Programme name: ASDAN Certificate of Personal Effectiveness

Contact details/links for further details: http://www.asdan.org.uk/Qualifications/CoPE_1_and_2

Programme description, aims and objectives:
The Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) is a set of qualifications (Level 1, 2 and 3) developed by ASDAN Education. CoPE is designed to promote a wide range of personal qualities, wider activities and generic and key skills. The CoPE comprises 12 modules, each of which has three sections. The modules include Communication, Independent Living, the Environment, etc. Each module has a range of challenges (activities), such as planning and giving an oral presentation. Students need to complete challenges and in so doing meet specific standards in a set of skills assessment criteria, such as using clear language in the presentation. A “portfolio of evidence” is built up as the student completes challenges, providing evidence of meeting skills assessment criteria. A student needs to complete 12 credits (120 hours) of challenges and meet skills assessment criteria in order to get a CoPE Level 1 or 2. CoPE Level 2 imposes some restriction of the composition of the 12 challenges, and requires Level 2 skills.

Currently, CoPE Level 1 is equivalent to a GCSE Grade E/F and Level 2 is equivalent to a GCSE Grade B. The use of this GCSE equivalence for headline performance measures will be removed from 2014, along with many other qualifications.

Target population:
CoPE Levels 1 and 2 mainly target young people in year 10 and 11, while CoPE level 3 is for those in post-16 education (and receives 70 UCAS tariff points). Schools may be motivated to offer CoPE to students with learning difficulties or on the border of achieving 5 A*-Cs.

Expected outcomes:
Competence in the following skills is assessed, and expected:
“Introduction to Working with Others, Introduction to Improving own Learning and Performance, Introduction to Problem Solving, Planning and Carrying out a Piece of Research, Communication through Discussion and Planning and Giving an Oral Presentation.”

Evidence of activities and skills is recorded by paperwork, assessed, and is externally moderated by ASDAN, an Ofqual approved Awarding Organisation, before the certificate is issued.

Study reference:

Related studies:
According to the report, there has been no existing research evidence on the contribution of CoPE on GCSE outcomes.
**Study details:**

The study examined the impact of CoPE Level 2 on “performance indicators at Key Stage 4”. It aimed to address five research questions:

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. Do pupils and staff identify relationships between CoPE and other KS4 study with respect to pupil engagement, attendance and motivation?
5. If so, what is the nature of experiences, perceptions, impressions and claims about such relationships?

The study consisted of three strands of analysis:

1. a quantitative analysis using the National Pupil Database NPD (main analysis)
2. a quantitative analysis using paired sample
3. case studies

The main analysis using NPD looked at the correlation between taking CoPE Level 2 and four GCSE outcomes: a) a pass in GCSE English at A* to G, (b) a pass in GCSE English at A* to C, (c) a pass in GCSE English at A* or A, or (d) five GCSE passes at A* to C including English and Maths (excluding equivalents). This regression approach included some subgroup analysis. Thus, it quantitatively addressed research questions 1 to 3. The paired-sample (quasi-experimental) analysis re-examined questions 1 and 2. Case studies are designed to address questions 4 and 5.

**Study sample:**

The main analysis used the NPD for 532,925 students taking KS4 exams in summer 2010.

The “paired sample” analysis selected two groups of students. First, 200 individuals were randomly selected from those undertaking CoPE in “wide usage” schools. Then, for each of the 200 CoPE individuals, a paired individual was randomly selected from the group of individuals who had similar characteristics to the former group in terms of eight observable characteristics (e.g. KS3 attainment in English and gender) and were from the “no CoPE” schools. This can be viewed as a quasi-experimental approach.

The case studies involved four schools which used CoPE substantially.

**Methodology:**

The main analysis consisted of a series of regression models (binary logistic). The dependent variable (i.e. the outcome of interest) for these models was one of the four GCSE outcomes aforementioned e.g. whether or not the person achieved A*-C in English GCSE or not. The model then examined the relationship between the outcome and whether an individual undertook CoPE level 2 or not, and whether they were from a school that offered CoPE or not. The objective was to determine whether students who took CoPE level 2 were more likely to achieve the outcome.

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1 A school is labelled “wide usage” if 25% or more of the cohort took CoPE in 2010.
2 A school is labelled “no CoPE” if none of the cohort took CoPE in 2010.
Schools were classified as “No CoPE” of no students took CoPE, “thin-usage” if less than 25% of students took CoPE and “wide-usage” if more than 25% of students took CoPE. Thus, each individual fell into one of five groups: a No-CoPE school; a thin-usage school and not taking CoPE level 2; a thin-usage school and taking CoPE level 2; a wide-usage school and not taking CoPE level 2; a wide-usage school and taking CoPE level 2.

