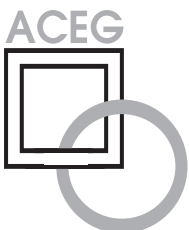


Reviewing the Evidence Base for Careers Work in Schools

A systematic review of research literature into the impact of career education and guidance during Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 on young people's transitions

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FOREWORD

The 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper (March, 2005) highlighted the need for improved sources of career information, advice and guidance available from institutions. It also indicated the need for ‘more professional development for teachers working effectively with their students regarding information about choices’ (para. 5.28). The ‘Youth Matters’ Green Paper (July, 2005) reinforces these messages. In this context, research findings help illuminate some key principles and strategies that may be adopted in UK schools and colleges to inform the development of career education and guidance programmes. Here, CeGS has combined a series of literature reviews to feed into and help further strengthen professional development programmes for those working with young people. We commend this to you! *Rob Mayall, Chief Executive, Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland and Alan Vincent, General Secretary, Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG)*

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The Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) is owned by the University of Derby. The Centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities; and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

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1. Introduction

A Transitions Review Group was established by CeGS in 2000. It comprised policy-makers, senior managers, practitioners and researchers from a range of organisations with an interest in education, guidance and youth support. The group's mission was to contribute to the synthesis and dissemination of research evidence to key stakeholders in guidance in order to enable future policy and practice developments to be evidence-based. With the support of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre), which is part of the Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, the Transitions Review Group completed two systematic literature reviews (Moon *et al.*, 2004; Smith *et al.*, 2005). These reviews examined the distinct 'actions' and 'influences' that impact on transitions from Key Stage 3 (KS3) to Key Stage 4 (KS4) and from KS4 into post-16 opportunities.

This paper summarises the main findings from the two reviews. It specifically considers the impact of career education and guidance (CEG) on young people's transitions but also takes account of other external and internal factors that can influence the effectiveness of CEG and the outcomes of transition processes. After a brief overview of the background and context within which the literature reviews were undertaken, the aims, objectives and methodological approach are outlined. The key findings are then synthesised under three broad headings. The first, on *effective CEG and the transition process*, considers the role of CEG in relation to the development of career-related skills and the conditions under which interventions are most effective. The second, on *inhibitors of CEG and the transition process*, considers the factors that can mediate the effectiveness of CEG and temper its impact on the transition process. The third considers the influence that *other external and internal factors* can have on young people's perceptions and experiences of transitions and the extent to which these affect the outcomes of CEG. Finally, a number of conclusions regarding the role and importance of CEG in the transition process are drawn. Key issues and challenges for policy-makers, managers, practitioners, and researchers are also identified.

2. Context

Successful transitions through the education system into further education (FE), training and work are central to current Government policy objectives designed to promote social inclusion as well as economic prosperity. The role and importance of CEG in relation to successful transitions and the fulfilment of these policy objectives has been widely acknowledged. The Green Paper *14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* (DfES, 2003a) emphasised the need for young people to have access to impartial and

independent help to formulate and maintain individual learning plans and prepare for making relevant and appropriate choices. These sentiments were echoed by the Tomlinson Committee (2004) in its interim report which argued that, within a reformed curriculum offering a wider range of vocational and academic choices to young people both pre- and post-16, it is essential that they are equipped with the appropriate skills and self-awareness to exercise their choices effectively.

Following the Education Act 1997, it has been incumbent on schools to provide a programme of career education for all young people from the age of 13; this statutory requirement was extended to all young people from age 11 in September 2004. A non-statutory framework for CEG exists (DfES, 2003b) and, to a greater or lesser extent, informs the planning, management and delivery of career *education* in schools. Schools typically work in partnership with the Connexions service which delivers career and other *guidance* support services. Connexions services were introduced in England from April 2001. Building on the re-focusing of the work of the previous Careers Service, Connexions provides a broad range of universal and targeted support services for 13-19-year-olds, of which career guidance is an important component.

More recently, the DfES (2005a) funded an 'end-to-end' review of CEG. Its findings have been incorporated into the Green Paper *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005b) which sets out the Government's intention to bring together existing resources and services in order to provide young people with access to 'personal development learning' in the curriculum alongside confidential and impartial support, including information and guidance on work and learning opportunities. The importance of embedding CEG in learning organisations for 11-19-year-olds in order to achieve this vision is widely acknowledged.

