



How schools can help protect young people in a recession

Career guidance has never been seen as more important but what really makes a difference to the prospects of young people? This paper provides guidance to schools on how school leaders, teachers and guidance professionals can be most confident that they are providing useful support to students. It summarises available research on how schools can be most effective – and shares examples of how countries are helping to prepare young people to become career ready even at the most difficult times. In particular, it focuses on three important teenage attributes which act as indicators for whether they can be expected to do as well as possible in the jobs market. It matters:

- What teenagers think about their futures in work
- How they explore their potential futures at home or at school
- Whether they experience workplaces through part-time working, internships or volunteering.

Young people who think about, explore and experience potential future lives in work are much better placed to make decisions that are right for them and compete for available jobs. The paper summarises the key evidence, sets out principles underpinning more effective career guidance and shows how well students are doing in different countries. Finally, encourages interested policy makers and practitioners to stay in touch with OECD work that will conclude late in 2021 with the development of data-driven tools for practice.

In any economic recession, as the jobs market gets tougher, young people can expect to struggle. Compared to older workers, while they may be cheaper to employ, young people tend to have less know-how about how to get a job, weaker social networks to help find a job and less experience to draw upon to persuade employers that they will be a 'safe bet'. In a recession, employers have greater choice in recruitment and in most countries young people struggle to compete for available jobs. Between 2007 and 2009 for example, during the Great Financial Crisis youth unemployment rose by an average of 44% across the OECD countries - more than twice the rate of increase of people over 25 - and remained high. It was only in 2017 that youth unemployment returned to pre-recession levels. Even so, on the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, one young person in five aged 15-24 around the world was not in education or work, typically experiencing much higher rates of unemployment than older peers. Moreover when in work, young people were far more likely to be in low paid or insecure jobs at higher risk of automation.

During the economic crisis that has accompanied the Covid-19 healthcare emergency, young people have again suffered disproportionately. They have been more likely to be in occupations where jobs opportunities have diminished because of the virus. As the International Labor Organisation states, the impact of the pandemic on the employment of young people has been systematic, deep and disproportionate.

A heartrending combination: high achieving, highly ambitious young people struggling to find good work

The tragedy of young people's struggles against the reality of the jobs market is revealed most acutely when account is taken of how they have prepared for their transitions out of education. Across the world, young people leaving education today are, on average, more highly qualified than any preceding generation in history. They enter the jobs market with often considerably more years of schooling than their parents or grandparents. What's more, today's young people form the most ambitious generation ever. Across a wide range of countries, some two-thirds of teenagers now expect to study at university and/or find jobs as managers or professionals. This is cause for celebration. Both investment in education and high ambition for working life are in general good things. It is tribute to school systems around the world and good news for young people. In most (but not all) countries in the pre-COVID era, higher levels of education have been associated with lower levels of adult unemployment.

The youth paradox

The hard reality of the labour market however is that when employers have the choice, in most countries they prefer not to take on young people even if they are more educated than older peers. The bottom line is that, for young people, academic success alone is not sufficient to ensure easy transitions into good employment: young people also need understanding and experience of the labour market. As Italian economist Francesco Pastore (2018) argues:

“Young people are becoming ever more educated around the world, but they still have lower human capital than adults because they lack work-related competences.”

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the OECD came together with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, European Commission, European Training Foundation, International Labor Organisation and UNESCO to highlight the growing importance of [‘Investing in career guidance’](#).

As young people stay in education longer than ever before, they need to make more decisions about their priorities for studying and training, but with the jobs market becoming increasingly unstable, decision-making has become more difficult. It is not just young people looking for work who need support. The pandemic has driven millions of young people to stay in education longer than they had first planned. They will be making potentially life-changing decisions often at short notice about the education and training they pursue. Their younger classmates will also be presented with new challenges as they make decisions about their schooling.

The COVID crisis

Now, the COVID-19 crisis has focused further urgent attention on the employment prospects of young people. While some sectors like hospitality and transport have nearly ground to a halt, others such as healthcare and online communications have increased their need for workers. Looking ahead, it is hard to know how long it will be before economies fully recover.

Never before in human history has career guidance been so important

Education systems have it in their power to help all students to compete more effectively in the jobs market – and by doing so give those students more choices in life. Schools can do a lot beyond maximising academic achievement to assist young people prepare for their transitions into work. For young people, the returns are

not just economic. Growing evidence points to the valuable role that career guidance has to play in preparing students psychologically to deal with a jobs market that might not live up to their expectations.

Why career guidance works

This paper provides guidance to schools on how school leaders, teachers and career guidance professionals can be most confident that they are providing useful support to students. It summarises available research on why and how it is that good guidance can be expected to work - and shares examples of how countries are helping to prepare young people to become career ready even at the most difficult times.

In a hurry? Ten things to remember...

1. **Career guidance matters** and can be expected to make a difference to young people. Qualifications alone are not enough – especially when unemployment is high! **Help students to become aware of potential employers and attractive to them, preparing them psychologically** for the future that awaits.
2. Many young people know very little about work - this is a sign of trouble ahead. **Career thinking is very often narrow, confused and distorted by gender, migrant status and social background.**
3. Good guidance not only provides access to information about the jobs market, but also **addresses the (often unspoken) assumptions and expectations** of young people about what work is appropriate for different people to do and what certain jobs, like those entered through vocational education and training, are really like.
4. It should **start young**, encouraging children's curiosity about the working world and helping them to draw connections between what they do in the classroom and who they might become as an adult. **The most important decisions students make about their investment in education do not come at the end of schooling.** Career guidance has an important role to play in motivating young people to work hard at school.
5. Through their education, make sure that students have lots **and lots of opportunity to meet, hear from and speak with people about the jobs they do.** The more students engage, the more they find it useful and the better ultimately they can be expected to do in adult work. Think of it as throwing mud at a wall. No one knows what will stick, but the more that is thrown, the more likely it is that something of importance will.
6. Make sure that when students engage with employers and people in work that it is authentic – and feels like it. **Authentic experiences are hard to ignore.** In an authentic interaction with an employee volunteer for example, a student will feel that they are getting an honest perspective from someone well-placed comment on what it is like to work in a particular occupation.
7. **A lot of a little can go a long way** – students can learn very quickly from authentic experiences such as career talks and benefit from taking part in different experiences.
8. Ensure that students have access to **impartial, trained career guidance professionals** to help them reflect on, and make sense of, who they hope to become and what they are learning from their career explorations.
9. Realise that young people have very different access to the information and support that helps in transitions into work. **Disadvantaged students especially have a lot to gain** from their schools preparing them to compete for available work. If schools do not act, disadvantage continues unchecked.