The regression models allowed for eight other individual characteristics that might influence outcomes, such as gender, ethnicity, FSM eligibility. Although this main analysis was not a before and after research design, the models did allow for one measure of prior achievement of students (KS3 attainment in English) which adds to the strength of the design. This regression approach allows us to interpret any positive relationship between taking CoPE and a particular outcome as causal if the only differences between those who take CoPE and those who do not are included in the analysis (KS3 attainment in English, gender, ethnicity, eligibility for Free School Meals, Special Educational Needs, English as a second language, persistent absentee in KS3, and living in a deprived neighbourhood). If for example, those taking CoPE are students who are struggling and on a downward trajectory due to factors we do not observe (e.g. family problems for example), then this will mean that the achievement of CoPE students are lower not because of CoPE but because of these other unobserved factors.

In the sub group analyses the following outcomes were considered (b) a pass in GCSE English at A* to C and (d) five GCSE passes at A* to C including English and Maths (excluding equivalents). The sub groups considered were students with different levels of prior (KS3) attainment. The extent to which the impact of the programme varied by gender, Special Education Needs, ethnicity and Free School Meals status was also considered.

The paired-sample analysis compared 200 randomly selected individuals from wide-usage schools who took CoPE with 200 randomly selected individuals from “no CoPE” schools who were similar to the former group across eight variables: KS3 attainment in English, gender, ethnicity, eligibility for Free School Meals, Special Educational Needs, English as a second language, persistent absentee in KS3, and living in a deprived neighbourhood. This matching approach enables us to identify the causal impact of the CoPE programme only if there are no systematic differences between those who take CoPE and those who do not other than across the 8 variables included in the model.

The case studies consisted of interviews of staff and students at four schools which used CoPE substantially. The staff interviewed included the member of staff with main responsibility for CoPE and the senior manager with overall curriculum responsibility.

**Results and impact:**

The regression results showed the impact from taking CoPE or being in a school that is thin usage or wide usage of CoPE, compared to being a student not taking CoPE and in a No-CoPE school.

The report suggests that there were indeed differences in the characteristics of pupils across the three types of schools (no CoPE, thin-usage schools and wide-usage schools). Hence it appears that no CoPE, thin usage and wide usage schools were different. This may have been a potential source of bias. It could be that wide usage schools were higher (or lower) quality for example. Hence comparing students in thin usage and wide usage schools would tell us not about the impact of using CoPE but about the underlying differences between these types of schools.

Although the models did account for some observed differences between students, such as their prior attainment at KS3 in English, there may well have been other differences across CoPE and non CoPE students. Again this may have been a source of selection bias. Indeed the qualitative analyses did suggest that CoPE students may be lower attaining or those who are struggling academically. This would mean that the approach used in the study would tend to underestimate the impact of taking CoPE because it did not allow for the fact
that the students who took CoPE may have been more likely to be on a downward trajectory than those who did not.

The results from the main analysis indicated that in wide-usage schools, undertaking CoPE Level 2 was significantly and positively correlated with passing GCSE English at A* to G, passing GCSE English at A* to C, and getting five GCSE passes at A* to C including English and Maths. The correlation between CoPE and a pass in GCSE English at A* or A was not statistically significant. Such evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that CoPE improves the general learning skills and therefore the GCSE results of the students in wide-usage schools.

In thin-usage schools, taking CoPE level 2 was significantly and negatively correlated with the outcomes b) to d). This clearly reflects the fact that this regression approach may have had selection bias. The model did allow for those with lower KS3 attainment being more likely to take CoPE. However, the model could not allow for any biases caused by students who are on a downward trajectory between KS3 and KS4 being more likely to take CoPE.

The subgroup analysis focused on two outcomes only: a pass in GCSE English at A* to C and five GCSE passes at A* to C including English and Maths (excluding equivalents). In wide-usage schools, the impact of CoPE appeared to be more positive for students with lower KS3 attainment; and among low KS3 achievers, those with SEN, ethnic minorities and FSM students appeared to have gained more from CoPE. In thin-usage schools, CoPE was still negatively associated with GCSE outcome in the subgroup analysis, probably reflecting the negative selection effects discussed earlier.

The paired-sample analysis found that CoPE had a positive impact on only one GCSE measure, namely GCSE English A*-C. Individuals taking CoPE achieved higher GCSE English results than the non-CoPE ones by an average of 0.2 grade points, which is statistically significant at the 5% level. The relationship between taking CoPE and the other outcomes considered was insignificant. Given that wide usage schools had more disadvantaged students (in terms of FSM, SEN and lower KS3 attainment) than no CoPE schools, one might suspect that there are likely to be greater negative peer effects on the CoPE group in the paired sample than the comparison group. Thus, the comparison might understate the positive impact of CoPE.

