
Impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales advisers

May 2022

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Executive summary

In the autumn term of 2021-22 inspectors visited a sample of secondary schools, special schools, pupil referral units (PRU) and education other than at school (EOTAS) across Wales to observe one-to-one guidance sessions between Careers Wales advisers and young people. We spoke to young people receiving guidance, teachers, careers advisers and Careers Wales leaders and managers. We also looked at a wide range of documents related to careers information advice and guidance provided by Careers Wales.

We found most of the young people eligible for a guidance session at the schools and settings we visited make good progress from their differing starting points when creating their plans for the future. They discuss their ideas and respond well to questions and challenges posed when a plan may seem risky. Where young people begin their guidance session with unrealistic plans and ideas, this usually stems from a lack of support from their school or setting. Following guidance, these young people make very good progress towards understanding the post-16 routes available to them.

We saw most careers advisers were well-prepared for their guidance sessions, particularly where they have well established relationships with providers, and they share key information. Advisers are effective and provide clear and appropriate advice for next steps for young people to carry out. Specialist additional learning needs (ALN) advisers support young people with ALN in their transition planning and have a comprehensive understanding of education, employment and training opportunities. However, the Welsh Government have not yet identified how Careers Wales will work with local authorities to provide this support under the reformed ALN system. While careers advisers understand schools' protocols for safeguarding and can name their school's designated safeguarding person (DSP), a minority are less clear about the company's protocols and DSP.

Careers Wales' Brighter Futures vision (Careers Wales, 2021) aims to target the young people most in need of independent advice and guidance to make informed choices. However, we found it is not always clear how leaders and managers plan to measure impact and effectiveness of their services and overall strategy. For example, they do not analyse the proportion of young people who drop out of their post-16 progression option before completing their goal, nor is there a clear strategy to improve young people's levels of engagement. Overall, the company's processes for evaluating the impact of its services are underdeveloped with too much focus on client satisfaction and no analysis of what impact the service has on improving young peoples' career planning and decision-making. This impedes the company's ability to base improvement planning on a reliable or rigorous analysis of its service strengths and areas for improvement.

We hope the following recommendations will support Careers Wales to further improve its work with young people:

- develop systems and appropriate criteria to evaluate the impact that services have on the effectiveness and resilience of young people's career planning and decision-making
- ensure that effective evaluation, based on accurate, comprehensive and relevant evidence, informs strategic planning and quality improvement
- strengthen links with other careers companies to improve opportunities for professional learning and developing good practice
- continue to ensure that analysis from quality assurance activities is fed back to individual schools to strengthen careers and work-related education
- ensure that all staff promote young people's awareness of the value of the Welsh language as an employment skill
- ensure that all staff understand the company's arrangements and procedures for the safeguarding of young people

Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2021-2022. This report focuses on the work of Careers Wales in relation to the impartial advice and guidance it provides for young people aged 14-16 in mainstream secondary schools, pupil referral units (PRUs), educated other than at school (EOTAS) settings and special schools. The report draws upon evidence from visits to schools and settings conducted during the autumn term of 2021, observations of one-to-one guidance sessions with careers advisers and scrutiny of documents and material provided by Careers Wales. We also interviewed young people receiving guidance, teachers in schools and settings, careers advisers and a variety of managers and leaders across the company structure of Careers Wales. A few planned visits could not take place due the rapid spread of the Omicron variant during November and December 2021.

This thematic report is the first of a series of thematic reviews with a focus around the work of Careers Wales in supporting clients to make informed choices towards their career pathways. This thematic review focuses on the independent advice and guidance that Careers Wales delivers through its careers advisers to young people aged 14-16. The review scope did not include the wider work that Careers Wales provides for this age group, such as employer engagement activities, parental engagement, support for those entering the labour market or professional learning and coaching services for schools. The findings of the review will be applicable to all sectors as educational policy in Wales shifts to the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales from 2022 and the element of Careers and Work Related Experiences for 3 to 16-year-olds, which will replace the current Careers and World of Work framework for 11 to 19-year-olds.

Background

The Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998) provided powers for the Welsh Government to request Estyn to inspect careers services in Wales on its behalf. Between 2003 and 2009, we inspected each of the six careers companies in place at that time in Wales.

On 1 April 2013, six individual careers companies across Wales came together under one common brand, Careers Wales. Careers Choices Dewis Gyrfa Ltd (CCDG), trading as Gyrfa Cymru Careers Wales, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government.

Careers Wales is contracted by the Welsh Government to provide advice, guidance and other services to:

- those in full-time education in schools and colleges of further education
- those in part-time education
- any people aged under 21 who have left education (other than higher education) or full-time training, up to two years earlier
- those with disabilities (including those with learning difficulties), until they are settled in their career intentions
- education institutions
- employers
- training providers
- parents and carers

Its purpose is to provide bilingual, all age, independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG), which includes statutory school-age pupils of 14-16 years of age, who are the focus of this review.

Careers Wales also has a separate brand, Working Wales, which delivers careers advice and guidance and develops the employability of adult and young people over the age of 16 who have left school.

Careers Wales employs over 600 staff. It is led by a Chief Executive who is supported by a senior leadership team, with each of the ten members overseeing a specific aspect of the organisation. For example, there is a Director of Delivery and Development, a Head of Services to Young People and a Head of Quality and Planning.

