



# Building a culture of achievement

The impact of the pursuit of CoPE (the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness) on GCSE attainment and engagement in learning



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# Foreword

Over the last three decades, ASDAN has grown from a small group of practitioners interested in educational theory and classroom practice to become one of the larger Awarding Organisations in the UK, with registered centres across the world.

For the first 25 years ASDAN programmes developed within the education world, from face-to-face work with learners. Then in 2003-4, with the support of QCDA, existing best practice was distilled into a stand-alone qualification called the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE), available at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.

The aim of this qualification was to increase understanding of, and introduce measurable outcomes of achievement in, the soft skills that employers and HE routinely identify as being missing in many young people who are otherwise academically capable. These soft skills are variously described as Wider Key Skills, team working, character, grit, determination, skills for employability, application of communication, data handling skills and independent learning. This wealth of terminology is an indication of the confusion that surrounds these skills and may be one reason why they are not always evident in those who have otherwise been successful according to academic measures. The title of Personal Effectiveness – more recently taken up in the Welsh Baccalaureate – was chosen as a way to encapsulate the content of the qualification developed for QCDA.

What started with just a few hundred students in the initial pilot group was by 2010 reaching more than 40,000 registered learners across the country. It was clear that CoPE was being used by thousands of schools as a tool to raise achievement and attainment.

ASDAN centres were supplying a stream of anecdotal evidence that CoPE was having a significant impact on learner achievement. While the stories of individual learners' lives being enriched were heart-warming to those with a vocation to teach, they cut little ice in a world tightly focused on an academic measure.

So, rather than relying on anecdotes from supportive centres, the following report was commissioned to investigate the links between CoPE and wider achievement at GCSE, based on national cohort data.

Maggie Walker  
ASDAN CEO, March 2013 to June 2016

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**“DfE should introduce a performance indicator which focuses on the whole distribution of performance within a school, including those at the top and bottom ends of the distribution”**

*The Wolf Report (2011)*

# Outline of the research

This finding is based on analysis of data from the National Pupil Database, comprising more than 500,000 young people who completed Key Stage 4 in 2010, and illuminated by qualitative data collected from four schools currently offering CoPE.

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The research analysis is mainly based on a distinction between two differing approaches to the way CoPE is offered within schools, linked to the proportion of the overall cohort undertaking it:

1. Thin usage: where CoPE is undertaken by less than 25% of the cohort. In these schools, the pupils selected to undertake CoPE are most likely to be those with serious educational challenges, including behavioural issues, persistent absenteeism, missed schooling for chronic ill-health or personal reasons or other situational factors.
2. Wide usage: where CoPE is undertaken by 25%-100% of the cohort. In these schools, CoPE students will be from a wider cross-section of individuals. This group still has more educational challenges, on average, than those schools not offering CoPE at all.

In this summary, all comparisons relate to the difference between 'wide usage' schools and schools not offering CoPE at all.



# Principal findings

## Commission

This study was commissioned by ASDAN from the Bristol Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning and Education (BRILLE) at the University of the West of England (UWE).

The five research questions that the research team addressed were:

1. Do pupils who undertake CoPE achieve a higher grade at GCSE English Language than comparable pupils who do not?
2. Are pupils who undertake CoPE more likely to achieve five GCSE passes than comparable pupils who do not?
3. Are there any identifiable subgroups of pupils (e.g. in terms of social deprivation or gender) for whom the impacts above are particularly marked or absent?
4. Are pupils and staff able to identify any relationships between CoPE and other Key Stage 4 studies in respect of pupil engagement, attendance and motivation?
5. If so, what is the nature of the experiences, perceptions, impressions and claims about such relationships?

## There were three strands to the research

### 1. Whole Sample

The key analysis was to determine whether there were significant differences between the GCSE attainment of students who had pursued CoPE and those who had not. Analysis was also undertaken into the possible impact of demographic factors such as gender or ethnicity to see whether CoPE had a particularly strong or weak effect for different groups.

### 2. Paired Sample

200 pairs of young people with identical demographic and external factors and identical attainment at Key Stage 3 were randomly isolated from the main dataset, with one individual in each pair having pursued CoPE the other who had not. This examined whether ostensibly similar individuals performed differently at GCSE, based on whether they pursued CoPE.