10. **Career readiness is everyone's responsibility.** Good guidance involves the whole school and looks for opportunities across the curriculum and the local economic community (employers, trade associations, trade unions) to bring learning to life by connecting classroom activities with potential future selves.

1: Career readiness in the pandemic: how we know what can be expected to work

This paper shares insights from two important sources. One is national longitudinal surveys. These are studies that follow thousands of people from childhood to adulthood, collating huge amounts of information about their home and school experiences, their teenage attitudes and aspirations and what happened to them in adult life. By reviewing these studies, patterns related to adult success in work emerge. Young people with better academic achievement and from more privileged social backgrounds for example, routinely do better in the jobs market than less fortunate peers. Statistical analysis however, can take account of these structural advantages. It becomes possible to isolate further specific aspects of teenage lives and see if they help explain why some young people go on to do better in work than would be expected given their qualifications and social backgrounds. Analysis of career-related questions in national longitudinal surveys helps to confirm what it is that can be expected to work in providing support for young people as they approach their transitions into adulthood.

National longitudinal surveys and what they have to say about young people's career readiness

This paper draws significantly on the 2020 OECD working paper [Career Ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19](#). That paper explores academic analyses of national longitudinal surveys from Australia, Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States which follow young people from childhood to adulthood. Examples include the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth which is a rolling survey that every couple of years follows new groups of 15 year-olds to the age of 25, and the British Cohort Study that follows a group of children from their birth in 1970 to the present day. This paper also draws on analysis of OECD surveys from the Programme of International Student Assessment. Two OECD papers in particular, [Working it out: career guidance and employer engagement](#) (2018) and [Dream Jobs? Teenagers' career aspirations and the future of work](#) (2020), have shown that the teenage career aspirations of teenagers are very commonly narrow, confused and distorted by social background. What can be learnt from longitudinal surveys is limited by the questions asked, but they provide sufficient evidence to see patterns across different countries and time periods.

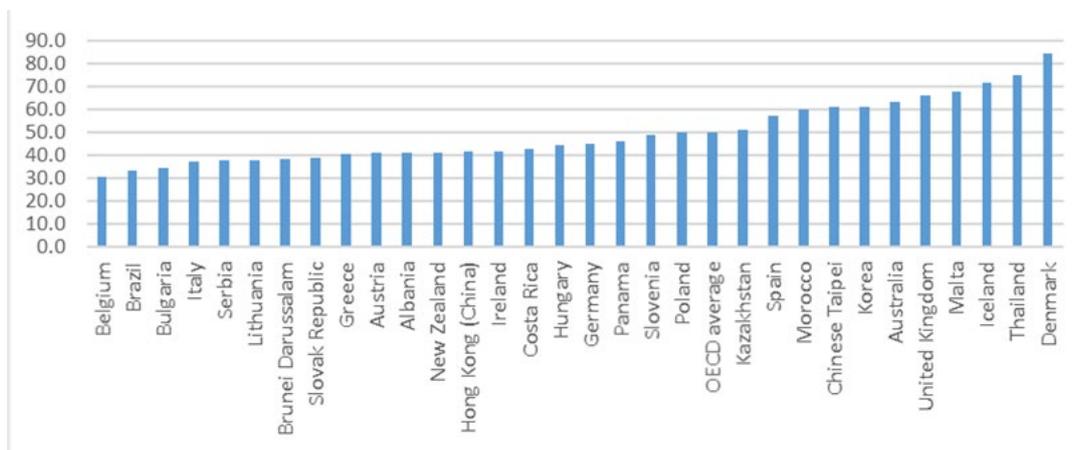
The second dataset is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Undertaken every three years since 2000, PISA surveys hundreds of thousands of teenagers who are carefully selected to ensure that they are representative of teenagers who live in their countries and regions. They take tests in reading, mathematics and science to assess their academic capability and respond to scores of questions about their backgrounds, attitudes, experiences and ambitions. In 2018, more than 600 000 young people from 79 countries and regions took part in the PISA tests. PISA targets 15 year-olds, young people who are on the verge of completing compulsory schooling and/or making important decisions about following narrower programmes of education and training. PISA consists of a number of questionnaires, not all of

which are completed in every country. It provides the best information that exists in the world on how young people's attitudes and experiences vary within and between countries.

Comparing teenage indicators of career readiness

Whereas analysis of national longitudinal surveys highlights the sorts of thinking and experiences that are associated with doing well in adult work, PISA shows how common it is for students in different countries and with different characteristics to demonstrate that they are developing such career readiness. For example, PISA shows that there is substantial variation across countries in the likelihood of young people speaking with a career advisor in school by the age of 15. While on average, only half of teenagers have had such a discussion, in Belgium it is less than one-third and in Denmark it is more than four in five.

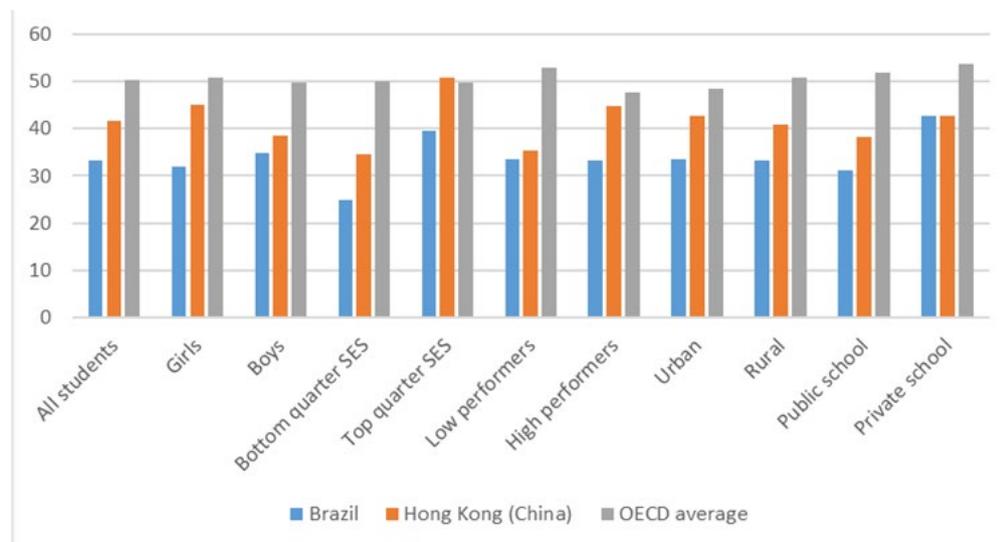
Percentage of 15 year-olds who have spoken to a career advisor in school.