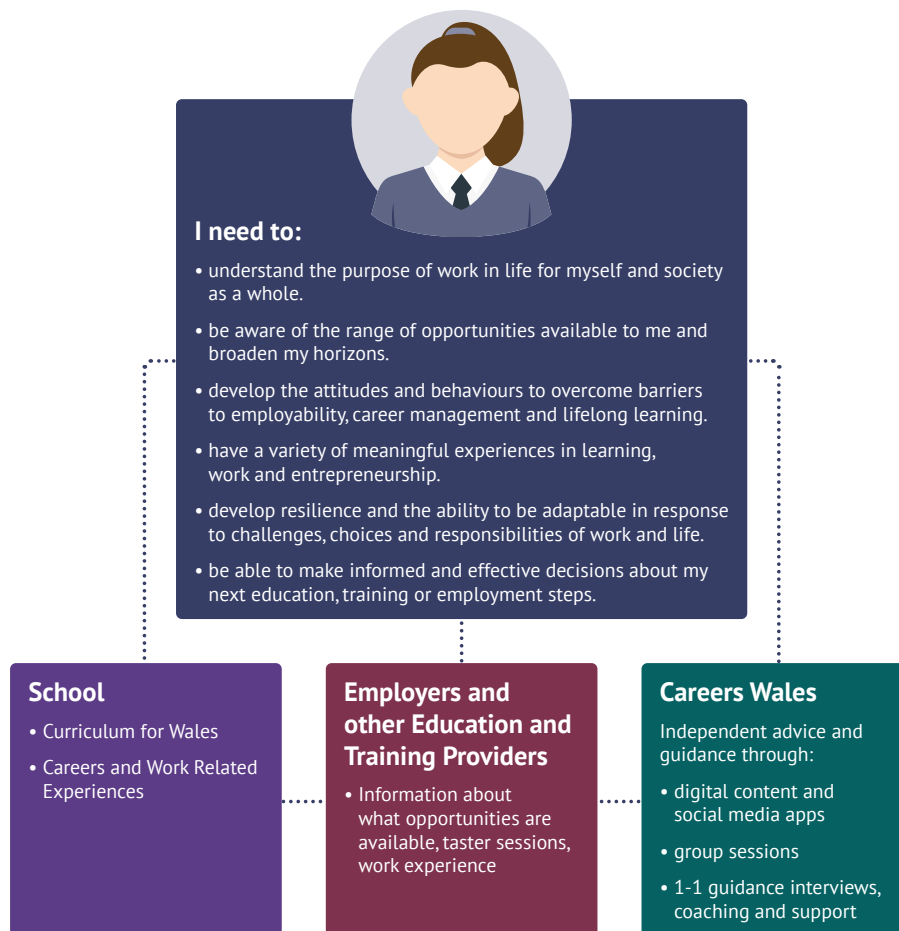
Careers Wales company structure is a national structure but the services to young people is divided into four regions and these are managed by 11 operational delivery managers who oversee the work within each region. Team managers support the work of the operational delivery managers across Wales. There are 15 team managers directly managing careers advisers and their caseloads of schools, settings and clients.

Careers advisers work with each of their schools and PRUs at the start of the new school year to create the partnership agreement for the activities to be carried out over the year. This useful document outlines the school's needs in terms of support from Careers Wales and the activities to be carried out during each term, as well as providing timescales for each activity. One of these activities is the 'Careers Check' screening questionnaire, which all young people complete for Careers Wales during Year 10. In this questionnaire young people identify how developed their career ideas are. The partnership agreement clearly identifies key members of staff and contacts from the school and Careers Wales and their contact details.

The role of Careers Wales' professionally qualified careers advisers is to help clients manage their life-long career choices effectively. In relation to their work with 14 to 16-year-olds, they work with schools and employers to help pupils to understand the world of work. They use a variety of approaches, for example supporting employer engagement activities such as traditional careers fairs and webinars, as well as working directly with young people. In schools, advisers hold consultancy meetings and support the delivery of careers-focused statutory curriculum provision, currently the 'Careers and the World of Work' framework (Welsh Government, 2008). This framework will be replaced incrementally from 2022 by the cross-cutting theme of 'Careers and Work-Related Experiences' as part of the Curriculum for Wales.

The work of Careers Wales, schools, employers and other education and training providers need to complement each other to ensure that learners get the knowledge, understanding and experiences they need to make decisions and plan for their progress towards employment. Their respective roles are summarised in Figure 1. This report looked in particular at the one-to-one careers adviser aspects of Careers Wales' work but also considers how this aspect of provision interacts with the work of schools and others.

Figure 1: The roles of Careers Wales, schools, employers and other training providers in supporting learners with making informed decisions and career planning



In its latest five year strategy, 'Brighter Futures', Careers Wales (2021a, p14) identifies one of its goals as 'to support people in Wales and to make sure that everyone has the chance for a brighter future'. It aims to achieve this by providing services that:

- support young people and adults to make positive transitions into education, employment or training (EET), including apprenticeships, and understand the skills required to succeed in the labour market and contribute to the future economy of Wales
- support clients who require enhanced levels of support to make positive transitions into appropriate provision
- raise clients' awareness of EET and other progression opportunities
- improve access to the benefits of careers guidance and coaching support through collaboration and engagement with partners
- target help to those young people who most need it

Careers Wales' Operational Plan for 2021-2022 outlines its offer for young people as:

'a personalised service delivered in collaboration with schools, colleges, EOTAS providers and other partners and influencers, including parents. It will involve all key stakeholders, ensuring that our work is integrated, preventative and focussed on a balance between the short and long-term needs of customers. The service will be focused on:

- broadening horizons;
- raising their awareness of the skills required in the modern labour market;
- development of the key skills for career planning, both short and long-term;
- support at key transition points for young people that need it.' (Careers Wales, 2021b, p3)

To work towards this, Careers Wales offers a differentiated model of careers guidance for 14 to 16-year-olds:

Figure 2: Levels of support provided by Careers Wales (table provided by Careers Wales)

Level	Support	Categories of learners supported	Types of support
1	Universal Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole Year group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Group sessions ○ Digital keep in touch and information updates ○ Parent evenings
2	Career Check Support (60% of remaining cohort after taking out Targeted Support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Unfocused ✓ Seeking an apprenticeship ✓ Talented but underachieving ✓ Labour market entrants ✓ Lacking in confidence or motivation to make things happen. ✓ Unrealistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guidance and Coaching interview (and above)
3	Targeted Support (30% of cohort)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Learners eligible for free school meals (FSM) ✓ Looked After Children ✓ Poor Attenders ✓ Young carers ✓ EOTAS (PRU and Alternative curriculum) ✓ Those learners at risk of becoming NEET ✓ School Action + learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guidance and Coaching support. ○ Guidance needs assessment. ○ High, Medium, or Low support – equates to more time.

