

# How is careers guidance for school pupils prioritised?

**Authors:** Katy Huxley and Rhys Davies

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**This Data Insight explores how information is used to inform decisions regarding the provision of careers guidance interviews among key stage 4 (KS4) pupils in Wales. It explores the relative importance of background characteristics contained within administrative education records compared to information supplied by pupils via the Careers Wales diagnostic tool.**

## Background

In the UK, the transition from learning to work is becoming increasingly complex and young people face a daunting array of challenges. Given the complexity of the transition between school to work, school to post-compulsory education, and the demands of the contemporary labour market, the provision of adequate and timely careers guidance is felt to play a critical role in supporting young people to make the transition from full-time education.

Research has shown that careers guidance is particularly important to young people who belong to families who have a history of unemployment or low-skilled employment and/or no experience of higher education (Haynes et al. 2013).

So how is the provision of careers guidance prioritised within Welsh schools? Within Wales, Careers Wales is responsible for providing 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. This strategy involves targeted support at KS4 to ensure resources address client needs. Four levels of support are identified:

- **Level One** - universal support for those young people who will self-help through Careers Wales's digital and social media platforms and attend group sessions.
- **Level Two** - guidance and coaching interview for young people identified as in need of support through the Career Check diagnostic tool (see below).

- **Level Three** – targeted, more intensive support for those young people whose characteristics can lead to them being under-represented in education, employment or training post-statutory education including those who are free school meal (FSM) eligible, Looked After Children, children Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS), young carers, School Action +<sup>1</sup> and poor attenders.
- **Level Four** - pupils with additional learning needs receive impartial guidance and coaching support; attendance at transition reviews for young people with individual development plans; delivery of group sessions and attendance at parents' events. This group does not complete the Career Check.

Careers Wales works closely with schools to identify those most in need of support. Firstly, schools share information with Careers Wales about the characteristics of pupils (levels of attainment, attendance, FSM eligibility) to identify those pupils who are most at risk of becoming disengaged and falling outside the education, training or employment system (requiring of Level 3 support).

However, such characteristics may fail to capture all those who need help. To support the professional judgement of careers guidance practitioners, during KS4 pupils in Wales are given the opportunity to complete Careers Wales's 'Career Check' survey. Mostly completed during Year 10, this diagnostic tool helps careers advisors to identify those pupils who are most in need of support and their likely service requirements. Career Check asks pupils a variety of questions that allow careers advisors to identify those pupils who have unrealistic expectations, are underachieving or who are lacking in focus, confidence or the motivation to make things happen (Level 2 support).

## What we did

By combining data from the National Data Collection (NDC, formerly the National Pupil Database, NPD) with responses from the Career Check survey, we have previously created a [database](#) that enables us to look at how different groups of pupils respond to Career Check. We have now also combined detailed information about the interactions that pupils have with Careers Wales during Year 11, distinguishing between more and less intensive forms of support.

Using data from two academic cohorts of Year 11 pupils from 2015/16 and 2016/17, we are able to examine how the provision of careers support to KS4 pupils varies with respect to their background characteristics and their responses to Career Check.

In 2015/16 and 2016/17, 68% of pupils responded—equivalent to about 42,000 pupils across the two cohorts. The data allows us to explore how this information is used by Careers Wales to identify the needs of different groups of pupils.

Career Check collects a variety of information from pupils, including questions that ask about their intended next steps, job aspirations, confidence with decision making and perceived barriers to achievement. For ease of exposition, we looked at the responses from a suite of five questions from Career Check that focus on an individual's ability to make informed educational and career choices. Responses to these questions are outlined in Table 1.

It can be seen that just over half of pupils either report that they do not have a plan for their future (20%) or that they have a plan, but they do not know how to make it happen (31%).

These measures were used to create a Career Check 'score' by summarising responses to these five questions.

A value of 1-4 was allocated to each of the response categories, with lower values indicating greater uncertainty for individuals' career planning capabilities. A value of 0 was allocated to those who provided no response to Career Check. These were the added up across the five questions to derive an aggregate score (range 0-20). We took our Career Check score and looked at how this relates to support provided by Careers Wales.