### 3. Qualitative data

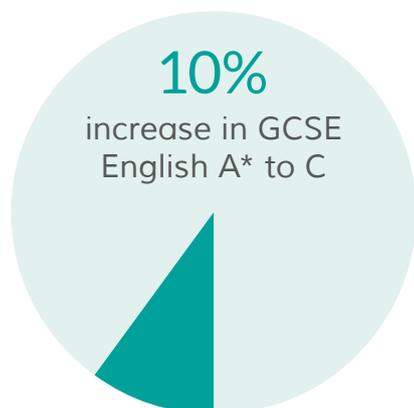
The research team interviewed staff and pupils from sample schools to provide evidence of perceptions of CoPE and shared beliefs or claims about its relationship to other study at Key Stage 4.

## Further analysis

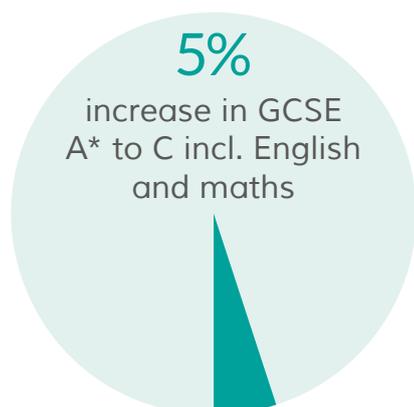
Additional statistical analysis has been carried out since the original report was published, for further details see page 11.

# Improved attainment at GCSE

The completion of the ASDAN Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) at Level 2 has a statistically significant association with improved attainment in GCSE qualifications.



Undertaking CoPE at Level 2 in a 'wide usage' school is associated with an estimated 10% increased likelihood of achieving GCSE English at A\* to C, compared to similar young people in schools not offering CoPE.



Undertaking CoPE at Level 2 in a 'wide usage' school is associated with an estimated 5% increased likelihood of achieving five GCSEs at A\* to C including English and maths (excluding equivalents), compared to similar young people in schools not offering CoPE.

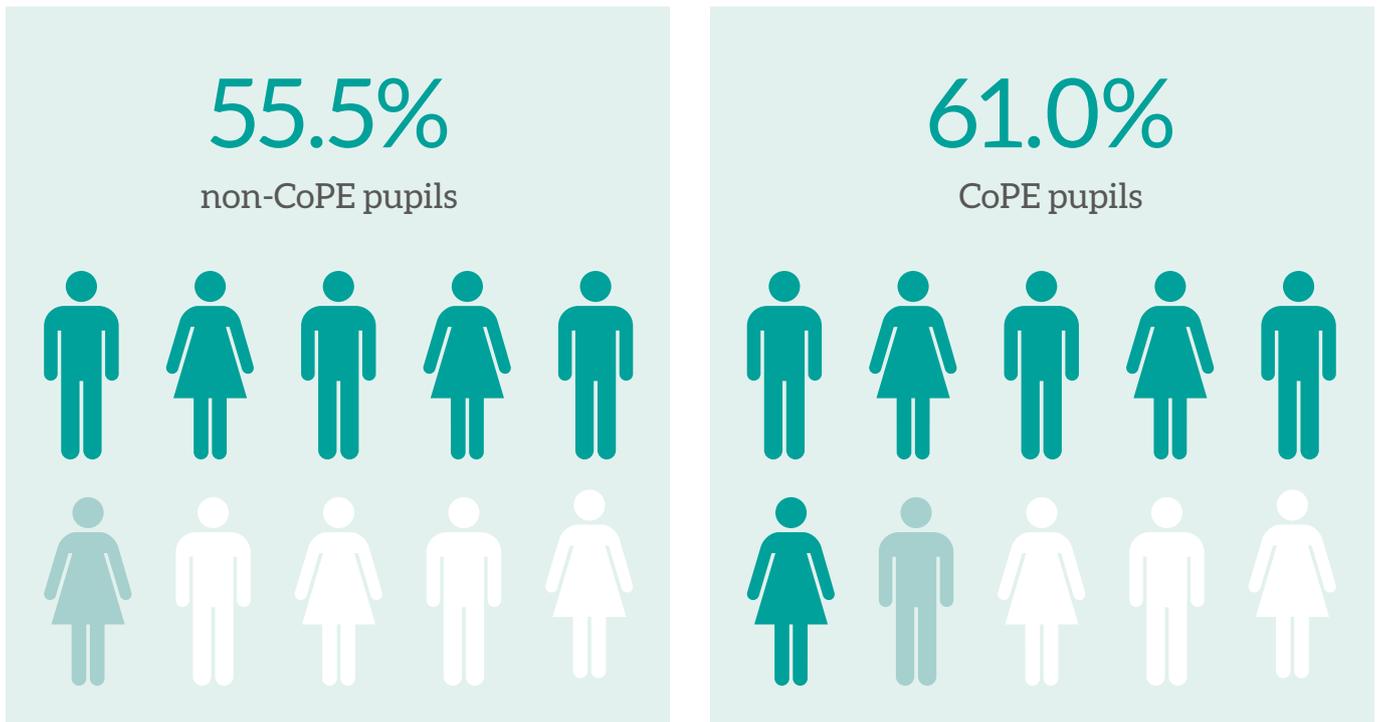
“English and maths GCSE (at grades A\*-C) are fundamental to young people’s employment and education prospects. Yet less than 50% of students have both at the end of Key Stage 4 (age 15/16)”