4	ALN support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Statemented or statement equivalent learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guidance and Coaching ○ Group work ○ Transition reviews ○ Learning and Skills Plan ○ Specialist college Funding application ○ Parent contact and parent evenings
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This report focuses on the delivery and impact of the one-to-one guidance sessions between advisers and targeted clients in the level two and three support, and meetings with providers to discuss the level four support.

Main findings

- 1 Careers Wales provides an appropriate tiered range of support for 14 to 16-year-olds, with the highest level of interaction and support for those that need it most. Careers advisors use information from the Careers Check to help target individual careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) sessions where they are needed.

Outcomes

- 2 The majority of young people participate well in their CIAG sessions. In these sessions, nearly all young people develop an effective working relationship with their careers adviser and contribute appropriately to discussions. They respond to questions fully and often improve their knowledge and insight as the session unfolds. They feel that careers advisers listen to their ideas and that advisers are keen to help and support them making choices. They were pleased to be challenged by the advisers to consider their plans. They felt that the sessions were beneficial.
- 3 Nearly all young people work with their careers adviser to formulate a clear plan of action for achieving their goals. Many of these plans are flexible, enabling young people to avoid rejecting options before they need to. Nearly all young people agree to complete these actions within the timescales set.
- 4 Young people in PRUs, special schools and education other than at school (EOTAS) make similar progress during interviews to that of their peers in mainstream secondary schools. Most importantly, they develop a rapport with their adviser that can become a helpful foundation for future sessions.
- 5 Nearly all the young people who attend careers guidance sessions have partly formed aims, and already have ideas to explore. Many have a satisfactory insight into their strengths and weaknesses, including their expected grades in GCSE. These young people have a broad idea of their career aim, but before the interview are not sufficiently aware of the range of progression options available to enable them to make an informed decision about their best progression route. Often this is compounded by their lack of understanding of the labour market or ideas that are unrealistic. In schools that have not supported young people to explore their options in detail or develop their knowledge of jobs or career routes, advisers have to spend too much time during the interview giving young people information, rather than helping them to evaluate their ideas. In general, young people in PRUs, special schools and EOTAS have less formed ideas of their career aim.

Provision

- 6 In most instances, careers advisers are well prepared for their guidance sessions with young people. This is particularly the case where advisers have well-established relationships with the school and have agreed protocols for information sharing. In these instances, the school's detailed and accurate information helps advisers to plan their guidance carefully to meet their young people's needs.

- 7 In a few cases, where the school does not provide the adviser with adequate access to information about the young person, too much time is spent finding out background information about young people in the early part of the interview. This reduces the time the adviser has to support young people to develop their career planning.
- 8 In most interviews, advisers use a range of effective techniques to help young people to 'tell their story' about their circumstances, priorities and ideas, encouraging them to participate fully in the interview. They use a good blend of questioning techniques to develop an understanding of the client's stage of development. However, in a few cases, advisers use leading questions, which fail to ensure that the client's point of view is explored fully. Many advisers explore their client's ideas extensively, enabling young people to improve their understanding of what their choices might involve.
- 9 In nearly all sessions, advisers give clear and appropriate advice about what further research young people need to carry out. Many advisers discuss appropriate contingency planning with young people. Where they have not considered a contingency plan, most advisers encourage them to do so in order to improve the resilience of their planning. For example, a young person may be helped to identify a secondary option if their main plan is not feasible or is risky. Nearly all advisers agree an appropriate plan of action with the client and identify appropriate timescales for them to take action. Many advisers arrange follow-up interviews to review progress against planned actions.
- 10 Careers Wales' contribution to achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050 is not clear. Brighter Futures (Careers Wales, 2021a) identifies that the company will do this by ensuring that clients understand the value of Welsh language skills in the economy. In a few cases, advisers are unaware that the client speaks Welsh and therefore do not encourage them to consider the potential impact of this on their plans.
- 11 Currently, specialist additional learning needs (ALN) advisers support young people with ALN in their transition planning and have a comprehensive understanding of education, employment and training opportunities and supporting funding mechanisms. The Welsh Government has not yet identified how Careers Wales will work with local authorities to provide this support under the reformed ALN system.
- 12 Overall, there are appropriate arrangements in place to hand over young people who are leaving statutory education at 16 years of age to a member of the Working Wales team to continue support with seeking appropriate opportunities. However, for young people with more complex needs, such as those young people attending PRUs, this can mean a break in relationship with the careers advisers with whom they have built trust.
- 13 Careers Wales' digital presence has improved its relationship with parents, particularly for those young people who require additional support. The Careers Wales digital team have developed a well-considered strategy to ensure that the materials they produce support young people in making informed decisions about their future. During the pandemic, the digital team enabled Careers Wales to continue to provide a service digitally to young people when face-to-face sessions

were not possible. During the first period of lockdown, Careers Wales reported a decrease in the number of users accessing its website, and the proportion of targeted young people who did not receive the appropriate support during the pandemic is unclear.

- 14 All careers advisers understand schools' protocols for safeguarding and can name their school's designated safeguarding person (DSP). However, only a majority of advisers can clearly explain the Careers Wales protocols and name the company's DSP.

