



How youth explore, experience and think about their future

A new look at effective career guidance



Career readiness in the pandemic

Young people have never left education more qualified or ambitious, but in many countries they face persistent barriers in securing good work.

Young people often struggle in comparison to older people because they typically have less understanding, less experience and fewer useful contacts than older people in the search for work.

Ratio of youth to adult unemployment

In 2019, across the OECD, young people under 25 were 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than older people.



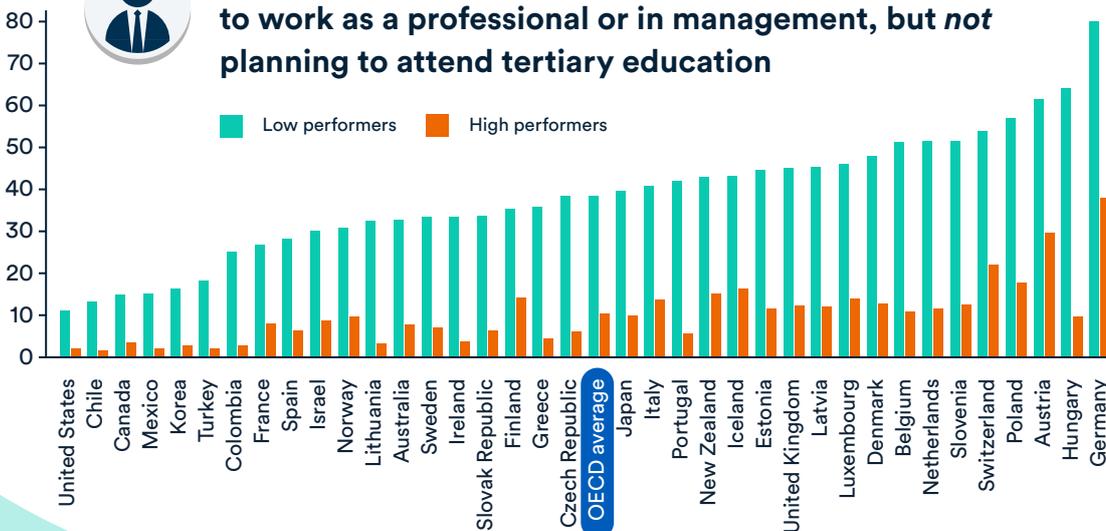
In Costa Rica, Hungary, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the UK, young adults are three to four times more likely to be unemployed than older people.



Modern societies expect individuals to navigate choices and manage their own careers, but results from the OECD's 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that students in many countries are poorly prepared to develop the individual agency needed for their transitions. Students vary considerably in the extent to which they are able to visualise and plan their futures, with the most disadvantaged at greatest risk.



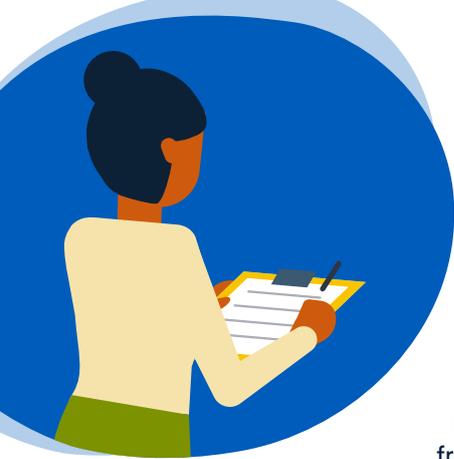
Lowest and highest academic performers at 15 expecting to work as a professional or in management, but not planning to attend tertiary education



38%

Across the OECD, 38% of lower achievers have career ambitions that do not align with their educational plans.

[New OECD work provides education systems and secondary schools with the diagnostics and a checklist for effective career guidance.]



How do we know what really works in career guidance?

Longitudinal studies follow the same cohort of people from school to early adulthood. Aside from commissioning extensive randomised control studies and waiting a decade for the results, longitudinal studies provide the best available evidence of the long-term consequences of school-age career-related interventions. An initial review of the academic literature identified numerous beneficial relationships that cluster around how student explore, experience and think about their futures in work. Now, new analysis has been undertaken by the OECD using data from 10 countries.