*The Wolf Report (2011)*

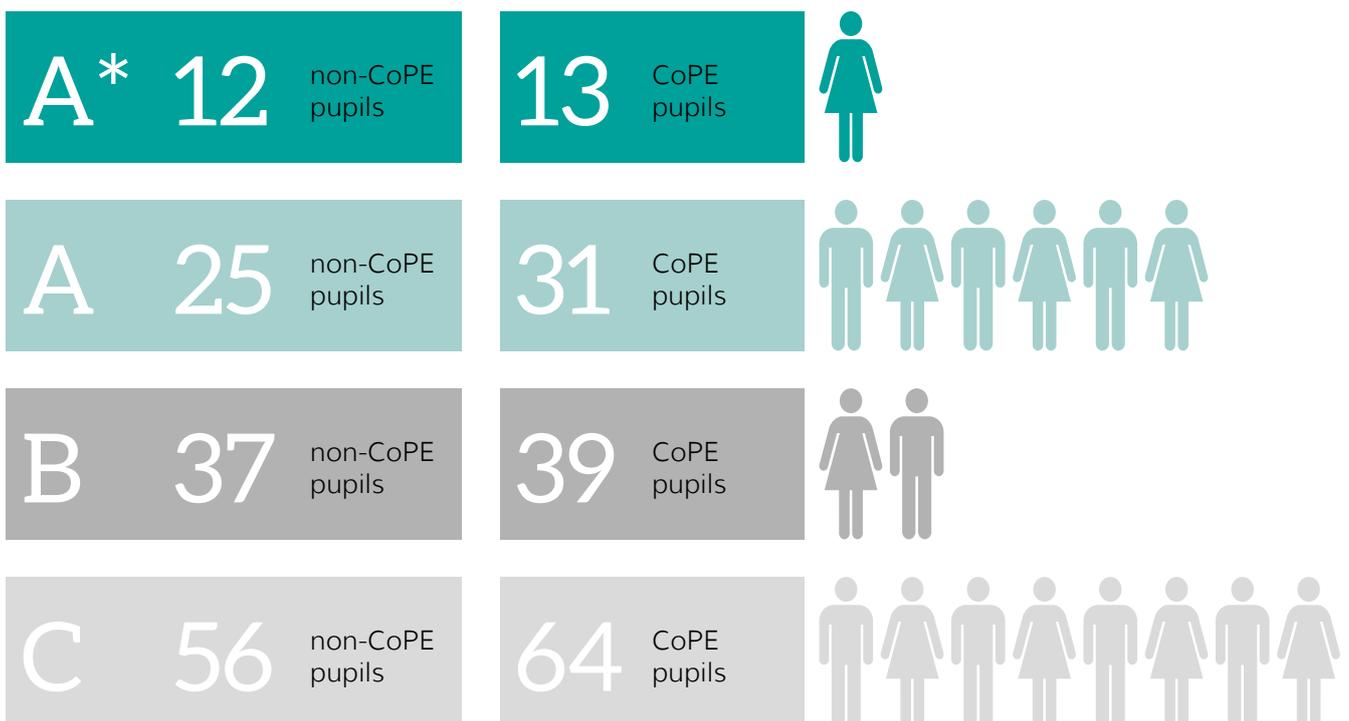
# Improved attainment at GCSE

'Like-for-like' comparison between 200 sets of paired random individuals.