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

At times, variation within countries can be substantial. Often, it is young people who are lower achievers or from more disadvantaged backgrounds who gain greater access to career guidance as they are more likely to be on vocational tracks or expected to enter the labour market earlier. Elsewhere however, it is young people with more advantaged socio-economic status (SES), higher achievers, urban dwellers and private school students who are typically more likely to report a conversation with a career advisor by the age of 15. Brazil and Hong Kong are good examples of places where those in greatest need of support from a guidance counsellor are less likely to speak to one.

Percentage of students who have spoken with a career advisor in school by personal characteristics (Brazil, Hong Kong and OECD average).



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

2: What students think about their futures in work really does make a difference

The OECD PISA study asks young people what type of job they expect to do at age 30. From this simple question, a number of assumptions can be made. Evidence from longitudinal surveys shows that career certainty, career ambition and career alignment are associated with teenagers going on to do better than would be expected (given their qualifications and backgrounds) in work as adults. For schools, if students are uncertain, unambitious and misalignment in their thinking - these are signs that students are exhibiting career confusion.

Career certainty

If a teenager is unable to say what job they would expect to have at age 30 (or thereabouts) they are seen by researchers as being uncertain. Studies show that uncertain students can be expected to pay penalties after they leave education. Scott Yates and colleagues, for example, use British data and find that young people who are uncertain at age 16 are considerably more likely to experience unemployment by the age of 18. In an American study, Mike Voulo and his colleagues find that high school students who are uncertain about their occupational expectations can expect lower earnings and to spend more time unemployed than comparable classmates even into their mid-thirties. There are circumstances where teenage uncertainty does not prove to be an indicator of worse employment prospects.

Participation in career guidance activities and lower levels of teenage uncertainty

The PISA results show that students who take part in career guidance activities are routinely less likely to be uncertain about their career plans than peers. Activities linked with lower levels of uncertainty include:

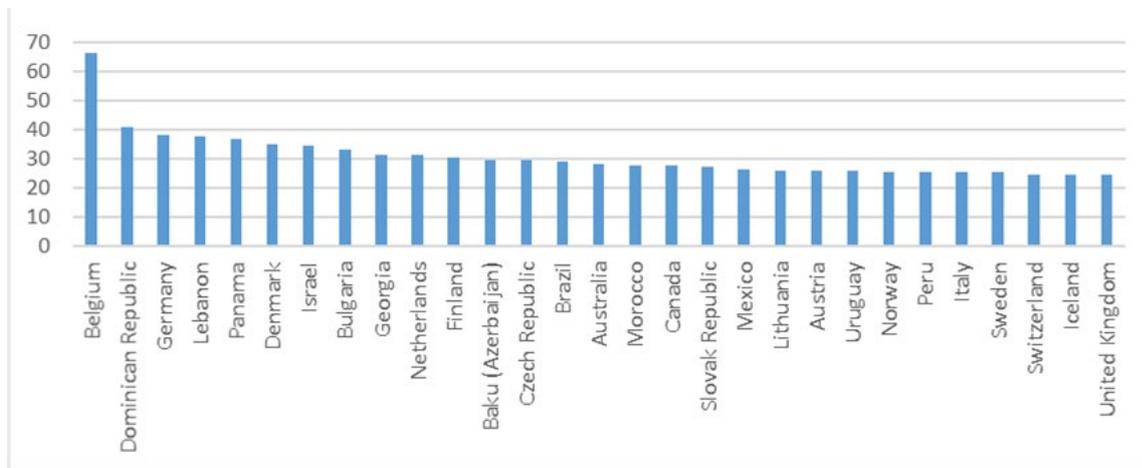
- Internships
- Job shadowing and workplace visits
- Job fairs
- Speaking with a career advisor
- Completing a questionnaire
- Researching jobs on the internet

[Career Ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of Covid-19](#)

Uncertain teenagers who are motivated to learn and higher achievers with access to useful career guidance tend to buck the trend.

PISA 2018 shows however, that most young people who are uncertain about their occupational expectations have characteristics that give cause for concern. It is more often lower achievers and students from more disadvantaged backgrounds who report uncertainty. Such teenagers run the risk of entering the labour market at a young age without a compass to guide their decision-making. In many countries, as they make potentially life-changing decisions about their education and training, more than one-quarter of 15 year-olds cannot say what job they expect to do by age 30. It is striking that a comparison of results for 2000 and 2018 shows that career uncertainty has risen by 81% across the OECD since the turn of the century.

Countries and regions where more than 25% of students are uncertain



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

Career ambition

A second indicator relates to the levels of young people’s career aspirations. This is measured in two ways. Student are understood to have high career ambitions when they anticipate working in a professional or managerial occupation or when they indicate that they plan on attending university. Some studies show that teenage ambition can be just as good an indicator of occupational attainment as academic ability.

PISA shows that often teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower levels of ambition that their more advantaged peers even if the the PISA tests show that they have similar levels of academic ability. Across OECD countries, 15% of students taking part in PISA 2018 whose results in reading, mathematics and science tests indicated ability to progress to higher education, did not expect to complete higher education. But for young people from the most socially disadvantaged quarter of students, the percentage was nearly double at 28%. More than four in ten disadvantaged students in Austria, Finland,

Primary Futures (United Kingdom)

Effective career guidance begins early, challenging assumptions and stereotypes. Launched in 2015, Primary Futures provides primary-aged children in the United Kingdom with an opportunity to meet and interact in person or online with professionals from a diverse range of careers and backgrounds. The goal is to broaden children’s horizons and show them at an early age what is possible before they can begin to rule out certain career aspirations. Developed with the national trade union representing primary school leaders, the programme actively recruits female volunteers working in non-traditional roles as a means of challenging gender stereotyping.

Find out more: [Primary Futures](#)

Germany, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Poland and Switzerland with the ability to progress to higher education do not plan to do so. It appears that many disadvantaged teenagers, particularly boys, may possess a poor conception of their own abilities, lack confidence in continuing in education or face additional barriers. On average, one-third of high performing young people from disadvantaged backgrounds across OECD countries do not expect to work in jobs typically requiring a university degree, compared to 17% of their similarly achieving, but more advantaged peers.

