

Education and Lifelong Learning

Evaluation of Careers Scotland Enhanced Resource Pilot Project

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Over its 2 year duration, we evaluated the Careers Scotland Enhanced Resource Pilot (ERP) project, assessing the extent to which the provision impacted on the pupils who received the support and on the School Leaver Destination Return (SLDR) figures for each of the pilot schools.

Main Findings

- The pilot did not impact significantly on SLDR figures at the school level. Improvements in the number of pupils moving into positive destinations (employment, further/higher education or training) in pilot schools were mirrored in a control group of comparator schools.
- At the individual level the pilot supported a number of pupils into positive destinations with 75% of ERP pupils in the 2006/7 academic year and 65% in 2007/8 achieving a positive destination.
- Over three quarters of ERP pupils remained in a positive destination 3 months after leaving school and roughly two thirds were in a positive destination after one year.
- Three quarters of school leavers from pilot schools who did not achieve a positive destination in 2007/8 had not been referred for ERP support, highlighting a need for a more systematic approach to selection and referral.
- The flexible and individually tailored careers support offered by ERP was a successful means of engaging and motivating those pupils who were referred. ERP support was particularly valued by those who found it difficult to engage with the more formal approach taken by the traditional school system.
- ERP Advisers worked with pupils in a very practical way, supporting them to explore their career options, make decisions about their future, and take action to pursue further education, training or employment opportunities. They also supported the development of employability skills to give the pupils the tools and confidence to pursue these opportunities.
- The Advisers could work more effectively with pupils where they had the full support of the staff within the school (particularly at Senior Management Team level) and their role was effectively integrated into existing school structures
- The referral process would be strengthened if the judgement of Pastoral Care teachers was combined with a systematic process to identify those at risk of not making a successful post school transition.

Background

The Careers Scotland Enhanced Resource Pilot (ERP) was developed to support the More Choices More Chances strategy of the former Scottish Executive (from now on referred to as the Scottish Government), which aims to reduce the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training. ERP was developed with the aim of reducing the numbers of pupils entering a negative destination¹ upon leaving school. The Scottish Government funded ERP in 13 pilot schools in 7 local authority areas. The pilot operated from August 2006 to June 2008, providing participating schools with an ERP careers adviser for 2.5 days per week to work with pupils who were identified as being at risk of not making a successful post-school transition, providing a more intensive form of careers guidance than is available through mainstream services. Advisers worked with a caseload in each school in an intensive and flexible way, providing support tailored to the individual pupil, and taking account of the range of barriers to progressing into employment, education or training.

Aims and Objectives

The former Scottish Executive Department of Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning commissioned GEN to undertake an evaluation of ERP. The evaluation took place throughout the duration of the pilot and focussed on 13 pilot schools that received Scottish Government funding, although there were a number of other schools that had ERP provision through other funding sources. The aim of the evaluation was to determine which elements or models of delivery best promote the overall aim of improving post-school destinations among those identified as being at risk of moving into a negative post-school destination. As part of the evaluation GEN focused on pupils' outcomes across a number of measures, including:

- Post-school destination
- Attendance
- Behaviours
- Attainment
- Measures of core and soft skills.

¹ School leavers in a negative destination are those who are not in employment, education or training.

Methodology

The evaluation began with desk based research to profile participating schools in terms of mapping negative destination trend data over the past 5 years and mapping key performance indicators against other participating schools. Fieldwork was conducted during each of the academic years (2006/7 and 2007/8) that the pilot operated. This involved case study visits to each of the 13² pilot schools, which included:

- Qualitative interviews with all 7 ERP advisers
- Qualitative interviews with key members of the Senior Management Team within each pilot school
- Qualitative focus groups with ERP participants where possible in each of the 13 pilot schools.

Telephone surveys were also conducted:

- in May 2007 with 81 ERP participants and 83 parents
- in May 2008 with 86 ERP participants and 91 parents.

Analysis of School Leaver Destination Returns (SLDR) data provided by Careers Scotland for pilot and comparator schools, alongside analysis of monitoring data provided by Careers Scotland, was conducted to track the sustainability of ERP participant destinations.

Main findings

Operation of ERP

There are three key elements that are considered crucial for ERP Advisers to work effectively with pupils who are at risk of moving into a negative post-school destination. These are:

- The referral process
- Model of delivery
- Integration within the school.

The report identifies lessons learned and makes recommendations on how these elements can be strengthened.

² Only 12 visits took place in 2006/7 because the Adviser in one school left their post early in the year.

Impact on SLDR figures

The primary measure of the success of ERP was to be its impact on reducing the number of pupils moving into negative destinations as reflected in the SLDR data.

Over the duration of the pilot there was a net increase of 2.7 percentage points in the percentage of leavers achieving a positive destination, with 8 of the 12 schools for whom data was available achieving an increase of between one and 8 percentage points in the proportion of pupils entering positive destinations.

In order to isolate the impact of ERP, comparator schools were identified and their school leaver destinations analysed. An almost identical level of improvement in positive destinations also took place in the comparator schools, suggesting that ERP provision did not have a significant additional impact on school leaver destinations across all the pilot schools.

Each school was set a target to reduce by half the percentage of pupils who had entered negative destinations in the year prior to the pilot commencing. These targets were not met by any of the schools.

Impact on beneficiaries

Although the pilot did not have the desired impact upon SLDR outcomes, there have been a number of positive impacts on beneficiaries. Over the two academic years advisers supported 1247 pupils, the vast majority of whom moved into positive destinations. In 2006/7 75% of ERP pupils moved into positive destinations and in 2007/8 65% achieved a positive destination.

There was a good level of sustainability of these positive destinations, with over three quarters of ERP pupils still in a positive destination 3 months after leaving school. After one year roughly two thirds of leavers had sustained a positive outcome.

ERP Advisers had a significant impact on raising the expectations of those pupils who had no expectations or expected to be unemployed. They also helped pupils to:

- Complete applications for employment, further education or training
- Make decisions about their future career
- Have more knowledge about information sources that will help them find out about various post school destinations
- Better understand how to present themselves for interview
- Be more aware of career options.

Most of the parents surveyed knew their child was receiving ERP support, although most parents were informed through their child and not the school or ERP adviser. A telephone survey revealed that parents of ERP pupils are keen to be involved in supporting their child to make career choices. Parents felt they could help support their child by having a meeting with the child and their ERP adviser and also receiving a progress update from the ERP adviser.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The flexible, tailored and informal approach taken by the ERP Advisers was well received by the pupils involved. The senior management teams within the schools valued the additional resource that ERP Advisers provided and the careers expertise that they had to offer. ERP Advisers were successful in raising the aspirations, confidence and self-esteem of the pupils that they worked with.

A difficulty has been in identifying those most likely to move into a negative destination. Three quarters of 2007/8 school leavers from ERP schools who entered negative destinations did not receive ERP support.

The report describes the ideal delivery model for ERP, the key elements of which are:

- Senior management teams, Pastoral Care staff and ERP Advisers engaging in a systematic process to identify and refer ERP pupils
- Advisers taking a flexible approach to delivery that is tailored to the needs of the individual, including one to one and group-work sessions
- Strong leadership and support at the local authority and school level for integration of ERP into the school and alignment with other initiatives aimed at the client group.

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