3. Aim and objectives

Set within this dynamic context of reform, the review process was designed to establish the ways in which CEG, or particular aspects of it, can influence and/or help to facilitate young people's transitions. However, as CEG does not take place in a vacuum, the reviews were also designed to examine the extent to which the effectiveness and impact of CEG are mediated by other external and internal factors.

The overall aim of the reviews was, therefore, to identify the available research evidence in a systematic and objective way in order to ascertain the role and impact of CEG at KS3 (ages 11-13) and KS4 (ages 14-16) on young people's transitions from KS3, through KS4, to post-compulsory education, employment and training.

In order to address this key aim, a number of objectives were set:

- to assess the influence of internal and external factors, such as young people's motivation and capabilities, family relationships and parental involvement in decision-making, socio-economic constraints, and environmental factors, on the impact of CEG and the transition process;
- to relate the findings to policy developments in CEG since 1988 in England (when the Education Reform Act led to the introduction of the National Curriculum) in order to assess their impact on practice within and outside schools;
- to make recommendations based on these findings so that decisions on policy and practice can be evidence-based.

4. Methodology

The review methodology followed the procedures devised by the EPPI-Centre. The process is highly systematic and comprises a number of distinct phases:

- *Searching*: a comprehensive search for reports of relevant primary research using electronic databases and websites and hand-searching journals.
- *Screening*: the application of set inclusion and exclusion criteria to identified studies. Empirical studies that focused on CEG in KS3 or KS4 and that were published after 1988 in English were included in the reviews. Studies were *excluded* if they focused solely on the general curriculum, citizenship or vocational education.
- *Keywording*: the application of a series of core and review-specific keywords to studies that met the inclusion criteria. The keyworded studies were used to produce a 'systematic map' of the extent and nature of the existing research on the review topics.
- *Data-extraction*: the extraction of the data contained in the studies in the systematic map using the EPPI-Centre standardised data-extraction guidelines (EPPI, 2002). These guidelines provided the basis for an assessment of the quality of the research design and relevance of the findings to the reviews in question, articulated as 'weight of evidence'. Assessments of quality were independently verified by two members of the review group and moderated by EPPI-Centre staff.
- *Synthesis*: the synthesis of the results of the data-extraction process in accordance with the conceptual framework underpinning the review strategy.

The initial searches for potentially relevant studies yielded over 8,500 bibliographic references. The in-depth reviews are based on a total of 20 studies that met the set inclusion criteria. Although the majority of the included studies were carried out in the United Kingdom (UK), three were conducted in the USA (due to the number of studies in the systematic map for the second review, the decision was taken to exclude studies conducted outside the UK from the synthesis and in-depth review). The quality of the studies included in the in-depth review, judged in accordance with the EPPI-Centre guidelines and independently verified, varied, but on the whole provided a medium to high weight of evidence.

5. Key findings

'Transition' in the UK is characterised by a series of distinct phases that mark the boundaries between the end of one stage of education and the beginning of the next (Looker & Dwyer, 1998). The success or otherwise of young people's transitions from one stage to the next is not simply determined by pre-existing 'traits' or 'dispositions', but rather is influenced by a range of other internal and external factors that act as facilitators and inhibitors to progression. These include young people's motivations and capabilities, peer-group and parental pressure, socio-economic constraints, and environmental factors, as well as the formal education system in general and CEG in particular.

5.1 Effective CEG and the transition process

The evidence suggests that good-quality CEG interventions can have a positive effect on young people and contribute towards the success of subsequent transitions made at KS3 and KS4. However, the strength of this impact is mediated by a number of factors that include the nature and type of CEG intervention, the timing of interventions, and the extent to which interventions are tailored to meet the needs of the individual. The individuals responsible for the delivery of CEG interventions can be just as influential as the interventions on young people in transition.

