

# Huge variance found in aspirations of school-leavers, depending on where they study

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Schools can be hugely influential in students' choices about higher education, irrespective of the grades they achieve, research has found.

The study, conducted at Cardiff University, followed the educational pathways of all Year 11 pupils across Wales between 2005 and 2007.

When the only variable factor was the school they went to, the findings reveal that [young people](#) with the same grades made very different decisions about whether or not they went to university.

Of the 195 [secondary schools](#) in Wales researchers found approximately 46 schools where the odds of young people participating in [higher education](#) were 35% greater than the average, and 35 schools where the odds were 35% lower. In some schools, the odds of going to university were as much as 250% higher than average, while attending other schools lowered the odds of going to university by as much as 80%.

The effect of the school a pupil attended was even more apparent when it came to whether or not they went to elite universities, the figures reveal.

A school's overall quality, its size and whether lessons were taught through English or Welsh did not have a bearing on these differences, it was found. In fact, pupils from schools categorised as "red" or as needing the most support under the National Schools Categorisation System (NSCS) had, on average, higher odds of participating in higher education, when compared with other young people with the same levels of attainment and [socioeconomic backgrounds](#).

Lead author, Professor Chris Taylor, of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD), said: "The findings suggest that widening access is not simply the responsibility of universities, and that schools also have an important role in influencing the future educational choices of their school leavers, irrespective of their levels of attainment. The way higher [education](#) aspirations are discussed, presented and actioned in schools has an important part to play in shaping a young person's decision-making.

**More information:** Chris Taylor et al. The effect of schools on school

leavers' university participation, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/09243453.2018.1484776](https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2018.1484776)

Provided by Cardiff University

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