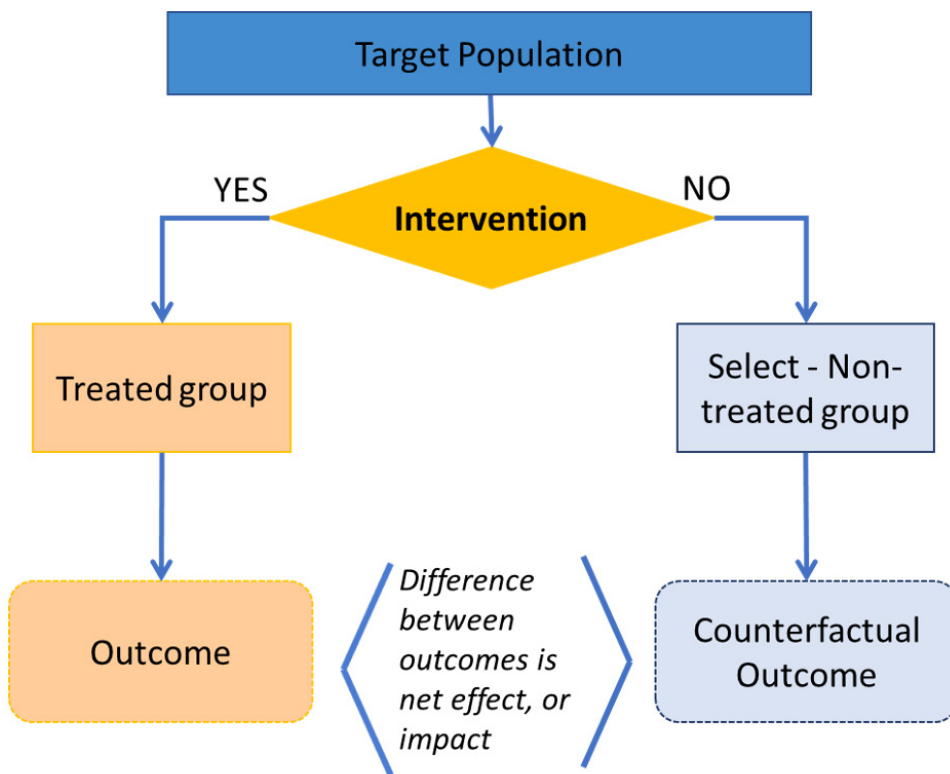


Table 2: Propensity score matching results, percentage of pupils who are NET after Year 11

	Treatment	Control	Difference	
			% Points	% Rate
All	8.0%	9.9%	-2.0%	-19.8%
By GCSE Attainment				
Quartile 1	13.3%	20.1%	-6.9%	-34.0%
Quartile 2	7.4%	8.2%	-0.8%	-10.3%
Quartile 3	4.2%	4.1%	0.1%	3.3%
Quartile 4	4.7%	4.5%	0.2%	5.3%
By FSM Eligibility				
Eligible	9.2%	15.1%	-5.8%	-38.7%
Non-Eligible	7.7%	9.0%	-1.3%	-14.5%
By FSM Eligibility & GCSE Attainment				
GCSE Quartile 1				
Eligible	13.1%	22.7%	-9.5%	-42.0%
Non-Eligible	13.5%	19.0%	-5.5%	-28.8%
GCSE Quartiles 2-4				
Eligible	5.2%	6.7%	-1.2%	-18.5%
Non-Eligible	5.7%	5.7%	0.1%	0.9%

Overall, receipt of a careers guidance interview reduces the rate of pupils who become NET from 10% (the control group) to 8% (the treatment group). This 2-percentage point reduction in the rate of NET is equivalent to a 20% reduction in the likelihood of being observed as NET following compulsory education. Further analysis reveals that this overall effect is being driven by the impact of careers guidance among particular sub-groups of pupils. We see that pupils who have low attainment at GCSE (quartile 1) are 34% less likely to be NET if they receive a guidance interview. If pupils are FSM eligible, they are 39% less likely. Where these characteristics are combined, we see that low attaining FSM pupils are 42% less likely to be NET if they receive a careers guidance interview compared to an otherwise comparable group of pupils who do not.

Why it matters

The application of Counterfactual Impact Evaluation Techniques allows us to make an assessment of impact of careers guidance increasing engagement with PCET and reducing the likelihood of being NET. Due to the absence of data on employment outcomes, we are not able to shed light on the impact of careers guidance interviews on the risk of pupils becoming NEET. Nonetheless, increasing engagement with PCET is a key aim of the Welsh Government,⁶ and so our evidence which suggests that the outcomes for young people can be enhanced by careers guidance interventions remains important. The greater impact that these interventions appear to have among the most disadvantaged groups of pupils also confirms the findings of previous research that emphasises the particular importance of careers guidance among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

What next

Our analysis has considered the effect of whether a pupil has received careers guidance interviews in relation to becoming NET. Enhanced levels of support for disadvantaged pupils means that these pupils will benefit from more support from careers advisers. The 'treatment' received by all pupils is therefore not the same. To further understand the support provided to school pupils by Careers Wales, we can interrogate our linked database to look at both the number and combinations of interventions received by different groups of pupils. This will allow us to examine which combinations of interventions among which groups of pupils might be particularly impactful for participation in PCET. We also hope to look at longer-term outcomes associated with careers guidance. For example, does careers guidance increase participation in higher education or does it reduce the rate with which learners drop out from PCET?

Acknowledgements

This Data Insight has been produced by the ADR Wales Skills and Employability research team. It provides a snapshot of informative research currently underway at ADR Wales but is not intended to provide a complete picture of work undertaken within this field or the ADR Wales programme of work. The information presented in this Data Insight have been reviewed by ADR Wales colleagues with expertise within this thematic area and are accepted to be accurate at the point of publication. Views expressed in this Data Insight are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of ADR Wales partner organisations.

References

¹ 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.

² Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G.V. and Pastorelli, C. (2001), Self-Efficacy Beliefs as Shapers of Children's Aspirations and Career Trajectories. *Child Development*, 72: 187-206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00273>

³ Wikeley, F., and A. Stables. (1999) Changes in school students' approaches to subject option choices: A study of pupils in the West of England in 1984 and 1996. *Educational Research* 41 (3), pp. 287-99.

⁴ Haynes, G., McCrone, T. & Wade, P. (2013) Young people's decision-making: the importance of high quality school-based careers education, information, advice and guidance, *Research Papers in Education*, 28:4, 459-482, DOI: [10.1080/02671522.2012.727099](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2012.727099)

⁵ Watts, A.G. & Kidd, J. (2000) Guidance in the United Kingdom: Past, present and future, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 28, 486-502, DOI: [10.1080/713652315](https://doi.org/10.1080/713652315)

⁶ This is evident in the new curriculum [Careers and Work-Related experience offer](#); the [Young Persons Guarantee](#), the [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework](#), and the [Employability plan](#).



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