Career-related skills are an important factor which can influence the extent to which young people are able to make successful transitions at KS3 and KS4. The research suggests that young people with a high level of career-related skills, including career exploration, self-awareness and self-confidence, are more likely to make satisfactory subject choices at Year 9 and less likely to modify their choices or switch courses post-16 (Morris *et al.*, 1998; Morris *et al.*, 1999). Interventions such as individual interviews, group-work sessions, career-related information, and practical and work-related activities, along with specific CEG programmes such as the Real Game and computer-assisted career guidance, have been shown to have a positive impact on the

development of pupils' career-related skills (Luzzo & Pierce, 1996; Edwards *et al.*, 1999; Morris *et al.*, 1999; SWA Consulting, 1998; Rolfe, 2000). It is, therefore, possible to infer that these interventions can also help to facilitate successful transitions for young people.

The timing of CEG interventions can influence the effectiveness of interventions and subsequent transitions. There is evidence to indicate that young people would like more help with decision-making at times that best suit their needs. For some, this may be at a relatively early stage of their school career (Keys *et al.*, 1998; Maychell *et al.*, 1998), yet the demands of the school option-choice system can exert pressure on, and to some extent govern, the timing and outcomes of CEG interventions. Although young people do not need to take final decisions about post-16 options until Year 11, there is evidence to suggest that many, especially those who plan to remain in education, make their choices much earlier (Howieson & Semple, 1996; Russell & Wardman, 1998). In a survey of 1,284 Year 11 students, 42% recalled that they began the process of choosing post-16 options in Year 10 or earlier; 5% indicated that they began this process before age 13 (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). Munro & Elsom (2000) suggest that there may be a number of benefits of introducing CEG interventions earlier, including that it may help to raise pupils' awareness of subject-related careers and counteract external influences, such as peer pressure, which can be very strong by Year 11 when post-16 choices are made.

The evidence suggests that the extent to which CEG interventions are tailored to meet the needs of individuals or groups of individuals rather than the needs of organisations is a key factor determining the effectiveness and impact of CEG on young people's skill development and subsequent transitions. In particular, Russell & Wardman (1998) indicate that care needs to be taken in the design and utilisation of career information to ensure that it is seen as relevant and appropriate by its target audience. For example, some types of career information may be more useful to young people in making and implementing secondary-level decisions about their options at 16 (what course or training programme to choose, etc.) rather than in making their primary-level decision (whether to remain in, or leave, education). It is important that such information provides sufficient detail to enable young people to use it for the latter purposes too. In addition, Rolfe (2000) suggests that labour market information might be more effective if it were presented in a range of formats and used successively in a variety of ways that appeal to different groups of young people.

A number of studies have suggested that a flexible approach to the timetabling of tailored interventions could further help to maximise the impact of CEG on young people (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993; Keys *et al.*,

1998; Lloyd, 2002; Maychell *et al.*, 1998; Morris *et al.*, 1999; Munro & Elsom, 2000; Russell & Wardman, 1998). However, SWA Consulting (1998) sound a note of caution in relation to the introduction of increased flexibility into the timetable. They found that the effectiveness of career sessions could be undermined by short tutor periods, carousel arrangements, inadequate differentiation and a lack of focus on learning outcomes, findings which were supported by Morris *et al.* (2001) and Ofsted (1998).

Pupils appear to value the involvement of people in the provision of career information, often seeing them as more important and/or more helpful than written sources of information (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993; Keys *et al.*, 1998; Maychell *et al.*, 1998; Munro & Elsom, 2000; Rolfe, 2000; Wardman & Stevens, 1998). However, it is not simply the knowledge and expertise of Careers Advisers and other school staff that can influence young people's skill development and transitions: it is also their function as a catalyst, instilling a sense of urgency or necessity in pupils (Macrae *et al.*, 1996).

5.2 Inhibitors of CEG and the transition process

The evidence suggests that the quality of CEG and the capacity to deliver it have an impact upon the extent to which young people can be effectively supported to develop career-related skills – which, as demonstrated above, can determine the success of the transition process. Recent research into CEG in UK schools suggests that while there are pockets of good practice, some provision is below acceptable standards. Where this is the case, it could be inhibiting the transition process. The impact of poor-quality service provision can be further exacerbated by gaps in existing provision, the lack of a clear strategy for CEG and where CEG is not appropriately integrated alongside other curriculum subjects.