Career alignment

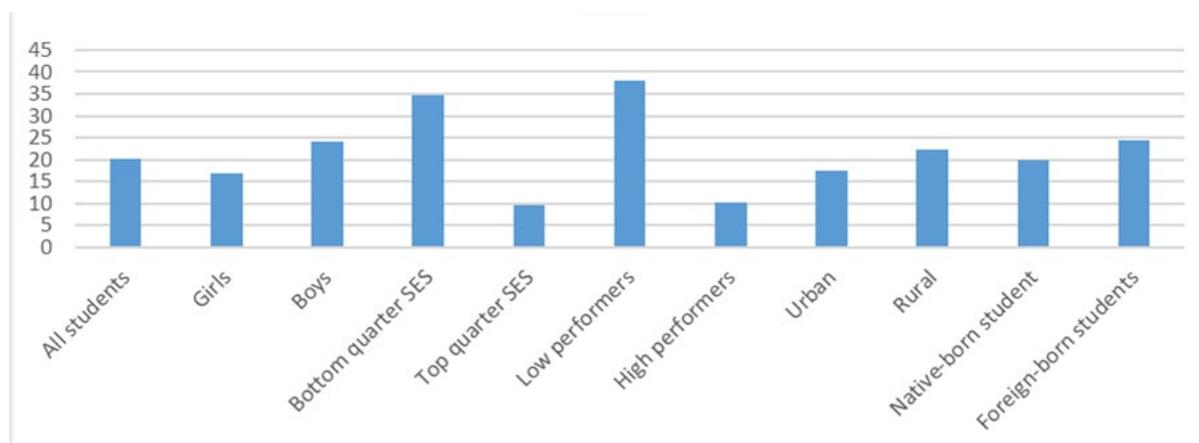
Analysis of longitudinal surveys also shows that young people who underestimate the level of education needed to secure their career expectation can expect to do worse in the adult jobs market than comparable peers. Teenagers who underestimate the education needed to achieve their occupational goals are often described by researchers as ‘misaligned’. For example, if a young person expected to work as a doctor or a lawyer (as very many do), but planned on leaving education as early as possible, they would be seen as misaligned. Such students underestimate the amount of education they need to achieve their goals. It is a strong indication of confusion about how the jobs market works. In 2018 across the OECD, one in five students were misaligned, rising to one in three among the most disadvantaged. The study by Scott Yates and colleagues mentioned above also explores the impact of misalignment on young people and finds that misaligned teenagers are much more likely to end up spending time unemployed before their twentieth birthday than classmates with comparable academic achievement and social backgrounds. Drawing on US survey data, Soobin Kim and colleagues find that teenagers who underestimated the qualifications needed for the job they aspired to could expect to earn up to one-third less than similar classmates who overestimated what they needed to do.

Students talking to volunteers from the world of work about jobs of interest (United Kingdom)

When students meet with people in work to talk about possible careers, they have chance to very quickly develop new and useful knowledge about jobs and how they can be secured. Career events are at their best when students feel the people they are talking to are authentic and they get lots of opportunity to speak with different people. Job fairs and in-classroom career talks from volunteers are quick and easy ways to get young people thinking about their futures in work. Still better is the Career Carousel where small groups of students speak with volunteers for 10-15 minutes before moving on to another volunteer. It is easier for students to ask questions and harder for them to become distracted.

Find out more: [Career events. What works?](#)

Student misalignment. Percentage of students underestimating education required to achieve career ambition. OECD countries.



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

Career concentration

A further likely indication that young people's career thinking is raising concerns relates to how concentrated student ambitions are. On average across the OECD, around half of young people expressing a view, say that they will be working in one of just ten jobs at 30 years-old. In some countries, more than 70% of students express this view. At its most extreme, 38% of girls in Saudi Arabia state that they will work in just one occupation, as a doctor, by the age of 30. While more research is needed, it is very likely that such levels of concentration are cause for concern. It can be assumed that employers are not signalling well to young people when so many students plan on working in so few jobs. The great majority of 15 year-olds, who will often be in the process of making important decisions about their investment in education linked to their aspirations, can expect to end up disappointed. Lower levels of career concentration indicate that young people are aware of a wider range of jobs.

This is especially important when it comes to jobs that have good prospects, especially during a recession. One of the lessons taken from the Great Financial Crisis was that youth unemployment was lower in countries where many young people took part in Vocational Education and Training (VET). Where employers are heavily involved (due to self-interest) in supporting VET programmes with apprenticeships or other forms of work-based learning, young people can have some confidence that there will be a skilled job for them at the end of their training. Unless financial incentives are so great that they seriously distort the cost/benefit balance, students can expect employers to only offer the apprenticeship if there is strong, continuing demand for the connected product or service. In a turbulent jobs market, work-based learning is a good signal that student investment in vocational training is likely to pay off. In many countries however, young people show scant interest in the sorts of skilled jobs accessed through VET programmes, including apprenticeships. The PISA 2018 survey shows that in many countries, interest is restricted to low achieving working class boys. But this is not always the case. In Hungary one girl in twenty, in the Czech Republic one in fifteen students from the highest socio-economic backgrounds and in

Speedmeets (New Zealand)

One example of a Career Carousel is Speedmeets. Driven by a shortage of young people entering the skilled trades, the New Zealand programme brings students into contact with employers through a series of six minute 1-2-1 meetings. At the end of the event, if employer and student both want to find out more about each other, they are matched up and have a deeper conversation. Speedmeets is design to broaden aspiration, develop communication skills and help young people find a training programme.

Find out more: [Speedmeets](#)

Switzerland one in eleven of the highest achievers expects to enter skilled employment typically entered through vocational education. While these figures reflect the quality of the programmes, they also highlight teenage familiarity with VET through their home and school networks.

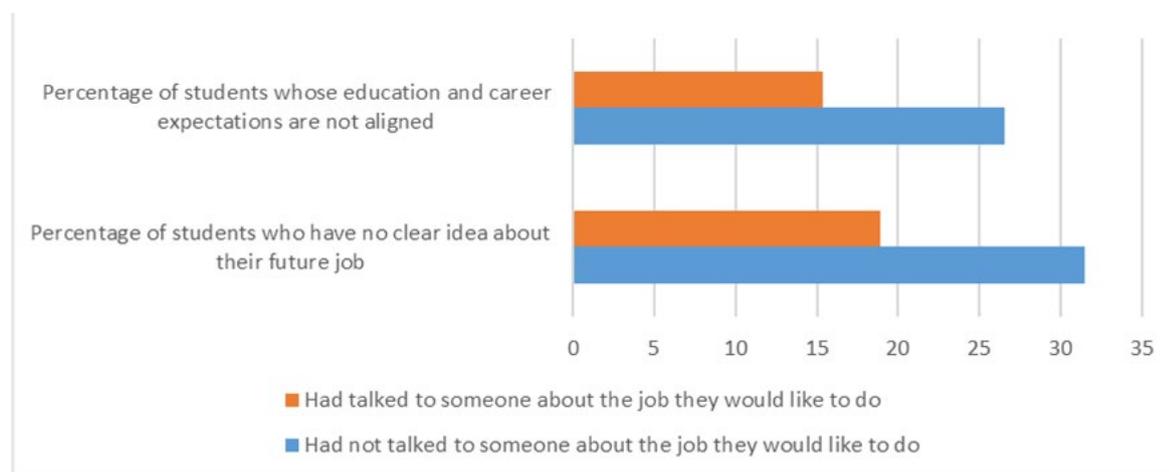
3: Whether students explore their futures in work, at home or at school really does make a difference

Study of national longitudinal surveys also shows that teenagers who explore their possible futures in school or at home can also be expected to do better in the adult jobs market than would be expected given their qualifications and backgrounds. PISA 2018 provides information from more than 30 countries on how often 15 year-olds report taking part in career-related activities. The results give cause for concern.