Attainment of five GCSEs at A\* to C, including English and maths:



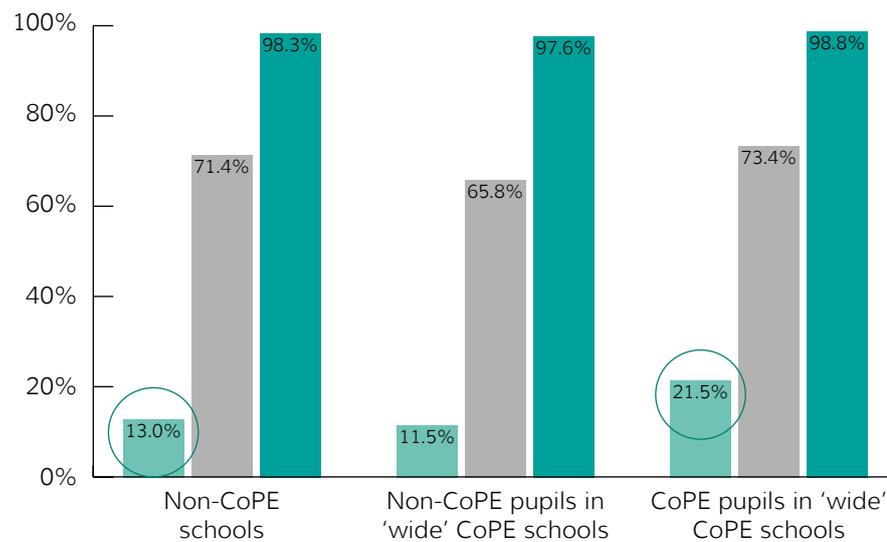
Attainment in GCSE A\* to C English:



# Positive impact on other pupil groups

CoPE has a stronger impact among young people with low Key Stage 3 attainment, with special educational needs, from black and minority ethnic communities and those who are eligible for free school meals

## Low KS3 attainers in English: GCSE English pass rate at A\* to C



## 65% increase

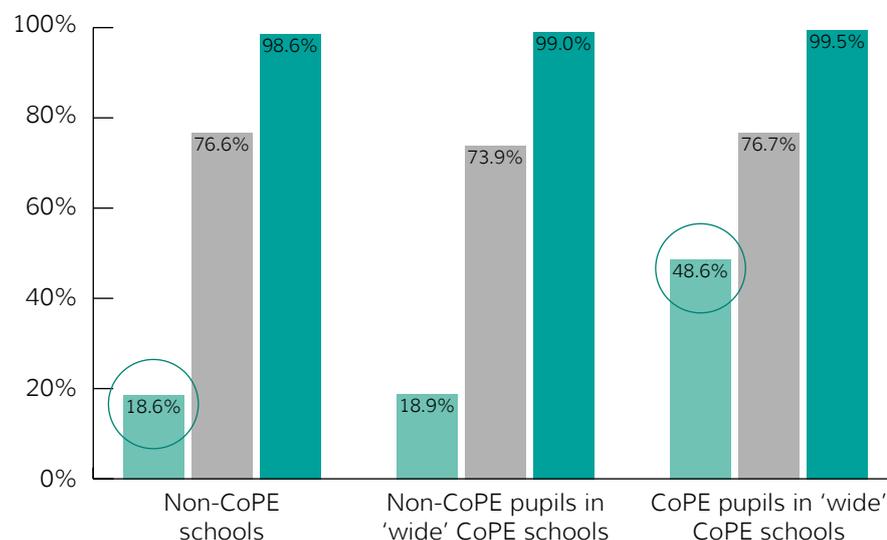
21.5% of those with low KS3 attainment who took CoPE achieved GCSE English at A\*-C compared to 13.0% at non-CoPE schools

Extract from Fig.2 GCSE English pass rate A\*-C by KS3 attainment, school type and CoPE

KS3 attainment in English

- low (up to Level 4)
- average (Level 5)
- high (Level 6/7)

## Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities: GCSE English pass rate at A\* to C