The quality of CEG provision has been shown to vary considerably from school to school. According to Ofsted (1998), students' knowledge, skills and understanding in CEG are satisfactory in the majority (70%) of secondary schools in England; as a result, approximately half of students make good progress at the end of KS3 and during KS4. However, in contrast, there is further evidence to suggest that many pupils receive CEG of a less than acceptable standard (OHMCISW, 1997; SWA Consulting, 1998). This variation in quality depends on a range of factors, including: policies for CEG and the priority accorded to CEG by the senior management team in schools, the content of CEG programmes, the careers library and associated materials and resources, and the provision of impartial information, advice and guidance (Ofsted, 1995).

Poor-quality service provision can often be a consequence of insufficient capacity. Morris *et al.* (2001) reported that the majority of schools do not have the capacity to provide high-quality career education and guidance, a conclusion supported by a National Audit Office report (2004) on the Connexions Service and an Ofsted (2004) evaluation of the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP). The majority of the 580 schools that took part in the National Audit Office (2004) study did not believe they had the capacity to provide appropriate levels of careers education and guidance for young people. Ofsted (2004) concluded that 'advice and guidance were among the weakest elements observed in the first year of the IFP' (p.9).

Quality can also be affected by the qualifications and experience of the teachers responsible for CEG. A study of CEG provision in secondary schools in Wales (OHMCISW, 1997) reported that, although the quality of CEG in Welsh schools was generally 'satisfactory', the quality of teaching varied when delivered by non-careers specialists, especially at KS3. Similarly, Ofsted (1998) reported that half the teachers with responsibility for CEG in England are insufficiently trained for careers work and are in need of further support. A number of studies stress the necessity for training and continuous professional development for teachers and guidance practitioners. Munro & Elsom (2000) suggest that it is essential that Careers Advisers have access to systematic training designed to ensure that their occupational knowledge is kept up-to-date. Rolfe (2000) concludes that additional staff development is needed for those using LMI with young people, especially where it is being used within the curriculum. Lloyd (2002) indicates that training is required for those working with the hardest to help and young people 'at risk', who often face multiple issues that can impact upon the decision-making and transitions processes.

The literature also suggests that the degree to which guidance interventions are integrated into careers education programmes and the wider curriculum can determine the effectiveness of CEG and the extent to which it can help facilitate successful transitions for young people (National Audit Office, 2004). Although schools have a statutory obligation to deliver a planned programme of careers education to pupils from Year 7, the fact that the National Framework for CEG is non-statutory accords schools a great deal of scope in terms of how they deliver their statutory requirements. The evidence suggests National Curriculum subjects are prioritised and that CEG is most commonly delivered as a discrete aspect of personal, social and health education (PSHE). Stoney *et al.* (1998) suggest that the status of careers work can be diminished when it is associated with PSHE, and that this can dilute its effect. Therefore, while there is evidence to suggest that CEG

benefits both young people and the transition process, these benefits can be lost if CEG is simply subsumed within, rather than delivered alongside, other subject areas.

The negative effects of poorly integrated programmes of CEG on young people and the transition process can be further exacerbated by the lack of a coherent strategy for CEG across key stages in some schools (Ofsted, 1995) and the absence of partnership working between subject and careers departments (Munro & Elsom, 2000).

Morris *et al.* (2002) concluded that increasing levels of drop-out among students who would have been expected to continue in further education and/or higher education is an indication that pre-16 CEG provision is failing to ensure that young people make the most appropriate choices about post-16 destinations. The research has identified gaps in existing provision that could help to explain this increase. A number of studies have shown that access to impartial information about post-16 options is patchy, that there are gaps in the information young people receive, and that the information can be too parochial (Morris *et al.*, 1999; Munro & Elsom, 2000; SWA Consulting, 1998; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993; Association of Colleges, 2004). Young people would like more information about courses, jobs and careers, especially through the workplace and contacts with working people (Keys *et al.*, 1998; Maychell *et al.*, 1998; Morris *et al.*, 1999; Munro & Elsom, 2000; Rolfe, 2000; SWA Consulting, 1998).