The Career Readiness team undertook new analysis of:



12 datasets



From 10 countries



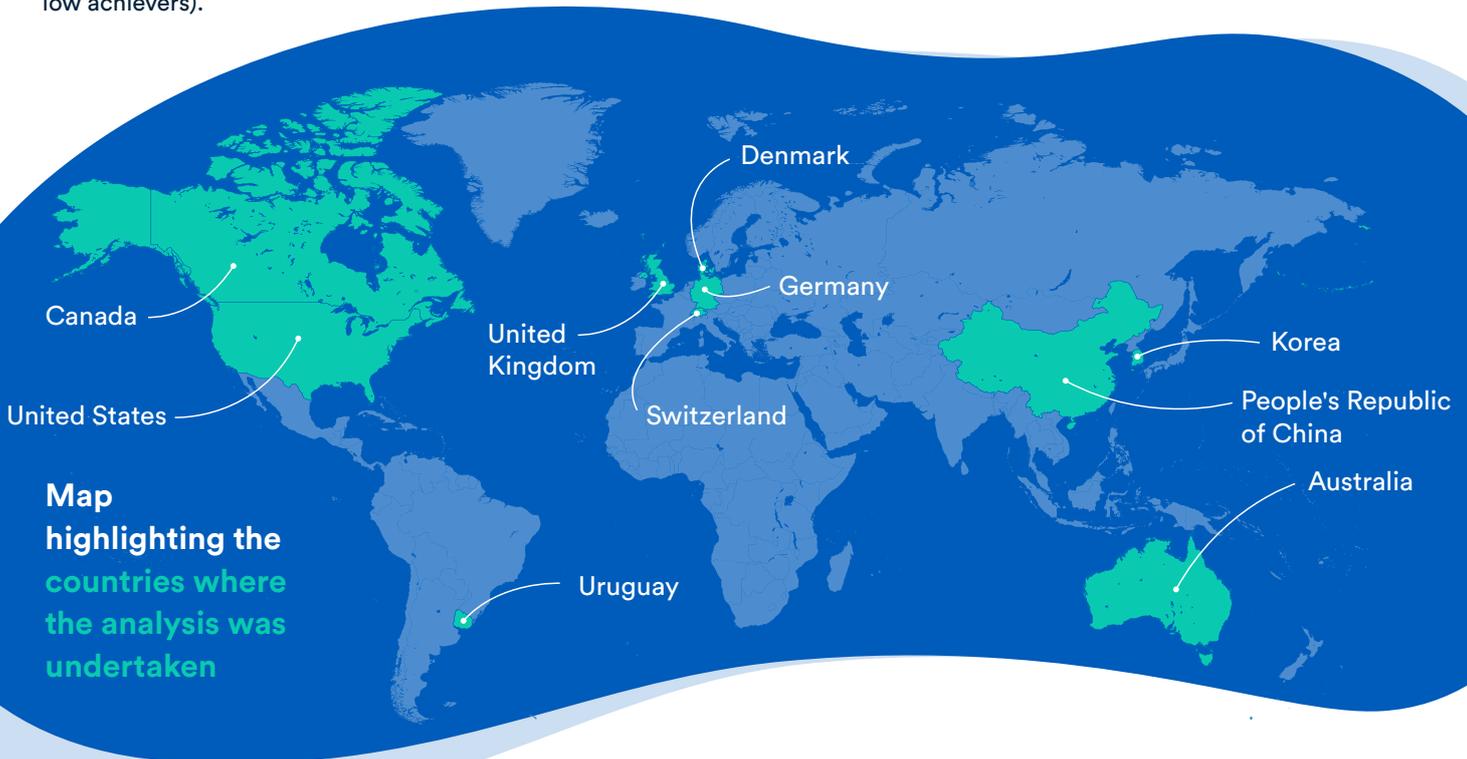
Involving some 67 000 students

Regression analysis was used to identify relationships between career guidance-related attitudes/activities overwhelmingly at ages 14-16 and better outcomes in employment 10-15 years later in terms of:

- 1. Lower rates of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET)**
- 2. Higher wages**
- 3. Greater job, career or life satisfaction**

Full analysis is available in the papers listed at the end.

In the tables that follow, statistically significant associations (at up to a 10% confidence level) between teenage career-related activities/attitudes and better employment outcomes generally relate to the whole sample. In the case of the indicators related to thinking about the future, they may relate only to subgroups of students (e.g. boys/girls, high achievers/low achievers).



How do countries compare?

OECD PISA 2018 provides us with much useful information on how student career-related experiences up to the age of 15 compare between (and within) countries. Only a minority of countries however, completed the Education Career Questionnaire which includes many relevant questions.

Exploring the Future

The review of existing and new analyses of longitudinal datasets look for evidence of associations between six career guidance activities that are commonly undertaken by secondary schools and better employment outcomes. Surprisingly, the existing research literature provides relatively few studies that make use of longitudinal surveys.