Career conversations

One of the most striking findings from [Career Ready?](#), the OECD review of national longitudinal surveys, is how important it is for young people to talk about their career aspirations. Simply having a conversation about job plans with family members, family friends, career guidance counsellors, teachers or other interested adults is associated in many studies with better outcomes in employment. Analysis of PISA 2018 shows that young people who had spoken to someone about the job they would like to do when they leave education are significantly less likely to be uncertain or misaligned in their career thinking.

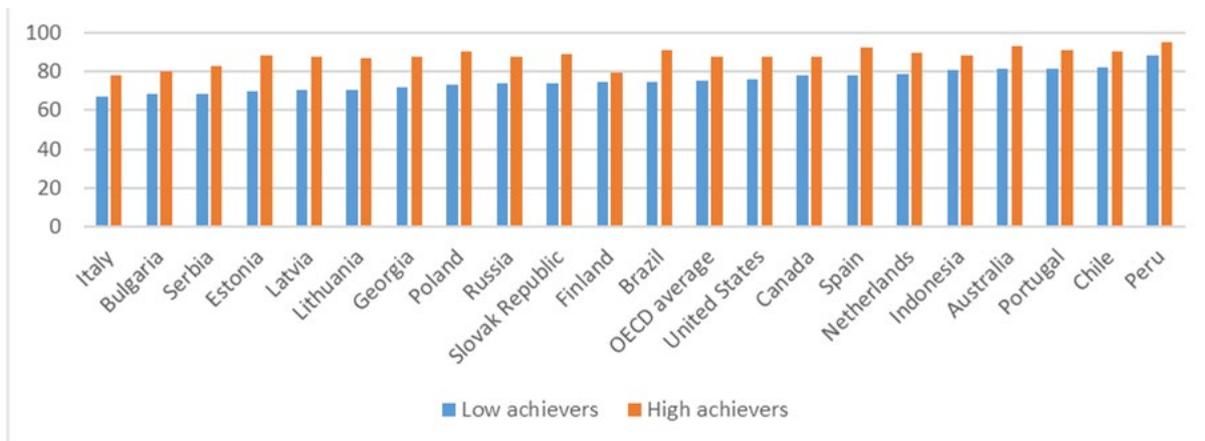
Relationship between teenage career thinking and having spoken to someone about job interests. OECD average



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

A conversation is a simple sign that a student is not only thinking about their future, but also that they are exploring it with people who may well be able to give them helpful advice and guidance. Young people who reported having such a conversation are also significantly more likely to agree that “trying hard at school will help me get a good job”, a sign of their educational motivation. However, a worryingly high percentage of young people, especially lower achievers and students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (who might be expected to leave education at earliest opportunity) report that, at age 15, they have never spoken to anyone about jobs they might do in adulthood. As the next table shows, consistently it is more likely that higher achievers (on the PISA tests in science, mathematics and reading) who will discuss their job ambitions.

Percentage of students agreeing that they had spoken to someone about a job interest. Low and high achievers.



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

Occupational exploration

In most countries, teenagers can be expected to be presented with a choice at some point of whether to pursue vocational or general programmes of study. While national experiences vary quite a lot, [analysis](#) shows graduates of VET programmes, especially at upper secondary level, can be expected in general to perform better in the first few years of working life than comparable peers with similar levels of qualifications, but in general education. American and Australian studies show as well that young people who select one or more occupationally-focused modules within an upper secondary curriculum that is largely academic, can also expect to do better in their first years in adult work. When teenagers sign up for such programmes they can expect to enjoy smoother school-to-work transitions than classmates with similar attainment levels and from the same social backgrounds. Programmes that are rich in work-based learning giving students chance to develop practical workplace skills, understanding of business culture and to meet people who can help with finding permanent employment are especially valuable.

Career academies (United States)

The American Career Academies programme develops career-focused programmes of learning which students aged 15-18 follow for one to two days a week alongside their usual high school curriculum. American Career Academies focus on vocational areas like Engineering, Healthcare and Information Technology. Learning is enriched through work-based learning, employer engagement and a strong emphasis on career readiness. Participation has been linked to significant [wage boosts](#) in adulthood.

Find out more: [National Academy Foundation](#)

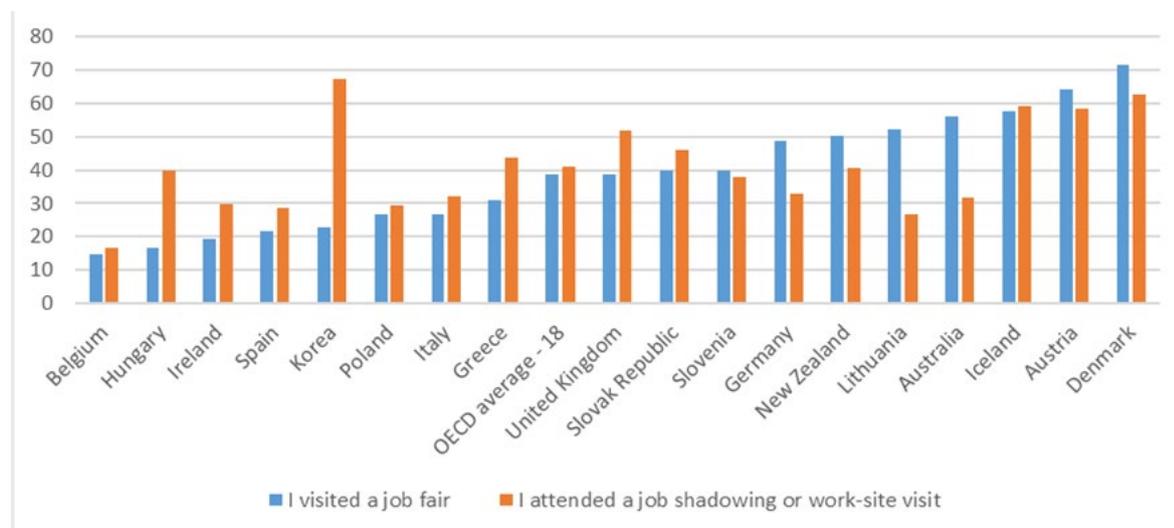
Career guidance activities

While the research evidence is incomplete, on balance the verdict is clear: the more students engage in career guidance activities through their school, the better they can expect to do as they start working life. Studies from the UK are especially interesting. Elnaz Kashefpakdel and Chris Percy used longitudinal studies to look at what happened by age 26 to teenagers who took part in career talks with school visitors at ages 14 to 16. They find that such young people can expect to earn significantly more in their twenties, with benefits the greatest when as teenagers they

- took part in lots of talks
- felt the talks were useful at the time, and

- participated as well in career conversations and guidance classes at school.