5.3 The influence of other external and internal factors

Young people are a highly heterogeneous group. The diverse circumstances in which they live engender a raft of factors that can impact upon and shape the way they perceive and experience CEG. These factors can modify and/or influence the effectiveness of CEG which can affect the transition process. Not surprisingly, therefore, the literature suggests that the impact of general CEG provision is different for different groups of young people and that CEG does not impact equally upon all young people at each point of transition. The systematic review identified a number of studies which considered the role and influence of some of the internal and other external factors that influence CEG and young people's transitions, including parents, relatives and friends, subject and other teachers, socio-economic factors, institutional factors, expected/actual academic attainment and gender.

5.3.1 Influence of parents, relatives and friends

One of the most powerful influences on young people is parents. There is evidence to suggest that the socio-

economic status of parents, including previous experience of further and higher education and of employment, along with their willingness and ability to provide financial support for their offspring beyond compulsory schooling, shapes parental views on appropriate pathways for their children (Macrae *et al.*, 1996; Connor *et al.*, 1999; Pitcher & Green, 1999; DfES, 2003b; Jones & Martin, 2004).

Munro & Elsom (2000) point out that young people's perceptions of local opportunities are often based on the perceptions and experiences of family and friends. Hodkinson & Sparkes (1993) found that many young people who had clear ideas about what they wanted to do had been influenced by close relatives, friends or neighbours who worked in their chosen field. These friends and relatives were perceived to be able to provide an 'insider's' view and their judgement could be trusted because they were personally known to the individual.

In a study of young people who had stayed on in full-time education, most indicated that they had sought advice from their parents/guardians (Keys *et al.*, 1998). Although in this case, the majority of young people reported that the advice of their Careers Adviser had been more influential than that from their parents/guardians, there is evidence to suggest that for others 'informal career guidance' from parents is more influential than 'formal guidance' provided by qualified guidance practitioners (Wardman & Stevens, 1998; Rolfe, 2000). In some cases, this has been to the detriment of young people and the transition process, with an increased likelihood of 'course switching' (Wardman & Stevens, 1998).

5.3.2 Influence of subject and other teachers

The evidence suggests that subject and other teachers can mediate the effects of CEG by influencing pupil choices through classroom and extracurricular activities and the provision of information on post-16 opportunities (Munro & Elsom, 2000). Keys *et al.* (1998) found that pupils who stayed on in school sixth-forms were more likely to have discussed their options with a subject/other teacher than were those who went on to an FE college. A second study reported that those who remained in education were more likely to have discussed their post-16 options with a subject/other teacher than were those who left aged 16 (Maychell *et al.*, 1998). Although there is variation in the extent to which young people regard the advice of their subject/other teachers more highly than that of a careers adviser, these findings suggest that subject teachers can have a powerful and at times partial influence on young people's decisions, which could impact upon the effectiveness of CEG.

5.3.3 Socio-economic factors

Socio-economic factors were also found to have a significant influence on young people's career decision-making. A shift in the UK economy away from manufacturing towards the service sector has had a profound effect on the labour market and has led to a proliferation in part-time, unskilled, and often temporary work. In contrast, skilled work in the emerging knowledge economy is increasingly dependent upon academic qualifications. The implications of this shift for individuals in the lower socio-economic classes, who remain less likely to continue in education, are far reaching (Maychell *et al.*, 1998). There is evidence to suggest that the attitudes towards work and learning of underachieving young men have been particularly affected; as a consequence, they have become more reluctant to learn, to accept the changing workplace, and to work hard for what they want (Lloyd, 2002).

The influence of socio-economic factors has serious implications for CEG and the role of guidance practitioners. Hodkinson & Sparkes (1993), in their discussion of the importance of socio-cultural factors, highlight the necessity for such practitioners to increase their understanding of the constraints within which young people have to learn and develop, and to endeavour to broaden young people's horizons by encouraging them to be more receptive to a range of information and potential opportunities. In particular, practitioners need to develop the skills to enable them to provide young people with strategies to counter the socio-economic factors and cultural constraints that impact upon them, as well as increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem. This may involve the development of additional CEG provision, tailored to meet the needs of specific groups of young people, such as those identified as being 'at risk'. Tailored provision of this nature, delivered by those with appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes, has been shown to have a significant impact on young people's learning outcomes and help them to prepare for post-16 transitions (Lloyd, 2002).

