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Education and employment destinations of students in England: the value of 14-19 qualifications

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

Until recently, school league tables and school inspections in England have focused on short-term successes rather than on what students do after they leave school/college. The latter is now more relevant as young people must stay in education or training until the age of 18. Destination measures are increasingly being seen as key tools in assessing how schools prepare their students for a successful transition into the next stage of education or training, or into employment. In the current policy context, it is also important to know the value that qualifications, academic and vocational, bring to learners in terms of future progression.

Research into destinations has been limited in the past due to data availability. However, recent linked data from the Department for Education offers the opportunity to examine the relationship between students' education and the destinations they progress to. This research investigated, in particular, if 14-19 qualifications enable progression to further study or employment for students in Key Stages 4 and 5 in 2012/13. The statistical methods used in it varied from descriptive statistics to more robust analyses using multilevel regression. A brief snapshot of the regression results (controlling for gender, attainment, level of deprivation, school type and region) is given below.

After completing Key Stage 4, the differences between progression rates for students on academic, mostly academic and mixed programmes of study were generally small; vocational only programmes were associated with lower rates. The students with the highest progression rates to education, training or employment were those with an OCR National qualification alongside their GCSEs. Students with a BTEC were the most likely to have no sustained destination or NEET status; they were also the most likely to progress to employment.

Similarly, at Key Stage 5, students with vocational qualifications only, particularly BTECs, were far less likely to progress to a sustained destination than students with a mix of qualifications, who were, in turn, less likely to progress than students with only academic qualifications. Furthermore, students on vocational only programmes were more likely to be NEET than students on other programmes. Students with A-levels only and applied AS/A-levels only were the most likely to progress to Higher Education and to apprenticeships, respectively.

Our findings support the concern that vocational only programmes do not prepare students for progression to further/higher education, but they also suggest that they do not prepare students for progression to non-education destinations either.

Full paper

Vidal Rodeiro, C.L. and Williamson, J. (2017). *Meaningful destinations: using national data to investigate how different education pathways support young people's progression in England*. Manuscript submitted for publication.