**Table 1: Career Check Measures**

<b>Knowing myself</b>	I don't know what my strengths are or what I need to improve	I know some of my strengths and some of the things I need to improve	I know most of my strengths and most of the things I need to improve	I know all of my strengths and the things I need to improve and I can give examples to show this	Total
	5.9	30.1	52.7	11.3	100
<b>Knowing my options</b>	I don't have information on opportunities	I've been given some information about opportunities	I've found some information about opportunities, but might need more	I've found the right information about opportunities to help me with my future plans	
	11.7	33.0	43.3	12.0	100
<b>Making decisions</b>	I'm not confident about making decisions, I prefer others to make them for me	I want to make decisions, but others usually make them for me	I make my own decisions, but I'm not sure that I always do it well	I make my own decisions and I'm confident that they are good decisions	
	6.3	10.8	62.3	20.5	100
<b>Knowing who can help</b>	I don't know who to go to for help	I know who I can go to if I need help, but I probably won't	I know who I can go to for help and I probably will	I'm already asking other people for help	
	9.2	32.7	45.8	12.3	100
<b>Making it happen</b>	I don't have a plan for my future	I have a plan for my future, but I don't know how to make it happen	I have a plan for my future and I know how to make it happen, but I haven't started yet	I'm confident about my plan for my future and I've already started making it happen	
	20.4	30.7	35.8	13.1	100

Data relating to the interactions that Careers Wales has with pupils provides a detailed account of the nature of the service that has been delivered, distinguishing primarily between information, advice and guidance. These three categories can be broadly regarded as representing increasing levels of support. Whilst careers advice can involve things like signposting to information about learning and work opportunities, careers guidance is more in-depth and can only be undertaken by a professionally qualified careers guidance advisor. Within these interviews, advisors can identify the interests, skills and aptitudes of the client and explore how individuals might overcome any barriers that they face with the development of a bespoke action plan. Information on the channels through which these services are delivered are also recorded, distinguishing between activities that take place in person or by other means such as telephone, email, text, video, letter or over the web. Further codes distinguish between the different types of activities undertaken, such as different types of interviews, group interactions and the preparation of career planning documents.

## What we found

Table 2 provides information on the interactions that take place with pupils and how the receipt of these interactions varies according to the Career Check score, derived using the methodology described above. Pupils have been grouped into quartiles on the basis of their scores, with the first quartile representing those pupils who appear to be most vulnerable to making uninformed educational and career choices. A separate category for those pupils who did not respond to Career Check is also identified.

Pupils can be recorded as having had multiple interactions with Careers Wales of different kinds. Even the details of texts or email correspondence with clients is recorded. To distil this information, Table 2 presents whether a pupil has received that type of interaction during either Year 10 or Year 11. The timing of these interactions is not considered and so some may have occurred before these pupils completed Career Check (if at all). The table demonstrates that many interventions are universal in their coverage. For example, group work sessions are not targeted at pupils with low Career Check scores. Indeed, Career Check may well have been first introduced or completed by pupils during a group work session. In contrast, the most intensive form of engagement—a one-to-one guidance interview with a qualified careers guidance advisor—is more likely to be received by pupils with low Career Check scores.

**Table 2: Percentage of pupils who received careers guidance interventions by Career Check Score**

	Career Check Score					
	No Response	1st Quartile	2nd	3rd	4th Quartile	All
One to One - Information - F2F	14.6	15.0	12.8	11.8	11.3	13.4
One to One - Information - Other	16.5	12.4	11.7	10.8	11.6	13.2
One to One - Advice - F2F	9.9	11.5	9.6	9.4	9.0	9.9
One to One - Advice - Other	3.4	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.8	2.1
One to One - Guidance - F2F	<b>46.6</b>	<b>62.1</b>	<b>46.6</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>39.3</b>	<b>47.6</b>
One to One - Guidance - Other	1.7	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.7	1.5
Group Work - Information	23.9	42.9	42.4	42.1	40.8	36.2
Group Work - Advice	12.7	22.9	22.4	22.8	23.8	19.6
Group Work - Guidance	22.7	40.9	41.2	41.6	40.2	35.1
SMS/Email to/from client	37.0	57.2	55.3	55.6	55.2	49.7
Advocacy/Liaison - F2F	20.9	14.7	11.7	10.7	10.2	14.8
Advocacy/Liaison - other	28.0	20.7	17.7	16.4	16.0	21.1
Parent Guardian Interaction - F2F	9.2	7.5	6.6	6.0	5.6	7.4
Parent Guardian Interaction - Other	10.7	8.9	7.9	7.4	6.8	8.7
Career Planning Documents	30.5	40.8	30.5	26.7	24.6	30.9
Learning Difficulty/Disability Review	5.5	2.5	2.1	2.0	1.8	3.2

## What other characteristics are associated with being in receipt of a guidance interview?

Table 3 examines the receipt of guidance interviews by both Career Check score, GCSE attainment at the end of Year 11 (measured in quartiles) and eligibility for free school meals (eFSM). It can be seen that those with the lowest levels of educational attainment are more likely to have a careers guidance interview. Looking across the top row of Table 3, it can be seen that among those with the lowest levels of educational attainment, the Career Check score is not strongly correlated with being in receipt of a careers guidance interview. This is particularly the case among eFSM pupils, among whom approximately eight out of ten pupils who complete Career Check receive careers guidance irrespective of what they report in the survey. This highlights the dominant influence of low attainment and FSM eligibility upon the prioritisation decisions of careers guidance advisors. However, those who do not respond to Career Check are less likely to receive an interview, highlighting the difficulties associated with engaging with this hard-to-reach group.