5.3.4 Institutional factors and academic attainment

A number of studies have found that factors relating to the school appeared to impact upon pupil progression in terms of career-related learning (Morris *et al.*, 1998; SWA Consulting, 1998). These factors include the type of school, the size of the Year 11 cohort and schools where more pupils are eligible for free school meals. In addition, the ability profile of the pupils and expected/actual academic attainment have been identified as factors that influence the extent to which young people are able to make successful transitions. The evidence suggests that higher achievers possess better self-awareness and opportunity awareness than

other pupils; as a consequence they have a clearer idea about future progression and are more likely to remain on their chosen post-16 pathway (Morris *et al.*, 1999; Wardman & Stevens, 1998).

5.3.5 Gender

SWA Consulting (1998) reported that progress towards decision-making and decidedness on post-16 options was greater among female than male pupils. According to Lloyd (2002), this presents guidance practitioners in general and those working with underachieving males in particular with a challenge. Lloyd suggests that a gendered set of attitudes towards masculinity could make it harder for young men to admit that they do not know what want to do; these attitudes could also mediate young men's experiences of CEG and the perceived benefits, which in turn will impact upon the effectiveness of CEG for these groups if it is not taken into account.

6. Conclusions

Although, because of the small number of high-quality studies reviewed, the findings must be regarded as indicative rather than definitive, a number of important conclusions regarding the role and importance of CEG for young people's transitions can be drawn. The evidence suggests that a good-quality careers education programme, coupled with impartial guidance provision, can equip pupils with the career-related skills they need in order to make informed decisions and successful transitions at KS3 and KS4, provided that they are tailored to individual rather than organisational needs, appropriately integrated into the timetable and the wider curriculum, and delivered at relevant points in time by suitably qualified staff.

However, the *effectiveness* of CEG is mediated by a number of factors, including the strategic and operational management and planning of CEG in schools, the quality of provision and the school's capacity to deliver it. The *impact* of CEG on young people and the transition process is further constrained by a number of other external and internal factors linked to young people's attitudes and abilities as well as their social and economic circumstances. The findings suggest that few schools in the UK have adequate capacity to deliver CEG effectively; as a result, some provision falls below acceptable quality standards. In the absence of good-quality CEG, there is evidence that other sources of 'informal' guidance from parents, friends and non-careers teachers are having a powerful influence over young people's choices; for some, this has resulted in unsuccessful transitions.

The results raise a number of issues and key challenges for policy-makers, managers, practitioners, and researchers. For policy-makers, the key challenge is to

ensure that the proposed reforms to schools, and 14-19 provision in particular, enable educational institutions and guidance providers to build on existing good practice in order to implement high-quality, appropriately tailored and fully integrated universal and targeted information, advice and guidance services for pupils. This will inevitably have resource implications but will be essential if the Government is to achieve its policy objectives linked to the skills agenda and in particular to Public Service Agreement targets for the achievement of qualifications at Level 2 and above.

Although it is recognised that practitioners may not always have the autonomy to implement changes to their practice without reference to their managers, their position on the 'front line' means they are well placed to consider the implications of research findings and seek to influence those responsible for planning and managing CEG processes. Of critical importance for managers within schools and the youth support agencies such as Connexions that work with them is the development of coherent strategies to support the implementation of the National Framework for CEG for pupils from Year 7 across all Key Stages. In order to deliver this strategy, managers should also be concerned with capacity. Managers could explore more flexible and creative approaches to delivery that ensure effective use of scarce resources. This could include the utilisation of information and communication technologies in order to address capacity issues, in addition to mechanisms to recruit and up-skill new and existing staff.

With the support of their managers, practitioners need to continue to develop their practice through training and professional development in order to ensure that they are equipped with the skills to respond to the diverse range of pupil needs and to combat the internal and external factors that can negatively influence the effectiveness of CEG and the transition process.

Finally, the systematic review process has identified a number of gaps and shortcomings in the quality and quantity of existing research evidence. Although the extent to which researchers are able to address gaps in research is largely dependent on the availability of funding, once funding has been secured it is incumbent on them to ensure that the outputs are sufficiently robust and crucially reported in a clear and transparent way that is open to scrutiny.

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