Leadership

- 15 Brighter Futures (Careers Wales, 2021a) sets out a clear vision for Careers Wales' work and identifies its aim to target those young people most in need of independent advice and guidance and to support them to make successful and informed choices and maintain their progression in education, employment or training. Brighter Futures (Careers Wales, 2021a) helpfully identifies the expected immediate, intermediate and long-term impacts of careers guidance and coaching. It is not clear how leaders and managers plan to measure these impacts to help them understand the effectiveness of their services and their overall strategy.
- 16 Careers Wales collects useful destination data when young people leave school and shares this information with stakeholders. It works well in partnership with local authorities to ensure that young people in danger of becoming 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) are offered tailored support to meet their needs. Although leaders and managers analyse destination data, they do not do so with sufficient precision or rigour. In particular, they do not monitor or analyse the proportion of young people who drop out of their post-16 progression option before completing their goal. There is no clear strategy to improve young people's levels of engagement or a target to aim for. This makes the impact of the guidance session in Key Stage 4 or ongoing targeted support difficult to analyse.
- 17 Overall, the company's processes for evaluating the impact of its services are underdeveloped. The company's evaluation of its service relies too heavily on client satisfaction measures, and does not analyse what impact the service has on improving the quality of clients' planning or decision-making. This impedes the company's ability to base improvement planning on a reliable or rigorous analysis of its service strengths and areas for improvement.
- 18 The company has developed an increasing emphasis on self-reflective practice. Careers advisers benefit from peer-to-peer support by meeting regularly to discuss key topics and explore solutions. Careers advisers regularly review the progress and quality of their work with their managers. Team managers also conduct annual observations of guidance sessions to quality assure guidance services. Advisers and their managers do not focus enough on the impact of careers advice and guidance upon the progress of young people's career planning.
- 19 Careers Wales has strong partnerships with many of the schools it works with but does not feedback information systematically from CIAG sessions to help improve the quality of careers and work-related education delivered by schools. Currently, the

work of schools and Careers Wales is not aligned closely enough to have maximum impact for young people.

- 20 Nearly all advisers communicate regularly with their managers and attend termly caseload meetings help them plan their work. These meetings help managers to identify training needs, both at an individual or team level.
- 21 Initial links have been made with another careers company but overall there are not enough opportunities to celebrate and share effective practice across the organisation and learn from other organisations.

Recommendations

Careers Wales should:

- R1 Develop systems and appropriate criteria to evaluate the impact that services have on the effectiveness and resilience of young people's career planning and decision-making
- R2 Ensure that effective evaluation, based on accurate, comprehensive and relevant evidence, informs strategic planning and quality improvement
- R3 Strengthen links with other careers companies to improve opportunities for professional learning and developing good practice
- R4 Continue to ensure that analysis from quality assurance activities is fed back to individual schools to strengthen careers and work-related education
- R5 Ensure that all staff promote young people's awareness of the value of the Welsh language as an employment skill
- R6 Ensure that all staff understand the company's arrangements and procedures for the safeguarding of young people

Outcomes

Careers guidance sessions

At the start of a careers guidance session, nearly all young people express that they understand confidentiality and can explain what this means, often following support from the careers adviser. Young people also understand what safeguarding is and that there could be times when the adviser may need to break confidentiality in order to keep them safe.

Nearly all young people have a broad understanding of what they hope to achieve from sessions with their adviser, although the clarity of their aims varies considerably. The majority of these young people have already begun to develop their own ideas about a possible careers path based on their knowledge of labour market opportunities or through their own experiences. Often these initial ideas stem from earlier school-based discussions or their own experiences of the world of work through personal interests or family connections. A minority of young people have not conducted enough research to extend their knowledge of employment opportunities or career routes to make enough progress in developing their plans. In nearly all cases, the guidance session is planned around the young person's responses in their 'Career Check' screening questionnaire, which pupils complete for Careers Wales during Year 10. At the time of their guidance session, young people recall the information they provided and explain their thoughts behind their initial career choices. Careers advisers use these to identify clients who are unsure of their next steps or want to refer themselves for help to plan their career progression.

A few clients are poorly prepared for their guidance session, often because school staff have given them short notice of their interview. This could be due to schools substituting appointments where young people are absent or unable to be released from a lesson. Since March 2020, this has often been as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic where young people's absences have been higher than usual. This impacts adversely on their ability to articulate their thoughts about any initial aims they may have or explain why they are considering the options they want to talk about.

Many clients have a satisfactory insight into their strengths and weaknesses and can discuss them appropriately with their adviser. Most are clear about their expected grades at GCSE, which match broadly the views of the school. In most cases, this information is shared with the careers adviser ahead of the guidance session. This gives the client time during the interview to explore their ideas and develop appropriate plans. Most advisers receive other information, such as whether a client has special educational needs, which helps the adviser to build an accurate profile of a client's circumstances.

In a few cases, clients are not sufficiently aware at the start of their interview of the range of progression options available to them. In these instances, their ideas are either unrealistic or based on inaccurate information, or do not take into account the

opportunities available within the labour market. This impacts adversely upon their ability to make an informed decision about their best progression route.

The majority of young people participate well in their guidance sessions. In these sessions, they develop a useful working relationship with their careers adviser and contribute well to discussions. For example, in a few guidance sessions, young people discuss key behaviours that they feel would be most important to abide by during the session, such as openness and honesty. They feel that careers advisers listen to their ideas and that advisers are keen to help and support them making choices.

Through their open discussions with their adviser, most young people improve their awareness of the range of post-16 options available to them, such as apprenticeships, remaining in their current school's sixth form or attending another school or a further education college. They also discover the range and levels of courses that may be suitable for them to pursue in order to make progress towards their overall aim. Following a guidance session, most young people discuss and evaluate appropriately the pros and cons of the options they are considering. In a few schools, young people start their interviews ill-informed about possible post-16 pathways, often where the school's delivery of the careers and the world of work is weak.

During guidance sessions, most young people respond to questions fully and often develop deeper knowledge and insight. Nearly all work effectively with the careers adviser to formulate a clear plan of actions towards achieving their goals. They work well with their adviser to explore online resources, such as the Careers Wales website, as a starting point for discovering potential careers based on subject preferences and strengths. Young people provide their adviser with suggestions and these become the basis for exploring other websites, such as further education colleges and the range of courses they offer, as well as sites to locate apprenticeships.