Student exploration of futures in work and employment outcomes: the longitudinal evidence	Results of new OECD analysis			
	Beneficial association	Detrimental associations	No associations found	No new analysis available
 School-based career reflection activities, including career questionnaires and career classes – 0 of 1 previous study in GBR evidence beneficial associations	CAN, URY	GBR	AUS, DEU, KOR	CHE, CHN, DNK, USA
 Career conversations – 3 of 4 previous studies in GBR and USA, evidences beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, GBR, USA		DEU, KOR	CHE, CHN, DNK, URY
 Engaging with people in work through career talks or job fairs – 1 of 1 previous study in GBR evidences beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, URY		DEU, GBR, KOR, USA	CHE, CHN, DNK
 Workplace visits or job shadowing – 0 of 0 previous studies evidence beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, KOR, USA		DEU, GBR	CHE, CHN, DNK, URY
 Application and interview skills development activities – 0 of 0 previous studies evidence beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, GBR		DEU	CHE, CHN, DNK, KOR, URY, USA
 Occupationally focused short programmes – 9 of 12 previous studies in AUS and US evidence beneficial associations	CAN, USA			AUS, CHE, CHN, DEU, DNK, GBR, KOR, URY

Indicator – with summary of previous academic literature

AUS (Australia), CAN (Canada), CHE (Switzerland), CHN (People's Republic of China), DNK (Denmark), DEU (Germany), KOR (Korea), GBR (United Kingdom), USA (United States), URY (Uruguay)



In Canada, **students who reported career conversations with a teacher by 15 earned 3% more at age 30** than comparable peers who did not.



In Uruguay, **students who had attended a career talk by 15 were 3% less likely to be NEET at 25** than comparable peers who had not.



In Korea, **students who visited a workplace by 15 were 23% less likely to be NEET at 25** than comparable peers who had not.



“ Students – even from the most disadvantaged backgrounds – have no lack of aspirations, but those they have often remain dormant. It is not until you engage with them that those aspirations come to the fore. When people come into the school to talk about their jobs, it encourages students to voice their own ambitions, perhaps for the first time. ”

Beth Nalter, Careers Advisor, Green Bay High School, Auckland, New Zealand

“ I’d have loved it if, at school, one day a week, we’d heard from people doing different professions. It would’ve been brilliant to get people to tell us about what their job was all about, what you need to do to get into it, what sort of life you can expect... ”

Jazzo (19), Ireland. Left education at 18, now working as an apprentice butcher



What it means

1 To visualise and plan their futures, students need to actively explore the jobs market.

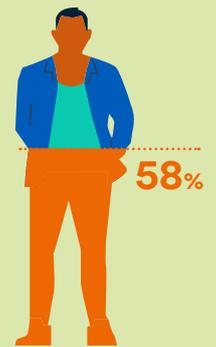
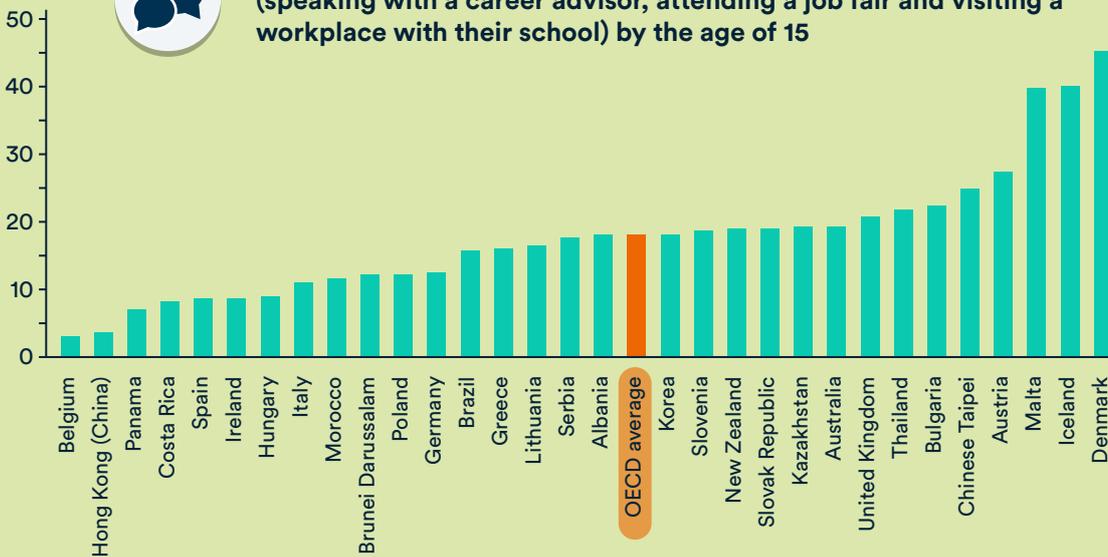
2 Greater exploration underpins the capacity for demonstrating personal agency through transitions.