CoPE has a particularly strong effect on BME pupils with low KS3 attainment

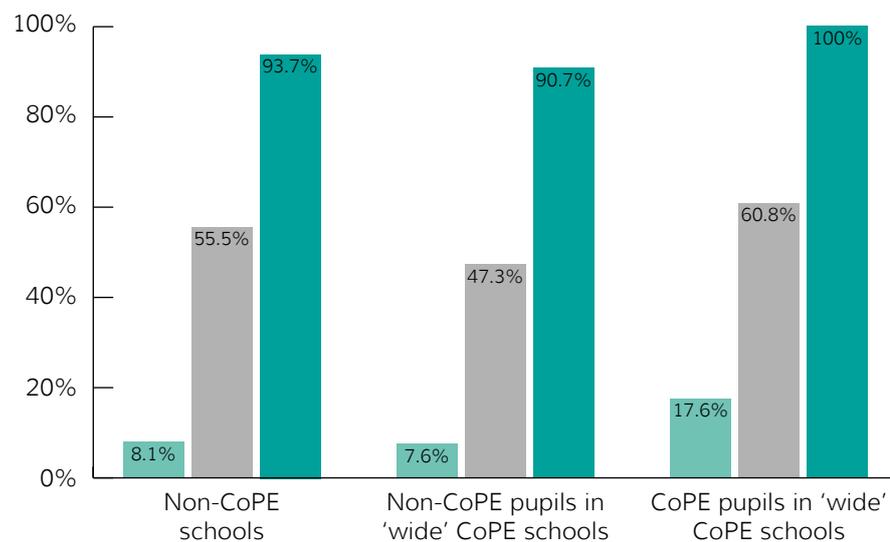
Extract from Fig.2 GCSE English pass rate A\*-C by KS3 attainment, school type and CoPE

KS3 attainment in English

- low (up to Level 4)
- average (Level 5)
- high (Level 6/7)

# Positive impact on other pupil groups

Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils:  
GCSE English pass rate at A\* to C

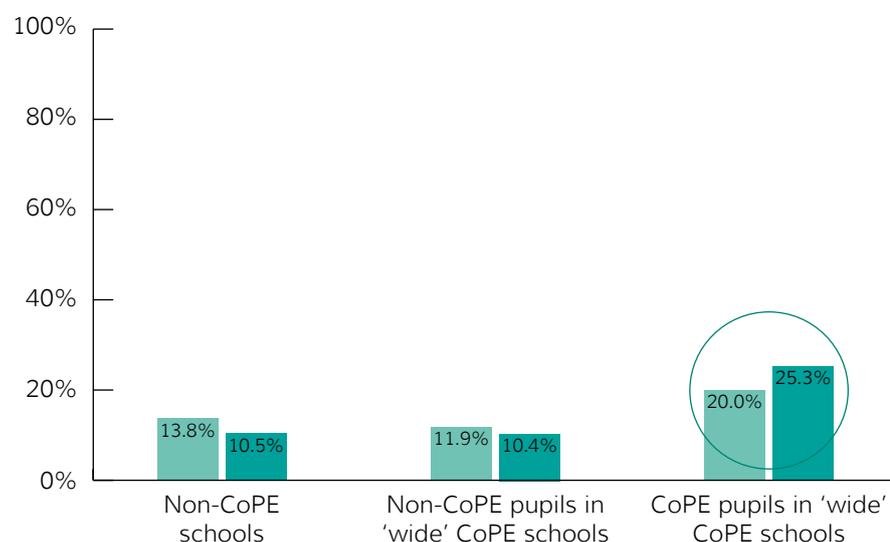


Extract from Fig.7: GCSE English pass rate at A\*-C by KS3 attainment, SEN, school type and CoPE

CoPE has a disproportionately positive impact on GCSE English outcomes at A\* to C among individuals with SEN



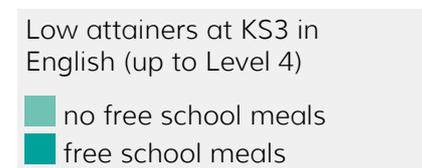
Free school meals pupils:  
GCSE English pass rate at A\* to C



Extract from Fig.9: GCSE English pass rate at A\*-C by free school meals, school type and CoPE

## Outperforming

Low attainers receiving free school meals who undertake CoPE actually outperform their peers from more affluent households