Many young people create helpful plans that have multiple actions. They develop an understanding of how to plan flexibly in order to delay critical decisions that may limit their options. These young people learn that they can keep their options open for longer before they commit to a particular career path. For example, a minority decide to submit applications to more than one progression option, thus delaying the point at which they have to make final decisions. By the end of their guidance session, most young people are more aware of the labour market implications of their choices and have improved their understanding of how the availability of employment opportunities within their locality may affect their decisions. For example, a few young people realise that they may need to move away from their current area in order to access certain types of employment or training. Nearly all young people agree to complete their action plan objectives within the timescales they set with their adviser. They were pleased to be challenged by the advisers to consider their plans. They felt that the sessions were beneficial. When offered, most young people make arrangements for a follow-up interview with their careers advisers to discuss progress towards objectives and review their plan. However, Careers Wales do not monitor the proportion of the young people who make progress towards their objectives.

Careers guidance sessions in pupil referral units, EOTAS provision and special schools

In PRUs, clients make similar progress to their peers in mainstream secondary schools. Many become increasingly engaged in their guidance session as it progresses, from discussing their original thoughts to developing a manageable plan of action. They begin to develop trusting relationships with their adviser, even when this is their first guidance session. By the end of the meeting, most clients are aware of timescales and the next steps they need to take, whether these are towards an apprenticeship, to access further education or to enter the labour market.

In EOTAS provision, most clients also make similar progress during guidance sessions to that of their peers in mainstream secondary schools. At the start of their guidance session, many young people have a variety of ideas regarding their potential career. A few have ideas that are based on their own work experience or that of family members. By the end of their sessions, most young people have a clearer understanding of the career ideas they would like to aim for and what they should do to work towards these. Through their discussions they gain a good understanding of the adviser's role in helping them.

At the start of guidance sessions, most young people in special schools have a limited awareness of the post-16 options available to them. As their guidance sessions progress, they learn more about options such as remaining in school, attending a further education or specialist college or what work-based learning entails. They participate well in job-matching quizzes through the Careers Wales website and use the site to explore options of interest to them. A few young people leave their session aware of the purpose of the career guidance and have begun to build a relationship of trust with their adviser, and this helps them to become less anxious about their future plans.

The targeted group for level 2 support includes those young people who have ALN, plan to leave education at 16, are eligible for free school meals or do not have a focused careers aim. All young people in the targeted group are required to complete a questionnaire at the end of the session, in addition to the electronic questionnaire all clients are asked to complete. This is not a fully effective evaluation tool as the results can be misleading. For example, where clients indicate that after the interview they have a career idea, this does not take into account whether the idea developed before or during the guidance session. In addition, where clients complete a questionnaire in the presence of the interviewer, the immediate request for a response does not allow the young person time to reflect on the progress they have made during the guidance session.

Provision

Preparing for careers guidance interview sessions

Most careers advisers prepare well for their guidance sessions with young people. This is helped by their good relationships with schools, with whom they have clear protocols for information sharing. As a result, these advisers have detailed and accurate information about young people, such as their school performance, predicted grades and details of their additional needs. This enables advisers to target their guidance accurately to their clients' needs and helps them to evaluate how realistic their clients' ideas are.

In a very few cases, schools do not give the adviser adequate access to data about their clients. Consequently, advisers spend too much time finding out background information about clients in the early part of interviews. This reduces the time available to support the young people in developing their career planning.

Towards the end of Year 10, young people fill out in a 'Career Check' questionnaire. Nearly all careers advisers analyse the information in this questionnaire appropriately. This helps them to prioritise those young people who do not have clear career aims or whose aims do not match their abilities closely enough. During interviews, careers advisers check appropriately with the client whether the information is still relevant, and they use this feedback to plan and revise their guidance strategy suitably. Young people recall their thoughts at the time of completion in Year 10 and, where appropriate, explain why they were unclear of their future plans or why these may have changed over the course of time. In schools that have not supported young people effectively to explore their options in detail, such as through an effective Careers and the World of Work programme, too many young people have a poor understanding of the progression opportunities available to them. This results in advisers having to spend too much of an interview giving clients information, rather than helping them to evaluate their options.

Careers guidance interview sessions

In nearly all schools, advisers make appropriate arrangements to ensure that they maintain social distancing, keep the environment and their resources hygienic and keep clients as safe as they can when delivering guidance sessions in relation to the COVID-19 restrictions at the time of our visits.

Careers advisers explain the parameters of confidentiality well, checking the client's understanding skilfully. They explain their role and the purpose of the interview clearly. Generally, careers advisers use language that is well matched to the client's level of understanding. Where appropriate, advisers use helpful pictorial methods to enable clients to express their feelings. In a very few cases, advisers' language is overly formal and not client-centred enough.

In the early stages of interviews, nearly all advisers help clients to express how they wish to benefit from the session. They use this understanding appropriately to plan

discussions and check regularly that they are meeting a client's needs. In most interviews, careers advisers use a range of techniques well to help young people to 'tell their story' about their circumstances, priorities and ideas, encouraging them to participate fully in their interview. They listen carefully, using verbal and non-verbal cues, to assess clients' guidance needs.

Most advisers use effective questioning to develop an understanding of the client's stage of development. Questions such as 'tell me about yourself', 'what do you like doing?', or 'what is most important to you when you are working with someone?' help to give the client control and ownership of the conversation and allow the adviser to find out information about a client's priorities and interests. In a few cases, advisers use leading questions, which fail to ensure that the client's point of view is explored fully, for example, 'don't you think this career is worth considering?'

In most cases, advisers explore their clients' ideas comprehensively, enabling young people to develop realistic aims and understand the potential implications of their choices. They give clear and appropriate advice about what further research young people need to carry out. Advisers make regular reference to the Careers Wales website as an example of a trusted source of information and, where necessary, help clients to explore the website. In around half of the sessions observed, advisers directed young people to other relevant resources, such as from local sixth forms, further education colleges and websites relevant to those seeking an apprenticeship.