3 It is especially important that they have opportunity to engage directly with employers and workplaces.

4 Students gain authentic insights into the working world, challenging, clarifying, and confirming their career ambitions and how they can be achieved.



Percentage of students taking part in three core guidance activities (speaking with a career advisor, attending a job fair and visiting a workplace with their school) by the age of 15



Only **half of students** on average across the OECD have spoken to a career guidance counsellor in school.

Only **four out of ten** students on average across the the OECD report having taken part in a workplace.

Fewer than **one in five** students have taken part in all three core guidance activities.





Experiencing the Future

OECD analysis builds on the existing research literature and identifies three ways in which teenagers can gain valuable experience of the workplace while still in school:



Part-time employment



Work placements/ internships



Volunteering in the community

All three activities are associated in the research literature with better outcomes in adult employment.

Student experiences of futures in work and employment outcomes: the longitudinal evidence	Results of new OECD analysis			
	Beneficial association	Detrimental associations	No associations found	No new analysis available
Part-time work – 15 of 18 studies in AUS, GBR and USA evidence beneficial associations	CAN, GBR, USA	DEU	AUS, KOR	CHE, CHN, DNK, URY
Volunteering – 4 of 4 studies in AUS and USA evidence beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, DEU, GBR		USA	CHE, CHN, DNK, KOR, URY
Work placements – 1 of 1 study in GBR evidences beneficial associations	DEU		AUS, GBR, USA	CAN, CHE, CHN, DNK, KOR, URY

Indicator – with summary of previous academic literature

*Did you know:
In the UK, students who experienced paid work by 16 earned 6% more at age 26 than comparable peers who had not worked.*

What it means

- 1** Workplace experience gives students the opportunity to learn about the culture of work and develop knowledge, technical and social skills valued by employers.
- 2** It helps students clarify their career ambitions, get new perspectives on their education, and gain extra value if they experience workplaces linked to their career aspirations.
- 3** It helps them demonstrate that they are a good fit for a chosen career and helps secure employment by providing first-hand experience and professional networks.
- 4** As students stay in education longer, work placements can be most effective if they take place before high-stake decisions on upper secondary enrolment and in the years before leaving school.

“ Experiential learning is very effective... Students gain most from reflection and dialogue after their experiences, including a better understanding of their own preferences and how these [relate] to their decisions about careers of interest and training pathways. ”

Michael Openshaw, Director, All Saints' College, Perth, Australia



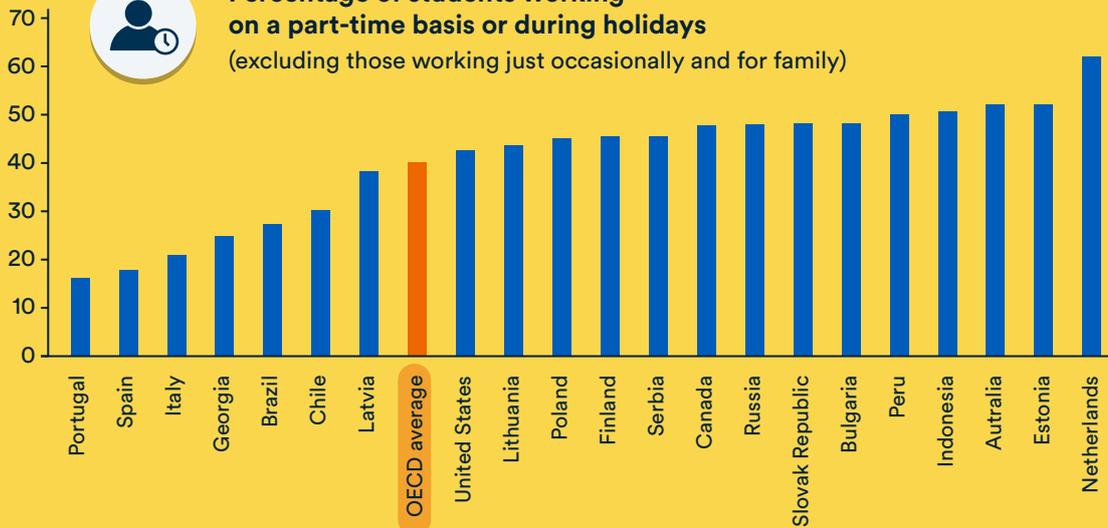
“ I did quite a lot of volunteer work during secondary school, which was useful when I applied for jobs. Along with strengthening my communication and soft skills, volunteering definitely helped fill some gaps in my CV. It makes you seem like a more well-rounded and interesting person to work with. ”