Student participation in career development activities with employers, selected OECD countries



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

The study finds that it is the most disadvantaged youth who have most to gain from such school activities.

Taking part in career guidance activities like job fairs, job shadowing and speaking with a career counsellor is also associated with lower levels of career uncertainty and misalignment.

A key reason why career talks are so successful is that they provide students with the opportunity to broaden their understanding of the world of work in ways that (if the speaker is seen as authentic) are hard to disregard. Employer engagement is essential to effective career guidance and missing in many countries.

Engaging employers (New Zealand, Australia and Finland)

The WE3 approach to career readiness, pioneered in **New Zealand** and **Australia**, focuses on Work Exposure, Work Exploration and Work Experience. The programme covers secondary education from ages 10 to 18 and is designed to develop critical thinking about the relationship between schooling and potential futures in work. Through managed self-reflection and plentiful opportunities to engage with local employers, young people are “introduced, enticed and inducted” into the world of work.

Developed in **Finland**, the 20-hour School-to-Work Group Method encourages and enables students in their final year of vocational school to reflect of their job interests, prepare for job searching and job applications, and question local employers about what they are looking for in new recruits. The programme is designed to help young people build psychological resiliency as they prepare to join the working world.

Find out more: [Career Ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of Covid-19](#)

It is important to remember that young people’s career thinking is largely narrow, confused and distorted by personal background. Good guidance will broaden aspirations, clarify what it means to work in different sectors and how jobs can be accessed, illuminating the barriers preventing students from succeeding in their ambitions. It will also serve to build the psychological resiliency of young people as they enter the jobs market, preparing them to understand how difficult it might be both to find good work and adjust to the demands of the workplace. This is particularly important for young people who might expect to face discrimination in the search for work or anticipate working in fields where they would be a small minority.

4: Giving students opportunity to experience potential future workplace in or out of school really does make a difference

National longitudinal surveys also show that typically teenagers who work part-time (alongside their full-time schooling), take part in internships or who volunteer in the community can expect to do better in adult work than peers from the same backgrounds with the same levels of academic achievement. Students have the chance to test out knowledge learnt in the classroom, develop new skills and find out for themselves about what it is like to work in a particular sector. Workplace experiences importantly, help students to develop relationships with people who can help them find work after school. Schools can help young people to gain experience in the community and to reflect on what they have learnt.

One of the most interesting (if unsurprising) findings from PISA 2018 is that teenagers who volunteer or who work whether paid or unpaid are significantly more likely to agree that they can adapt new circumstances they encounter. In a world where work is changing rapidly due to automation, such adaptability is often highly prized by employers.

Part-time working

Young people can take part in different types of paid work while still in school. It might be working within their family, informal employment (such as occasional babysitting) or more formally with a contract and regular hours for an employer. All the different forms are typically associated with better outcomes, but it is likely that the last type of employment that has the greatest benefits for students. Across the OECD, 40% of 15 year-olds work in such environments. Young people who work are more likely to be male, lower achievers and living in rural areas. They are also much more likely to have taken part in career guidance activities. Many Australian, British and US studies have looked for links between teenage part-time working and better employment prospects and found evidence that young adults do better even after taking background and qualifications into account. Studies show that teenagers are often given considerable responsibilities in work and feel themselves to be learning much that is new and useful for their futures. Excessive working, more than 10 or 15 hours a week however, has been seen to have negative consequences for exam results. Young people should be encouraged to work, but not too many hours. In some countries, there is clear evidence that students are not working as much as they used to. Technological changes mean that many of the lower skilled jobs historically undertaken by teenagers have been automated, while students themselves are increasingly focused on their academic success. In such circumstances, there is an extra need for schools to nurture students' exposure to the world of work.

Internships and work experience placements

PISA 2018 shows that there are great differences between countries in the extent to which young people take part in short work placements while still in secondary education. In Germany, nine out of ten students do so. By contrast, only one teenager in ten in Korea, Belgium or Brazil experience a workplace at first-hand through their school. European studies show that at age 34, adults who took part as teenagers in placements arranged by their school (or who worked part-time for that matter) do better in adult working life than their peers. Other studies show that teenage interns can expect to be less uncertain in their career aspirations and to be at lower risk of becoming unemployed. It is students who do not work part-time who appear to have most to gain from placements arranged by their schools. In order to get the most out of them, schools need to help young people to plan for, and reflect on, their work experience. One common challenge is that when young people are asked to find their own placement and draw on their family networks, inequalities and unconscious bias quickly emerges. Yet, if placements are sourced by their school, students lose out on the opportunity to apply for a placement and can end up with what is on offer rather than seeking out internships that align with their career interests. One potential solution is to ask students to work collaboratively to source placements, through an enterprise project, and then for teaching staff to manage their allocation.

A key question to ask of a placement is whether it is designed to give a young person a taste of a job that they might enter at a young age straight from school (in which case the purpose of the placement should be to give as authentic as possible exposure to actual working life) or is it to explore and confirm career aspirations (in which case, exploration should be built into the design). For the latter, job shadowing can be a very effective and efficient approach. Job shadowing is typically shorter (one to three days) and designed to help a student explore an occupational area. On their own or in groups of two or three, job shadowers should meet with different people in a place of work, including managers, workers and staff in Human Resources to understand what work is like and how recruitment happens. Students should be prepared by their schools to take full advantage of the opportunity to explore the potential workplace. Work placements may seem less authentic to students than their part-time jobs, but they are much more likely to be in areas which are of genuine long-term career interest. In countries like Finland, there are processes for rationing access to the most attractive placements to ensure that employers are not overwhelmed by demand.

Ethnographies of Work Programme (United States)

The Ethnographies of Work (EOW) programme created at Guttman Community College in the United States is aimed at young people in the first years of tertiary education, but has many useful lessons for secondary provision. The social science course is built around an explicit theory of action: ‘students who understand the meaning of work in human lives, the sociology of the professions and who have some professional work experience will have greater agency in entering the labour market than those who believe only a credential is needed. In addition, students who understand the challenges that being different imposes in the professional world – being working class, dark skinned, speaking with an accent – will, armed with that knowledge, enter the job market alert to the meanings of these aspects of identity.’

All Guttman students participate, spending three hours every week on the EOW programme.