Many advisers discuss appropriate contingency planning with young people. In the majority of instances, young people already have a backup plan, in which case advisers validate their plan or suggest additional actions that the client may need to take to improve their planning, such as by strengthening their results in a particular GCSE subject. Where young people have not considered a contingency plan, most advisers encourage them to do so and in the majority of cases include this in their action plan. This improves the flexibility of young people's planning.

Nearly all advisers agree an appropriate plan of action with the client and identify timescales for young people to take action. Many advisers arrange follow-up interviews to review how well a client is putting into practice the actions agreed during the interview.

In a few cases, advisers fail to identify that a client speaks Welsh. As a result, they do not encourage the client to consider the career and employment-related value of this skill or provide an option to carry out the interview in Welsh. Careers advisers are not clear about how the company will support the Welsh Government to reach its aim of achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

In addition to their work in schools, Careers Wales advisers work with young people who receive elective home education as part of their caseload. This group of young people largely receive their support following contacting Careers Wales, either through their website or by making telephone contact. Legislation around data protection and a young person's confidentiality means that identifying these young people is often difficult.

All careers advisers understand schools' protocols for safeguarding and can name their school's designated safeguarding person (DSP). However, a minority are unclear about the Careers Wales safeguarding protocols and are unable to name the company's DSP.

Specialist careers advisers

Advisers working in settings such as special schools or PRUs have a strong understanding of clients' emotional barriers, cognitive development and abilities. They are careful to adapt language and the content of advice to reflect this. They put clients at ease successfully and gain their confidence, often focusing on areas of the client's personal interest to encourage them. In these cases, advisers take particular care to tailor activities to clients' abilities, taking effective account of their attention span, emotional state and other potential barriers to their understanding. Advisers working with these clients are realistic about what clients can achieve in interviews. Consequently, they often aim to develop a client's planning skills in small stages. They plan flexibly to meet the needs of clients and families, often working closely with parents to support them to understand the options open to them.

Specialist advisers working with clients who have additional learning needs are particularly skilled in supporting their clients. They begin a structured series of support interventions with clients in Year 9 and support clients as they move through the school to develop their transition planning. These advisers provide a high degree of advocacy for their clients, representing clients' views and needs in meetings with relevant stakeholders, such as specialist further education providers. They use their assessments of clients' needs to complete detailed learning and skills plans, which give helpful advice about a client's training needs and enable opportunity providers to tailor provision accordingly. However, there are no formal arrangements to track retention and the onward destinations of this group of young people, or to identify how well post-16 progression options enable them to access employment.

Specialist advisers have built up a rich web of contacts to enable them to provide high levels of support to clients with ALN. Recent changes to legislation with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) no longer gives these advisers a statutory role in assessing clients' needs or advocating on their behalf. Advisers, Careers Wales and staff in special schools are not yet clear about how this role will adapt to the changes set out in the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) and Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021) in order to ensure that clients with ALN have access to independent advice and guidance. There are particular concerns about how the local authority will meet the duty on it to provide impartial advice and guidance to learners if careers advisers are employed directly by the local authority, or if their involvement in the process is reduced below the current level of service provision. The Welsh Government has not yet made clear its expectations of how local authorities should work with Careers Wales to support transition planning for learners with ALN.

Additional learning needs

All ALN careers advisers belong to a local team with whom they communicate regularly. This has helped them to, for example, highlight the increasing number of learners who have an autistic spectrum condition (ASC). Additionally, team managers conduct annual observations of guidance sessions to quality assure consistency as part of the personal development programme for careers advisers. This includes observing advisers within a client's annual review meeting where advisers are asked to identify their own learning needs. Careers Wales also provides training at a national level and have organised several all-Wales workshops on writing a good Learning and Skills Plan or funding applications for specialist ALN provision. Leaders regularly discuss updates on ALN reform, to inform business planning sessions.

Careers Wales has clear arrangements for determining the level and nature of service within these partnership agreements with PRUs and special schools. This provides advisers with scope to respond appropriately and flexibly, adjusting the support and ensuring the service is tailored to the needs of clients in each school. Similarly, there is a robust level of communication between advisers based in schools and those based in colleges.

Overall, the company has appropriate arrangements for careers advisers to hand over clients who are leaving statutory education at 16 years of age to a member of the Working Wales team. This means that Careers Wales can continue to support these young people in seeking appropriate opportunities in education, training and employment. In these cases, specialist advisers work well with clients in need of additional support or who have ALN and they continue to work with these clients to progress towards other opportunities. For clients with complex needs who may attend organisations such as PRUs, this can mean a break in relationship with the careers advisers with whom they have built up trust.

Digital strategies

The Careers Wales digital team have developed a well-considered strategy to enable the service to support young people in making informed decisions about their future. The digital strategy aligns well to the 'Brighter Futures' strategic plan (Careers Wales, 2021a) and complements the independent advice and guidance Careers Wales provides for young people aged 14-16 years. During the pandemic, the digital team enabled Careers Wales to continue to provide a service digitally to clients when face-to-face sessions were not possible. Advisers pre-recorded sessions similar to those they would have delivered in schools and uploaded their material to digital platforms. Often, digital material includes live sessions with employers that enable young people to interact with them and ask questions. During the first period of lockdown, Careers Wales reported a decrease in the number of users accessing its website but were unclear about what factors may have contributed towards this.

The digital team regularly participate in formal and informal evaluation of their work. They use this evaluation to plan improvements to the website, such as by providing geographic intelligence for young people, so that they can see, for example, where particular types of apprenticeships are offered around Wales. Although leaders and

managers have a clear understanding of the requirements of the digital platform, overall, there is not a clear strategy to evaluate how well digital services improve clients' career planning.