Among those with higher levels of attainment, the likelihood of receiving a careers guidance interview declines. However, at each level of attainment, eFSM pupils are more likely to receive an interview. The analysis also demonstrates that among those with higher levels of attainment, those with the lowest Career Check scores (quartile 1) are more likely to receive an interview.

**Table 3: Guidance interview rates by Career Check score, FSM status and GCSE points**

		Career Check score											
		No Response		1st Quartile		2 <sup>nd</sup> Quartile		3 <sup>rd</sup> Quartile		4th Quartile		All	
		Non-FSM	FSM	Non-FSM	FSM	Non-FSM	FSM	Non-FSM	FSM	Non-FSM	FSM	Non-FSM	FSM
<b>GCSE Points (Quartiles)</b>													
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Quartile</b>		63.4	67.9	76.2	79.3	68.1	77.1	66.3	77.1	66.4	79.7	67.2	72.7
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>		44.8	57.0	65.5	76.0	51.3	63.0	49.2	59.6	49.3	57.7	51.5	62.6
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>		32.0	43.2	53.8	64.3	38.2	55.6	33.2	50.2	33.4	37.0	37.7	50.1
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Quartile</b>		24.4	30.3	45.1	57.6	27.6	43.5	25.5	40.2	22.7	37.4	28.1	40.4
<b>Total</b>		42.7	61.4	59.8	74.5	43.6	66.4	39.6	62.8	36.9	58.0	44.5	64.5

## Why it matters

We have shown that KS4 pupils who have low levels of attainment and who are eligible for free school meals are most likely to receive guidance irrespective of the responses that they provide via Career Check. This highlights the primacy of these indicators for careers advisors in prioritising support for KS4 pupils.

However, among those with higher levels of attainment, Career Check does provide the opportunity to identify those where there is cause for concern regarding their career planning capabilities. These findings demonstrate the intricacy with which pupils are identified as needing support.

A recent study of Year 11 pupils in England (Moote and Archer, 2016)<sup>2</sup> has again raised concerns that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to receive careers education. However, this and previous research on the provision and take-up of careers guidance within schools has generally been based upon voluntary surveys and could be subject to problems associated with response bias (Anderson, et al. 2004<sup>3</sup>; Furlong, 2006<sup>4</sup>; Haynes et al, 2013<sup>5</sup>).

**Our analysis based on administrative data provides a more nuanced understanding of how careers guidance is primarily targeted at disadvantaged groups. By providing us with a better understanding of the population at risk, these findings also have important implications in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of careers guidance.**

## What next

For the purpose of this analysis, we have only used data from five measures from the Career Check survey related to an individual's capacity for career planning. It is now important for us to examine other data from Career Check to see what variables are most important in predicting which pupils receive careers guidance support. This work will also be supported by interviews with careers guidance advisors to hear first-hand about how they use the data collected from Career Check. It is also necessary to examine how higher intensity of support manifests itself in the data. For example, do those who are identified as requiring Level 3 support simply receive an increased number of interviews or do they receive different combinations or 'bundles' of interventions?

## 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

<sup>1</sup> School Action + is a category of support for pupils who need more help which is provided within their school for pupils with special education, or additional learning needs.

<sup>2</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.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, S., Biggart, A., Deacon, K., Furlong, A., Given, L., and Hinds, K. (2004). 17 in 2003 Scotland's Young People: Findings from the Scottish School Leavers Survey. Prepared for the Scottish Executive Education Department.

<sup>4</sup> Furlong, A. (2006). Not a very NEET solution: representing problematic labour market transitions among early school-leavers. *Work, Employment and Society*. 20(3), pp. 553-569.

<sup>5</sup> Haynes, G., McCrone, T., and 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*, 2(4), pp.459-482.

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This research has been carried out as part of the ADR Wales programme of work, as part of the Skills and Employability thematic research area. The thematic research areas are aligned to the priority themes as identified in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government. ADR Wales brings together data science experts at Swansea University Medical School, staff from the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD) at Cardiff University and specialist teams within the Welsh Government to develop new evidence which supports the Programme for Government by using the SAIL Databank at Swansea University, to link and analyse anonymised data. ADR Wales is part of the Economic and Social Research Council (part of UK Research and Innovation) funded ADR UK.

For further information please contact

[Cathrine.E.Richards@Swansea.ac.uk](mailto:Cathrine.E.Richards@Swansea.ac.uk)

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