Bianca (24), from the UK, now working in finance





Percentage of students working on a part-time basis or during holidays
(excluding those working just occasionally and for family)



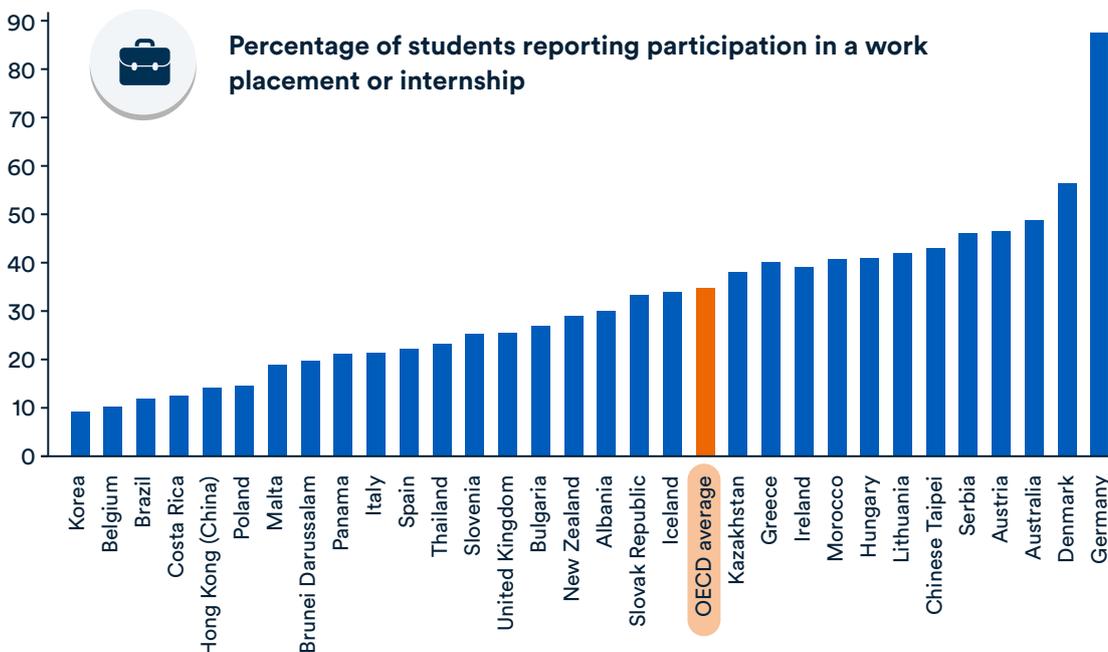
On average, **four out of ten** students across the OECD work on a part-time basis or during the holidays (excluding those working just occasionally and for family).



In the United States, students who worked part-time at ages 14-16 were 22% less likely to be NEET ages 27-29 than comparable peers who had not worked as teenagers.



Percentage of students reporting participation in a work placement or internship



Only **1/3 of students** on average across the OECD report having taken part in an internship by the age of 15.



*Did you know:
In Australia, students who volunteers by 15 earned 8% more at age 26 than comparable peers who had not volunteered.*

Thinking about the Future

The research literature exploring the link between student career-related attitudes and employment outcomes is rich. Existing literature and OECD analysis identifies five aspects of teenage attitudes about their futures in work that often link with better actual employment outcomes:



Career certainty

Students knowing the type of job they expect in 10-15 years



Instrumental motivation towards school

Student belief that their education is relevant to their imagined futures in work



Career alignment

Where students' educational plans are typically sufficient for desired careers



Career ambition

Students expecting to work in managerial or professional careers



Career originality

Students aspiring to occupations outside of the top ten most popular desired jobs among fellow teenagers in their country

Student exploration of futures in work and employment outcomes: the longitudinal evidence

Results of new OECD analysis

				
	Beneficial association	Detrimental associations	No associations found	No new analysis available
 Career certainty – 10 of 12 studies in AUS, GBR, NL and USA evidence beneficial associations	CAN, CHE, DNK, GBR, USA	KOR	AUS, CHN	DEU, URY
 Instrumental Motivation – 5 of 5 studies in US and GBR evidence beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, DNK, GBR, USA	URY	CHE, KOR	CHN, DEU
 Career alignment – 5 of 6 studies in AUS, GBR, NL and USA evidence beneficial associations	AUS, CAN, CHN, KOR		DEU	CHE, DNK, GBR, URY, USA
 Career ambition – 11 of 11 studies in AUS, GBR and USA evidence beneficial associations	CHE, CHN, KOR		AUS, DEU, DNK, USA	CAN, GBR, URY
 Career originality – 0 of 0 previous studies evidence beneficial associations	AUS, DNK	CAN	CHE	CHN, DEU, GBR, KOR, URY, USA

Indicator – with summary of previous academic literature

What it means

1 Young people with clear, high and considered job ambitions can be expected to do better in work later on, because they are building the agency needed for their transitions.