Welsh language

Careers Wales 'Brighter Futures' strategy (Careers Wales, 2021a) aims to support the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 vision of achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050 through its bilingual service and ensuring young people are fully aware of the opportunities that Welsh language skills offer to future careers choices. Leaders have high expectations for the delivery of Welsh language goals set by the Welsh Government. However, staff at all levels, including senior leaders, are not clear what the company needs to do to support the Welsh Government to reach its target.

The company aims to deliver provision in the language of choice. Advisers use the information gathered via the online 'Career Check', to identify a young person's language preference ahead of their guidance session to ensure the correct resource allocation is in place. The company uses this information well to plan its resources. For example, 40% of the Careers Wales team in north Wales is bilingual to help meet the language preference demand. This provision is particularly strong for young people with ALN in Welsh-medium settings. In Welsh-medium settings, staff have a good understanding of how the Welsh language can help young people to make progress in their chosen career. However, in a few cases, careers advisers in non-Welsh-medium secondary schools fail to identify young people who can speak Welsh and therefore do not promote the value of this skill to their employment prospects or offer to carry out a guidance interview in Welsh.

Careers advisers have good access to bilingual resources and most display these prominently in rooms where they conduct guidance sessions in schools and settings. Advisers have further support from the company's translation service. The company's website is fully bilingual and recruitment exercises consider succession planning to cover language needs.

Leadership and management

Operational management of advisers' work

In Careers Wales' vision document 'Brighter Futures' (Careers Wales, 2021a) one of their aims is to 'support customers who require enhanced levels of support to make positive transitions into appropriate provision.' (Careers Wales, 2021a, p14). There are appropriate arrangements to identify the size of client cohorts and to allocate caseloads equitably among careers advisers. Line managers have a clear understanding of how this process works and manage it well. Managers hold frequent discussions with staff and these sessions help to ensure their advisers understand how caseloads are allocated. Line managers hold regular meetings with advisers to monitor their progress with their caseloads. During most interviews observed, the adviser arranged a follow-up review. Whilst this benefits the client, advisers were unclear as to how often they could do this without it impacting adversely on their caseload obligations.

Managers hold termly caseload meetings with staff and have suitable systems in place to support advisers who need to develop their skills or who need to prioritise their workload. These regular conversations and meetings help to identify training needs, both at an individual or team level. In addition to their regular caseload reviews, managers monitor advisers' documentation and discuss the quality of guidance they issue to young people. Middle managers monitor the accuracy of the data the advisers in their team upload to the management information system. This process, in addition to the annual observations of advisers' work, is used appropriately to identify advisers' potential support needs. However, these discussions do not focus closely enough on the impact of advisers' work on the progress of clients' career planning.

Regional managers communicate well with their staff. They make good use of technology to ensure that communication has been maintained during times when the face-to-face interaction is not possible, particularly during periods of significant pandemic-related restrictions.

Team managers recognise the value in prioritising careers advisers' time to support schools and wider partners to enable their clients to gain useful insights into the world of work. This is particularly important as Careers Wales is a valued partner in multi-agency meetings and local planning meetings, for example with employers and local authorities. These meetings ensure that the most appropriate agencies are involved in engaging with young people who are identified as furthest from the job market or as most vulnerable of being not in education, employment or training.

Partnership agreements

Nearly all schools have a helpful, comprehensive partnership agreement in place with Careers Wales. This agreement takes account of the schools' needs and lays out plans for what the school and the company will deliver to support young people. In most cases, these plans are monitored regularly and effectively.

Professional learning for staff

Across the company, there is an increasing emphasis on encouraging careers advisers to reflect on their own performance and practice. Careers advisers benefit from peer-to-peer support by meeting regularly to discuss key topics and explore solutions. Careers Wales has a supportive approach to managing underperformance, with staff being encouraged to highlight their problems early. There is appropriate support in place to coach advisers, and they have appropriate access to learning materials. Where necessary, team managers will meet with them regularly and produce individual action plans.

Careers Wales staff deliver useful career skills training to trainee teachers and employers. This important work raises the profile of the value of guidance and develops an understanding of the importance of accurate labour market intelligence to help young people make informed decisions.

There are appropriate opportunities for advisers to develop their own skills. An allocation of days is included within the company's working time model in order that they can access training. There are also helpful opportunities for underperforming staff to access learning materials and support to improve their performance, which they review with their line managers. Inevitably, the impact of the pandemic places limits on Careers Wales' ability to deliver company-wide professional learning and it relies upon individualised responses to the resources available. Therefore professional learning is likely to be inconsistent across the company. Leaders acknowledge that this approach will need reviewing as restrictions ease.

The impact of COVID-19

Inevitably, COVID-19 impacted negatively on the delivery of careers guidance in schools and other providers. During the recent pandemic restrictions, Careers Wales provided many solutions to enable young people to access independent advice and guidance, such as through the Welsh Government's 'Hwb' education platform, the company's own website and by telephone or online contact with advisers. Careers advisers linked well with providers to ensure young people had access to technology to ensure that they could interact with these resources. Additionally, many careers advisers have been trained to enable them to adopt hybrid working models. As a result, Careers Wales has increased the scope of its digital presence. Managers and advisers have noted an improvement in relationships with parents and carers to support young people, particularly those who require additional support. However, leaders are unclear about the extent to which COVID impacted adversely on service delivery and the extent to which the careers guidance needs of young people were met. They know how many interviews have taken place as this is a monitored key performance indicator, but they do not know how many young people have been interviewed or who had missed being interviewed, unless these young people have ALN.