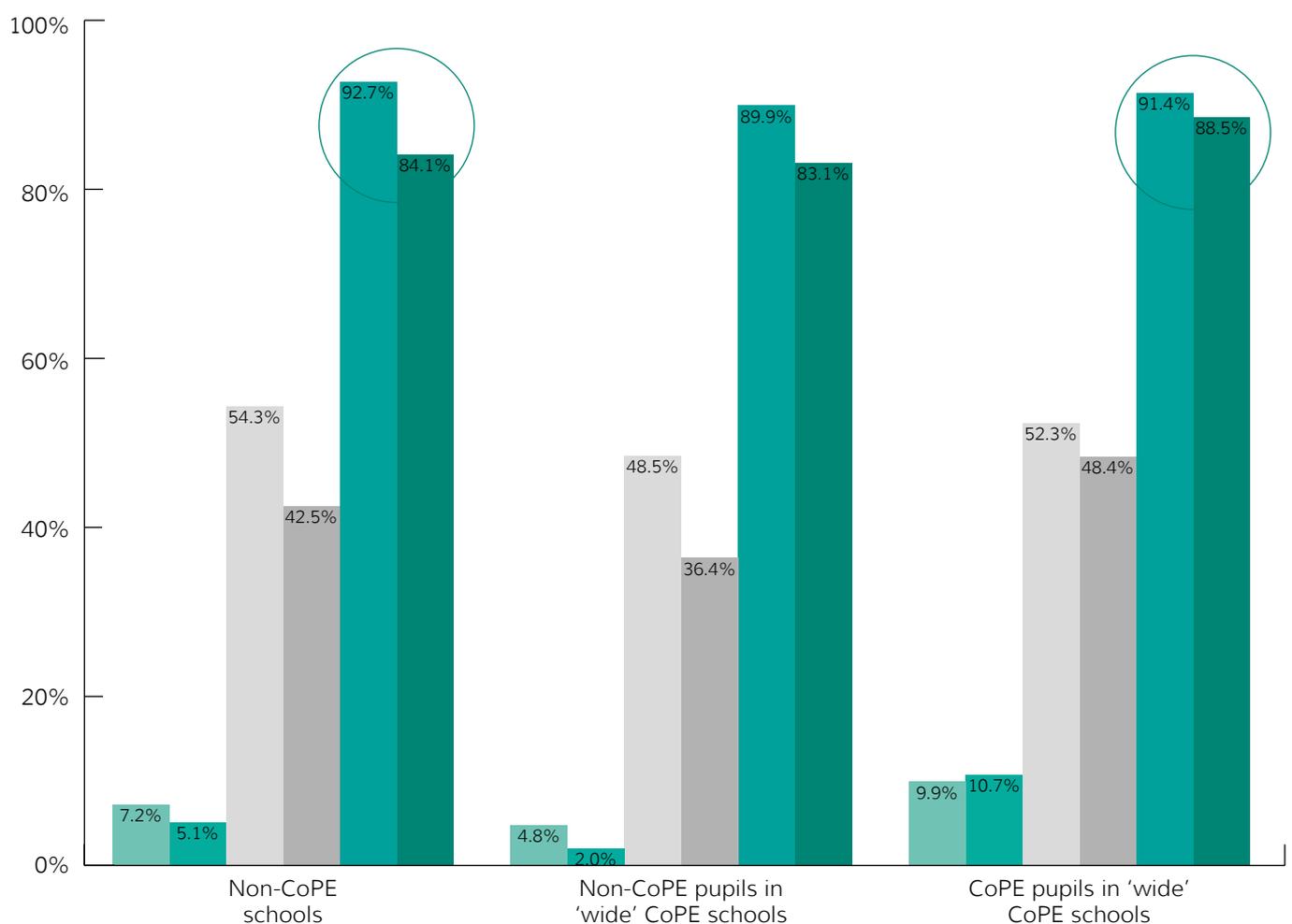
# Positive impact on other pupil groups

Free school meals pupils:  
Five GCSEs at A\* to C, including English and maths

## Closing the gap

In non-CoPE schools there is an 8.6% gap in the proportion of high KS3 attainers who go on to achieve five good GCSEs, depending on whether or not they receive free school meals.

For those who undertake CoPE, this deficit is reduced to just 2.9%.



Extract from Fig.10: Pass rate for five GCSEs at A\*-C including English and maths by KS3 attainment, free school meals, school type and CoPE

| KS3 attainment in English |                     |                   |                  |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| no FSM                    | low (up to Level 4) | average (Level 5) | high (Level 6/7) |
| FSM                       | low (up to Level 4) | average (Level 5) | high (Level 6/7) |

# Further analysis

Additional statistical analysis has been carried out since the original report was published. What emerges concerning the CoPE qualification is of continuing high significance to the overall national evidence about attainment.

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The latest analysis of the research evidence is undergoing academic peer review and could be subject to some changes. A preliminary summary is presented here within the context of an ongoing and important national debate about standards and which qualifications and courses are valuable for students to pursue.