Find out more: [Career Ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of Covid-19](#)

Volunteering

In recent years, new studies have shown that teenage volunteers can expect to gain similar benefits to interns once they go into work as adults. When young people volunteer in the community, they often enter workplaces and/or meet with people in paid employment and undertake tasks for which people can expect to be paid in adulthood. Surveys of young adults show that many agree that their teenage volunteering helped them get a job after they left education. On average, the PISA survey shows that half of students volunteer, but this disguises big variations between countries: more than two-thirds of young Americans and Indonesians volunteer compared to one-third of teenage Brazilians, Italians, Portuguese and Serbians. One important United States study checked whether volunteering was a choice or not and finds that it makes no difference: higher earnings are still found at age 30 regardless of whether the student enthusiastically opted in to volunteering or was made to do it by their school. Young volunteers often see connections themselves with career exploration: teenage volunteers are less likely to be uncertain, less likely to be misaligned and have lower levels of career concentration than would be otherwise expected.

Curriculum flexibility (Ireland and Korea)

In Ireland and in Korea, education ministries build significant flexibility into the curriculum to provide space for students to explore career interests in depth. In **Ireland**, at age 15-16, students have the option of taking a Transition Year. Over a year, students explore self-directed and community-based learning with volunteering and work placements popular. No state exams take place at the end of the Transition Year.

In **Korea**, Middle Schools offer Free Learning Semesters. As in Ireland, during the semester, national examinations are suspended and students encouraged and enabled to develop practical skills, take part in career-related provision (including work-based learning) and become involved in community-based activities.

Find out more:

[Transition Year](#)

[Free Learning Semester](#)

What makes for effective career guidance

Effective career guidance enables young people to develop informed, critical perspectives about the relationships between education, training and employment. Effective guidance builds a young person's understanding by providing plentiful opportunity to access new and useful information and experiences about the labour market, challenging students to reflect on, and demonstrate agency in, their school-to-work transitions.

Key attributes of effective guidance:

- It ensures that young people while still in education:
 - think about their futures in employment
 - are required to explore and experience potential futures.
- It should start early in education and build an individual's capacity throughout their schooling and beyond (broadening and informing aspirations and drawing connections between classroom and workplaces from primary/elementary school).
- It provides regular opportunities for young people to discuss and reflect on their prospective futures in order to develop self-understanding through face-to-face (and

digital) activities such as 1-2-1 and group career conversations, self-assessment activities, completion of questionnaires, interviews and written exercises.

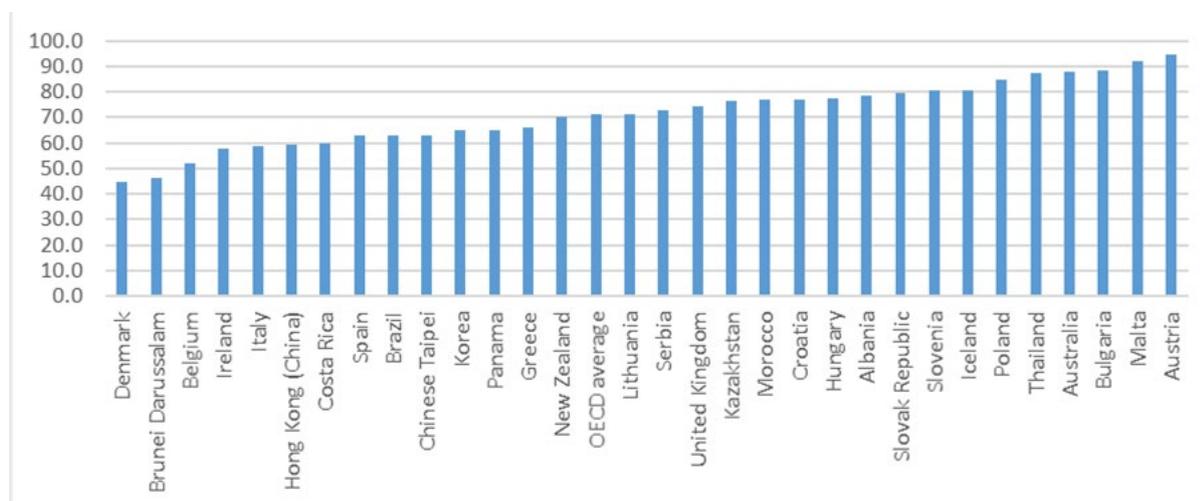
- It actively seeks to broaden the career-related knowledge and interests of young people, ensuring particularly that they have opportunity to explore occupations that are (i) new and emerging, (ii) likely to be misunderstood (such as the skilled trades) or (iii) of strategic economic importance in a given community.
- It challenges assumptions about what is reasonable for different types of people to do in work (e.g., gender and race-based stereotyping).
- It provides easy access to trustworthy and understandable labour market information and, in advance of key decision points, ensures that advice/guidance is made available from guidance professionals who are well-trained and impartial.
- Ensures that employers, employees and workplace experiences are systematically involved in provision, including regular career talks, workplace visits, job shadowing opportunities and short work placements. Employer engagement should feel authentic to students and enable a realistic understanding of the labour market as it relates to all learners (including learners from backgrounds which are linked to more challenging transitions).
- Listens to young people, helping them to actively explore potential careers (allowing them to determine their own suitability) and listening regularly to their assessments of whether provision is proving sufficient to their needs.
- Recognises that schools have a democratic responsibility to equip all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions of relevance to their futures. Effective practice acknowledges that the ways in which young people think about jobs and careers are shaped by gender, social background, ethnicity, migrant status and sense of identity. Effective practice is designed to ensure that young people build psychological resilience as well as gain access to practical information and skills.

5: Recruitment skills

As young people approach the end of their secondary schooling, it is important to help them prepare for the competition for work. Young people deserve practice runs at employer recruitment while still in the safe space provided by education. Schools working in partnership with employers and public employment services can do this by helping young people develop their own CVs and to practice being interviewed. It is good news that in most countries and regions for which there is information, more than half of students say that they have had this preparation by the age of 15. That said, nearly half have not and provides no information about the quality of the provision. Both activities will help young people to reflect on their education and how they can present a profile suited to a specific job. More effective recruitment skills programmes involve employers from the local community. When they give feedback to students about what works in recruitment, it is much more likely that they will be heard than if the message comes from school staff.