Self-evaluation for improvement

Overall, the company's evaluation of its services is not based on sufficiently quantifiable or robust evidence. This impedes the company's service improvement

planning. Leaders explain why they have selected improvement priorities but their explanations are often based on anecdotes or are pilot projects without establishing clear impact criteria for evaluation. This leads to decision-making and judgements based on activity, rather than effect. Leaders and managers are well informed about the extent of activity taking place but, when looking at the impact of the pandemic on penetration rates, the lack of analysis can lead to gaps obscured by activity rates. Furthermore, the reliance on satisfaction-based questions to clients shows that young people feel that advisers are doing a good job, but does not identify whether the service strengthens their clients' planning. Therefore, they miss opportunities in their satisfaction surveys to question whether their service has enabled young people to improve their career planning. As a result, self-evaluation and planning for improvement focus too much on the completion of activities and do not identify or measure the intended impact of the company's work.

There are appropriate performance management arrangements for advisers. Team managers' summary reports to senior managers assist in identifying staff performance with national and regional moderation processes in place. For those advisers identified as unsatisfactory or inadequate, a coaching approach and other support is put in place to improve performance. The company's summary reports show no excellent practice. In one report, around 70% of interviews reported were judged by managers as adequate at best. Most managers and staff are not clear about what the benchmarks or criteria for good or excellent practice are, or about what the profile of judgements should be across the company. Line managers across Wales have the opportunity to meet to discuss the company's self-evaluation. Many managers are unable to articulate to extent of their involvement in this process and, as a result, are unclear about how they contribute to the overall company self-evaluation or planning for improvement.

Many team managers identified areas in which they felt the service should improve, including developing blended delivery and making increased use of digital technology. It is not clear what the company plans to do to address these areas for improvement.

Careers Wales staff regularly gather feedback from clients. Analysis of these responses shows a very high satisfaction rate across the client group. In around half of the interviews, inspectors observed advisers asking clients evaluative questions immediately after their guidance interview. In the best cases, these questions gauge whether a client has increased awareness or understanding. However, the questions posed are not designed well overall and, in a few cases, generate inappropriately positive answers. In addition, too much of the company's evaluation of its services is based on client satisfaction measures, rather than an analysis of what impact the service has on improving client's planning or career decision-making.

Careers Wales staff record 'intended destinations' of the young people they engage with through guidance sessions. Recently, the company launched a pilot scheme to enhance information gathering. This is based on those clients completing the initial 'Career Check' in Year 10 and comparing this information with their actual destination to evaluate whether the intended and actual destination correlate. It is too early to tell how this information is used to inform planning or what insight it will give into the impact of advice and guidance.

Careers Wales collects destination data when young people leave school and shares this information with stakeholders. This data indicates there is a high number of positive destinations recorded for young people, with nearly all progressing into education, employment or training (Careers Wales, 2020). The number of young people with unknown destinations is very small and, where these do exist, Careers Wales works well in partnership with local authorities to contact young people through a variety of methods. This ensures those young people are offered tailored support to meet their needs and helps them to avoid becoming 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET).

While leaders and managers analyse destination data, they do not have a clear target as to what levels of NEET young people the service aims to achieve. Neither are they clear about how to achieve further reductions in the proportion of NEET.

In addition to collecting destination data for young people at the end of compulsory education at 16 years of age, Careers Wales also collects the early leaver data for further education college leavers and follows up those leavers they are notified about. This data is less robust for learners who drop out of college before completing their course, or those who are on benefits and not seeking work. Therefore, the impact of the guidance session undertaken by young people when they were in Key Stage 4 is difficult to analyse. The numbers of young people aged 19-24 who are not in education, employment or training remains too high (Welsh Government, 2022).

Senior managers are aware that longitudinal tracking of learner destinations is inconsistent. Consequently, the company aims to undertake a study of the young people and the impact of the guidance session has upon their longer-term destination. This is not currently in place and is an important shortcoming in improvement planning.

The company has developed links with another careers service provider in the UK. These links have not yet impacted on service planning, improvement or professional learning opportunities.

Methods and evidence base

Inspectors visited a range of secondary schools, special schools, PRUs and EOTAS providers across Wales, observing careers advisers' work with young people in these settings during November and December 2021. Two visits were cancelled because of the emerging COVID-19 Omicron variant.

Inspectors took account of the restrictions placed on Careers Wales due to the pandemic and talked to careers advisers about the flexible range of arrangements they had made in order to maintain contact with the young people within their caseload. Inspectors also listened to recorded guidance interviews and held discussions with:

- young people
- careers advisers
- school staff

Inspectors from Education Scotland joined Estyn inspectors in online meetings with Careers Wales leaders and managers. They also looked at a range of documents requested from Careers Wales, including:

- corporate plans
- operational plans
- policy/procedures documentation
- quality development plans
- minutes/records of meetings
- records of focus groups
- evaluation reports
- performance reports
- partnership agreements/statements of arrangements
- company publications

Schools and settings visited

ACT Cardiff EOTAS provision, Cardiff
Bassaleg Comprehensive School, Newport
Birchgrove Comprehensive School, Swansea
Brynlywarch Hall, Powys
Ceredigion PRU, Ceredigion
Cwmtawe Community School, Neath Port Talbot
Hawarden High School, Flintshire
Hawthorn High School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
King Henry VIII School, Monmouthshire
Newtown PRU, Powys
Pen-Y-Dre High School, Merthyr Tydfil
Radyr Comprehensive School, Cardiff
Rhyl College (EPIC EOTAS provision), Denbighshire

St. Alban's RC High School, Torfaen
St. Cenydd Comprehensive School, Caerphilly
Wrexham PRU, Wrexham
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr, Cardiff

Meetings with providers (some of which were online)

Denbighshire PRU, Denbighshire
Learning Pathways Centre, Heolddu Comprehensive School, Caerphilly
Pembrokeshire PRU, Pembrokeshire
Ty Gwyn School (Western Learning Federation), Cardiff
Woodlands School (Western Learning Federation), Cardiff
Y Bont Alternative Provision, Bridgend
Ysgol Maes Hyfryd, Flintshire
Ysgol Hen Felin, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Y Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe, Swansea

Glossary

Client An individual receiving services from Careers Wales. In this report, a young person aged 14-16

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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