2 Students' chances of a successful future are greatly enhanced if they are thinking seriously about their futures and share those thoughts with guidance counsellors and other adults as they progress through education.

3 Assumptions about work start very young. Schools should encourage and enable students from the primary years to reflect on how educational experiences relate to imagined futures in work.

4 Students have access to different family resources to help them visualise and plan their futures. Effective guidance levels up the playing field and directly addresses inequalities.

“ My secondary school did not prepare me enough to get a job. There were no activities around career education or career readiness, and I wish there were. I had to seek that guidance elsewhere ”

Everly (19), from Chile, currently at university

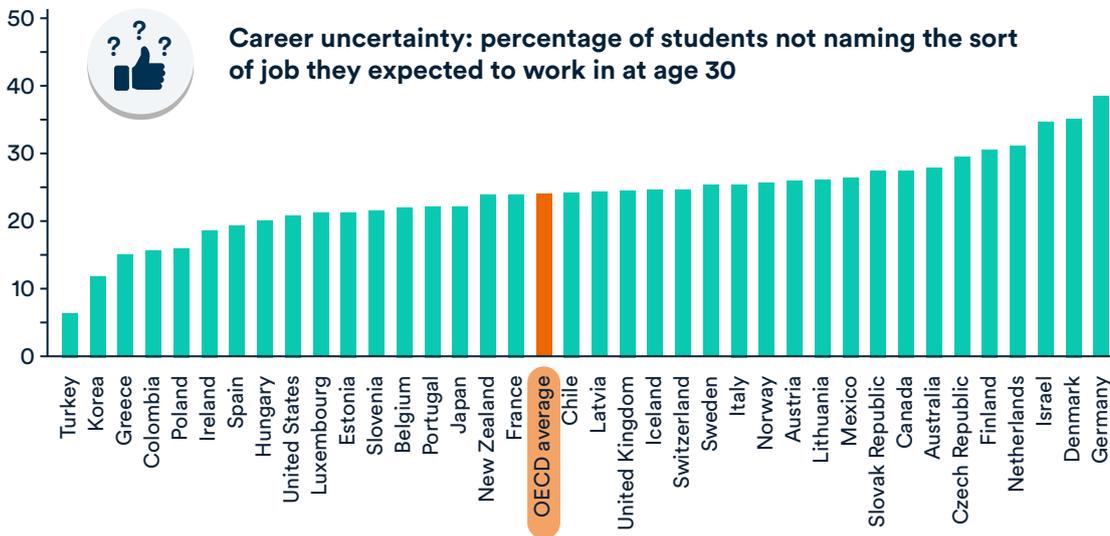


“ Often, students have an idea of what they might be interested in, but don't know the names of certain jobs. They cannot aspire to be what they don't know. I encourage my lower-secondary students to maintain a 'career journal', to keep track of what they might or might not like as they discover new career interests ”

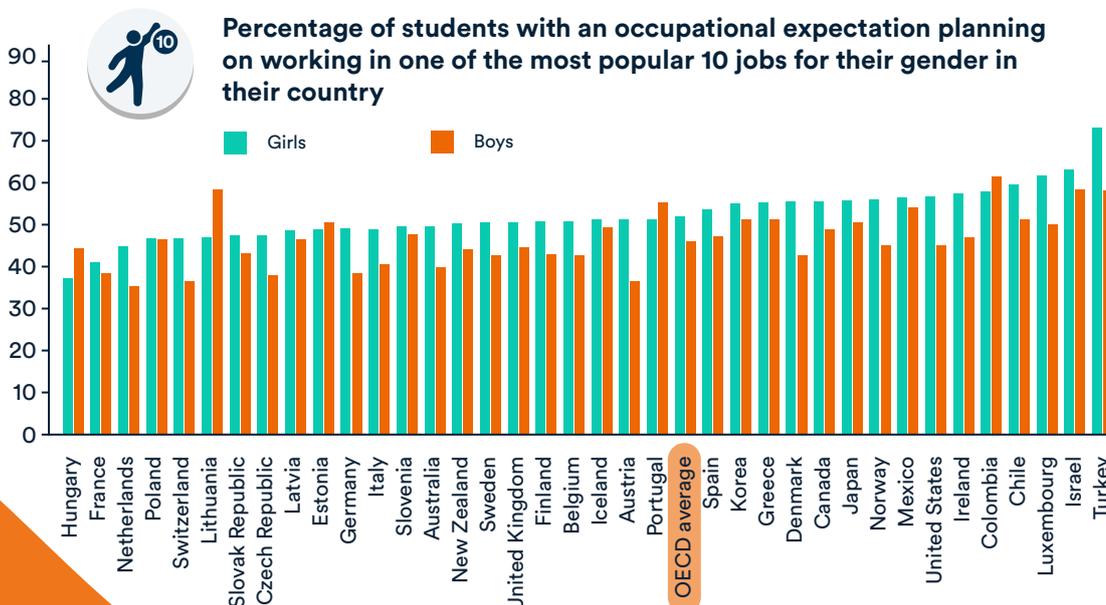
Niya Stateva, career counsellor, American English Academy, Sofia, Bulgaria