In the schools involved in the case studies, staff determined which pupils would study CoPE. It was often offered to students with low levels of attendance, behavioural issues, SEN, and those on the borderline of achieving five A*-C including English and Maths. Two schools stated the GCSE equivalence was a major motivation for running CoPE, and that they would look for another course when the equivalence is removed. Staff and students reported positive effects on motivation, attendance and confidence. Other advantages cited included the flexibility of the course, its provision of life skills, and the opportunity to obtain a qualification in the absence of exams.

Overall, undertaking CoPE appears to have had some positive effects on GCSE English and the attainment of five GCSEs at grade A*-C, especially for those with lower prior attainment and from disadvantaged backgrounds. If the aim of CoPE is not just to improve GCSE point scores, but to develop young people’s wider skills and personal qualities, then it is inevitably difficult to evaluate its success or failure as the individuals’ skills and longer run outcomes were not measured in the study.

Impact grade: 2

Costs: CoPE provides courses that require teaching resources just like any other course and hence it is important that the direct costs of CoPE materials and registrations are compared with alternatives that
schools would pay if students took different courses.

The direct costs of CoPE are as follows:

- Schools need to pay for registration with ASDAN and course materials such as worksheets and CD-ROMs.
- The annual fee for a school to become an ASDAN Centre varies according to the courses that the school wants to offer.
- Further details are available at: [http://www.asdan.org.uk/Costs](http://www.asdan.org.uk/Costs)

### Quality of evaluation evidence:

The main analysis used a cross section regression to examine the relationship between taking CoPE and a range of GCSE outcomes, though the model does allow for prior achievement in English at KS3. While many individual characteristics were controlled for, the results potentially suffer from various possible sources of selection bias. For example, the study found a negative impact from taking CoPE in thin usage schools. This could be attributable to CoPE having a genuinely negative impact on students’ outcomes but equally it could be due to systematic differences across CoPE and non-CoPE pupils that were not observed by the researchers. In particular, there was qualitative evidence that students taking CoPE may have been more likely to be facing other challenges that would impact negatively on their progress between KS3 and KS4. If this is correct then the estimates provided in the report of the impact of CoPE will tend to have understated the positive impact of CoPE. We must acknowledge however that the direction of bias could be the other way, causing the estimates provided to overstate the positive impact of CoPE (or under estimate the negative impact). For example, if low attaining but highly motivated students were the ones most likely to be allocated to CoPE then these students would do better at GCSE than those who were equally low attaining but less motivated and hence not allocated to the programme. This would cause estimates of the impact of CoPE to overstate the impact of the programme. We are not in any way suggesting this is the case but it is a possibility with the method used in the study.

The subgroup analysis should alleviate some selection effects, but it is plausible that CoPE students differ in unobserved ways even when we look within subgroups and within schools.

The paired-sample analysis compared a random selection of individuals who took CoPE with a randomly drawn comparison group who were identical to the former across eight observed characteristics. Again, the estimates provide evidence of the causal impact of CoPE only if one is willing to assume that there were no other systematic unobserved differences between the two groups of pupils that might have impacted on their GCSE performance. If there were unobserved differences, such as in school quality or due to the selection of students into CoPE, then the estimates would not reflect the real impact of CoPE.

The case studies were inevitably descriptive and based on a rather limited sample. The information they provided was useful but could not prove any causal impact from the programme.

### Quality of evidence grade:

- Main analysis 3
- Paired-sample analysis 5
Appendix: details of impact grades and quality of evidence grades are set out below

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 (none)</td>
<td>No relationship between the youth service and the outcome in question.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 (low)</td>
<td>Provision of the youth service may be positively related to one but not all outcomes or just for sub-groups of the target population.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 (medium)</td>
<td>The youth service has moderate impact on all outcomes and sub-groups or high impact on some outcomes and sub-groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (high)</td>
<td>The youth service has high impact on all outcomes and sub-groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Type of study</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Foundation level</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Descriptive, anecdotal, expert opinion</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Study where a statistical relationship (correlation) between the outcome and receiving services or programme is established</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Study which accounts for when the services or programme were delivered by surveying before and after or a study which approximates a before and after approach using pre-existing prior measures of the outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Study where there is both a before and after evaluation strategy and a clear comparison between groups who do and do not receive the services or programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>As above but in addition includes statistical modelling to produce better comparison groups and of outcomes to</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Study where services or programmes are provided on the basis of individuals being randomly assigned to either the treatment or the control group</td>
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