This additional work aims to improve the original analysis by adding further context, baseline mathematics attainment data and by extending the paired pupil comparison. Overall, this further work has upgraded and increased the rigour and reliability of the original analysis.

## Context

The original work used a flat binary logistic regression that looked at individuals without context. The new work uses multi-level binary logistic regression to group individuals into units that are expected to have similar experiences, i.e. schools. This methodology enables the researchers to investigate (and reject) explanations that the effect of CoPE was due to features of the schools that offer CoPE rather than the qualification itself, e.g. that high achieving or high deprivation schools are more likely to offer CoPE.

## Baseline mathematics

The new work uses Key Stage 3 attainment in maths in the regression model for achievement of five GCSE passes including English and maths. This eliminates an apparent anomaly in the original research that saw boys outperforming girls within the model, which does not correspond with other research findings. Once baseline maths ability is woven in, this anomaly disappears.

## Extended paired pupil comparison

In the original work, the research hand-paired 200 pupils and analysed their outcomes, effectively creating two hypothesised schools. In the new work, the matching process has been automated; over 3,500 pairs are now used in the analysis. This has enabled subgroups to be scrutinised in more detail, e.g. by gender, Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Free School Meals (FSM).

## Further analysis

### New findings

- The impact of CoPE in 'wide usage' schools on the likelihood of achieving an A\*-C grade in GCSE English has risen from 10% in the original work to 11% in the new work.
- The impact of CoPE in 'wide usage' schools on the likelihood of five good GCSE passes including English and maths has risen from 5% in the original work to 19% in the new work. This is due to the improved modelling now that Key Stage 3 maths attainment has been included as a factor.
- The new matched pairs analysis shows an overall increase in pass rates for those undertaking CoPE of 4% (for GCSE English) and 3% (for five GCSEs including English and maths). These are slightly lower than in the original paper (4.5% and 5.5%), but it is likely to be a more reliable estimate due to the larger number of pairs used.
- Importantly, the extended paired pupil analysis also identifies pass rate uplifts for particular subgroups: Black Minority Ethnic pupils, those with English as an additional language, free school meals or Pupil Premium pupils, persistent absentees, lower ability pupils and those with SEN all experience a greater than average increase in attainment having undertaken CoPE, as compared with the average.

In other words, the impact of CoPE is greatest for those with intersecting forms of educational or situational disadvantage. This data is new and there is no direct comparison in the original work, although this was suggested by the original regression analyses.

“The effect of CoPE in ‘wide usage’ schools on the likelihood of five good GCSE passes including English and maths has risen from 5%... to 19%...”

# Engagement

Teachers and young people report that CoPE boosts confidence, self-esteem, motivation and attendance. It is likely that the benefits feed back into Key Stage 4 outcomes, with these young people doing better than if they had not undertaken CoPE.

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The research study found that:

1. CoPE mitigates the underachievement of individuals with serious educational challenges, while markedly improving the achievement of those without such challenges.
  2. CoPE is neither vocational nor academic in any normal characterisation of those categories: it is instead a skills-based process that is compatible with either vocational or academic qualifications or combinations of the two... it is demonstrably supportive of (pupils') learning... and makes a tangible contribution to their achievements in more mainstream terms.
  3. Accounts from staff and students highlighted that particular features, namely the systematic use of Plan-Do-Review and collaborative group work provided a mode of working that young people could (and did) transfer to other subjects and other contexts.
  4. CoPE had given many students their first taste of success and recognised achievement, and this had changed their orientation to study more generally, including raised motivation and confidence.
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“DfE should review current policies for the lowest-attaining quintile of pupils at KS4, with a view to greatly increasing the proportion who are able to progress directly onto Level 2 programmes at age 16”

*The Wolf Report (2011)*

“I like the days I do CoPE, I enjoy coming to school on those days”

“CoPE gives us skills for the rest of our GCSEs”

*CoPE pupils from the study schools*

“When this [CoPE] started in Year 9, I thought this is going to be a waste of time, just keeping him busy... I have to apologise to you because I think this course has done a huge amount for my son in terms of confidence and the way he is progressing with other subjects in school”

*Father of CoPE pupil from one of the study schools (as reported by a teacher)*





© ASDAN Nov 2016, Wainbrook House, Hudds Vale Road, St George, Bristol BS5 7HY  
t: 0117 941 1126 | e: [info@asdan.org.uk](mailto:info@asdan.org.uk) | [www.asdan.org.uk](http://www.asdan.org.uk)  
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