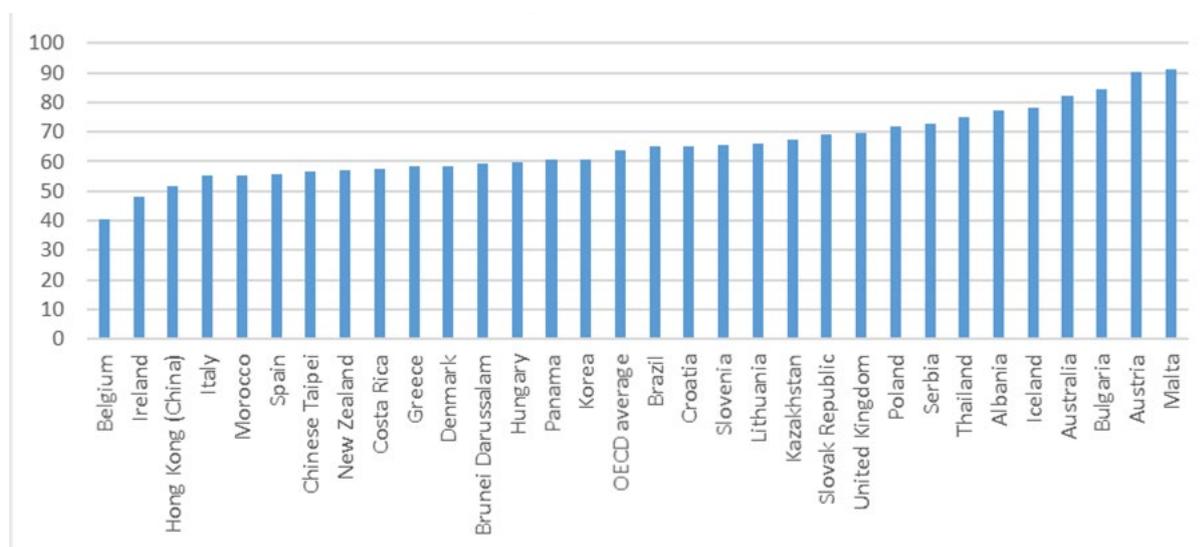
PISA 2018 shows that in many countries young people say that they have been taught to apply for work by the age of 15.

Percentage of young people who reported knowing how to write a resumé or a summary of their qualifications.



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

Percentage of young people who reported knowing how to prepare for a job interview.



Source: PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/career-ready_e1503534-en accessed February 1st 2021

There has been very little research on how schools can best provide young people with recruitment skills, so it is difficult to give firm advice. This [guide](#) from the UK however, does provide tips based on the views of young people, teachers and available studies. It finds that programmes that can be expected to be more effective help students prepare for, and reflect on, interactive recruitment exercises (with employee volunteers) which are varied and repeated frequently.

Career readiness in the pandemic

Young people going through education have ever more decisions to make and the turbulent jobs market (and the diversification and marketization of post-compulsory education and training) is making those decisions more difficult. Career guidance has never been more important, especially for young people who are likely to look for work as soon as they leave secondary school. This paper provides guidance based on the best available evidence over what schools can do to increase the employment chances of their students going into the jobs market. Effective guidance gives young people multiple opportunities to think about their futures, explore potential careers and get first-hand experience of the world of work.

During 2020 and 2021, career guidance has been made more difficult by the pandemic. Face-to-face guidance has been suspended in many countries and a new reliance on digital technologies has emerged. A recent international survey includes a summary of some of the approaches taken to ensure that career guidance has been maintained: [Career guidance policy and practice in the pandemic](#). Around the world, guidance is being delivered in new ways online. This includes career talks and virtual work experience as well one-to-one interviews.

OECD Career Readiness

At the OECD, during 2021, considerable new work is underway to deepen understanding of what works in terms of career readiness. Through the year, working and guidance papers will present new evidence and advice for practice. The ultimate aim is to develop free data-driven tools for policy makers and practitioners. By harnessing insights from longitudinal surveys and big data sets like PISA, it is possible to develop and assess programmes with greater confidence that can be expected to make a tangible difference to the lives of young people. As an employment crisis replaces a healthcare emergency, the need for the best possible guidance is greater than ever.

Find out more about the OECD Career Readiness project: <http://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness/>. There is opportunity to follow the work of the project team and share examples of practice that can be expected to work.

Further reading

A good place to start for anyone looking for evidence on what works in career guidance are recent OECD publications that combine literature reviews with presentation of PISA data:

[Career Ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19](#)

[Dream Jobs? Teenagers' career aspirations and the future of work](#)

[Working it out? Career guidance and employer engagement](#)

Also very useful is this 2016 evidence review from the UK Education Endowment Foundation:

[Careers Education: International Literature Review](#)

Key reading about how what young people think about their futures makes a difference

Kim, S. (2019), "The Effects of Alignment of Educational Expectations and Occupational Aspirations on Labor Market Outcomes: Evidence from NLSY79" *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 90/6, pp. 992-1015

Mello, Z. (2008), "Gender variation in developmental trajectories of educational and occupational expectations and attainment from adolescence to adulthood" *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 44/4, pp. 1069-1080

Staff, J. et al. (2010), "Uncertainty in early occupational aspirations: role exploration or aimlessness?" *Social Forces*, Vol. 89/2, pp. 659-683

Yates, S. et al. (2010), "Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK" *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 40/3, pp. 513–534

Key reading about how teenagers' exploration of the labour market makes a difference

Kashefpakdel, E. (2017), "Career education that works: an economic analysis using the British Cohort Study" *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 30/3, pp. 217-234

Kemple, J. (2008), *Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Work, Education, and Transitions to Adulthood*, New York: MDRC

Mann, A. and Percy, C. (2014), "Employer engagement in British secondary education: wage earning outcomes experienced by young adults" *Journal of Education and Work*, Vol. 27/5, pp. 496-523

Key reading about how young people's workplace experiences makes a difference

Ballard, P. (2019), "Impacts of Adolescent and Young Adult Civic Engagement on Health and Socioeconomic Status in Adulthood" *Child Development*, Vol. 90/4, pp. 1138-1154

Kim, J. (2017), "Long-term Consequences of Youth Volunteering: Voluntary Versus Involuntary Service" *Social Science Research*, Vol. 67/May, pp. 160-175

Musset, P. (2019), "Improving work-based learning in schools", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 233, OECD Publishing, Paris

Pastore, F. *Why is youth unemployment so high and different across countries?* IZA World of Labor 2018

Sikora, J. (2020), "Gifts as gains? The impact of volunteering on young people's educational and occupational attainment in Australia" *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol 60/2, 177-194

Vuolo, M. (2014), "Adolescent Precursors of Pathways From School to Work" *Journal of Research on Adolescent*, Vol. 24/1, pp. 145-162

Resources

The OECD Career Readiness project is designed to provide new advice to governments, schools, employers and other stakeholders on how to best prepare young people to compete in the labour market.

For more information

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See: <http://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness/>



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NEW SKILLS AT WORK

J.P.Morgan