*Did you know:
In Australia, students who were career aligned at 15/16 earned 8% more at 25/26 compared to average earnings.*



*Did you know:
In Denmark and Switzerland, high-performing 15 year olds who were uncertain about their occupational plans earned 11% and 20% less respectively at age 25 than comparable peers who had a job ambition as teenagers.*



How exploring and experiencing potential futures in work link to more informed thinking

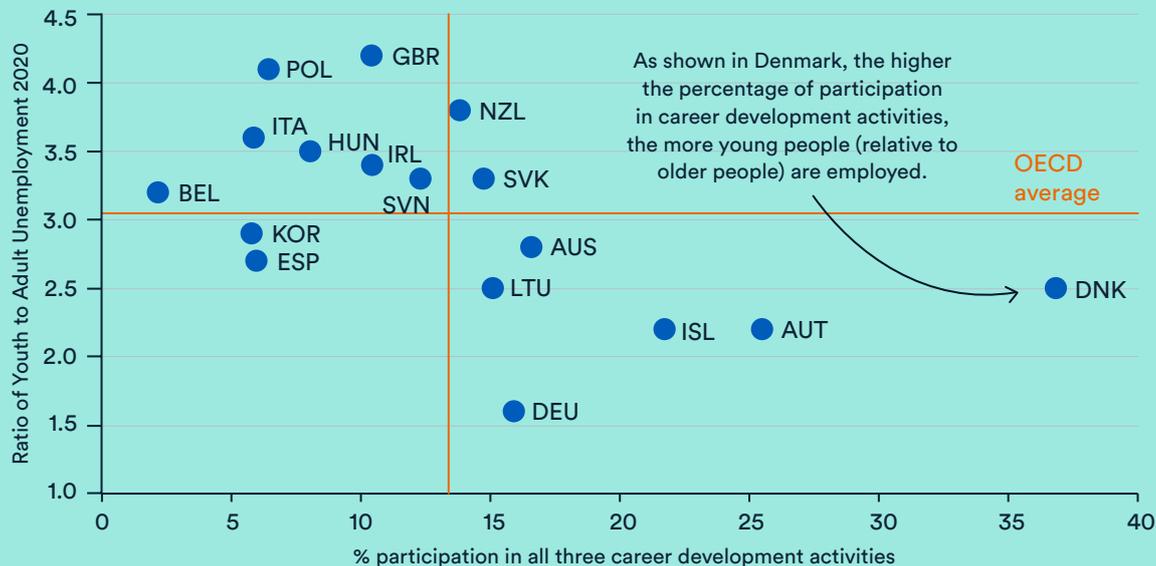
Analysis of national longitudinal data shows that, when students explore, experience and think about potential futures in work, they can often expect to achieve better employment outcomes as young adults.

More beneficial career thinking reflects the agency expected of students. PISA shows strong relationships between participation in career-related activities and the types of career thinking associated with better employment outcomes.

It can be anticipated that students with access to appropriate resources will be better placed to demonstrate the agency needed for their transitions through education into work.



Student participation in three core career guidance activities (speaking with an advisor, visiting a workplace, attending a job fair) and the ratio of youth to adult unemployment



“ I think my high school did a great job of preparing us... They set up lots of programmes to transition kids into full-time work after school, or onto a pathway towards their future careers. [But], I wish the careers centre at our school was more honest about [what] careers would be like. ”

Blair (18), from Australia, who is a construction apprentice



Relationship between student participation in career-related exploration and experiential activities and more positive career thinking - significant associations identified in PISA 2018 data (all OECD countries)

Activity	 Career certainty	 Career ambition	 Career alignment	 Instrumental motivation	 Career originality
 I spoke with a Career Advisor (at all)	+++	++		++	
 I talked to someone about the job I would like to do when I finish my education	+++	+++	+++	+++	
 I completed a questionnaire to find out about my interests and abilities	+++	+++	++	++	
 I researched the internet for information about careers	+++	+++	+++	++	
 I visited a job fair	+++				
 I attended a job shadowing or work-site visit	+++		+		++
 I did an internship	+++	-			
 I earned money from working outside school hours (e.g. a holiday job, part time work)	+++				++
 I undertook voluntary work	+++	++	+		



Statistically significant positive relationship at 1%, 5% and 10%

Statistically significant negative relationship at 1%, 5% and 10%

Career guidance in the post-COVID era

Nine insights from the OECD Career Readiness project...

1 We can now be confident about the characteristics of more effective career guidance.

Longitudinal data highlight activities that link with more positive employment outcomes for students. New OECD analysis, combined with reviews of existing longitudinal literature, find evidence of beneficial outcomes in three of more countries linked to 11 of the 14 potential indicators. Students who explore, experience and think about their futures in work often experience lower levels of unemployment, receive higher wages and are happier in their careers as adults. Beneficial results are found in relation to both students who continue to tertiary education and those who enter the labour market directly from school. The findings are strongest in countries where high proportions of secondary school students are in general, rather than vocational education. Countries are encouraged to develop longitudinal resources and to ask young adults how useful they feel their schools were in preparing them for work.

2 Too few students show signs of being "career ready".

PISA 2018 tells us that the career thinking of many students is narrow, confused and influenced by gender and socio-economic background. Labour market signalling about jobs is weak, raising concerns in a period of labour market change due to automation, COVID-19 and the growth of "green jobs". Countries increasingly expect students to navigate their own way through complicated education and training choices, but PISA tells us that their individual agency to do so is often constrained by lack of relevant information and experiences.

By age 15, on average, across OECD countries, only:



58%
of students
have spoken
to a guidance
advisor.



39%
visited a
job fair.



41%
participated
in a workplace
visit or job
shadowing.



18%
had undertaken
all three
activities.

3 Career guidance should begin well before age 15.

Effective guidance is as much about personal reflection as it is about access to information, and because career opportunities are influenced by study choices, attitudes towards learning and educational experiences from the beginning of schooling, guidance should begin well before aged 15. Students need time and encouragement to explore, experience and think about their futures in work and how they relate to their educational choices. From primary school, children should be helped to understand the value of learning in different fields of study as well as links between education and employment, and to challenge stereotypical career thinking through direct encounters with people working in non-traditional roles.

4 Students should extensively explore the world of work.

Through secondary education, students should explore their occupational interests through counselling, career-interest exercises and discussion including with subject teachers. Guidance activities that involve employers are particularly important in broadening and informing student attitudes. Career talks (notably the carousel format), workplace visits, job shadowing and exercises focused on developing the skills needed in recruitment have been shown to be especially effective. Such activities should be regular, contextualised and initially mandatory to optimise the chance of students encountering new and useful information.

As students get older, more personalised activities will help to challenge, enable and confirm career thinking.



5 Students should experience the world of work.

First-hand experiences of the workplace help students explore and confirm their career aspirations, gain valuable experience and develop useful networks. Such activities can be expected to be especially valuable if they relate to career ambitions and take place before key decision-making points and in the years prior to the conclusion of secondary education. Excessive part-time working (more than 10-15 hours a week) should be a concern to schools as it can undermine academic achievement.

6 Students should be encouraged and enabled to think critically about their futures in work.

Students with their clear, high and considered job ambitions and who see the link between their education and later employment, can be expected to do better in work as young adults. The importance of career thinking as an indicator for adult employment underpins the need for guidance being led by well-trained and impartial counsellors, skilled in engaging with young people through secondary education.



7 More research is still needed.

Evidence is insufficient in relation to three areas, each of which has been explored in only a small number of studies:



School-based career reflection activities (exploring)



Work placements (experiencing)



Career originality (thinking)

While initial findings and wider evidence suggest that these are aspects of teenage lives that can ultimately be connected to long-term employment outcomes, it is not yet possible to highlight them as indicators. Further research is encouraged to confirm and understand how beneficial impacts can be optimised.

8 For governments, guidance has a central role to play in the recovery.

New information is becoming available on the characteristics of more effective career guidance. Beneficial effects are found in times of both high and low youth unemployment. As students stay in education longer and the labour market becomes more turbulent, the need for effective career guidance grows. Governments have an important role to play in clearly articulating expectations of schools, ensuring the supply of trained counsellors and encouraging and enabling employers to work with schools. As students from more disadvantaged backgrounds typically need greater support, schools serving them should anticipate greater resource availability.

9 The OECD's work continues.

A continuing Career Readiness project will draw further on this new data to focus particularly on effective guidance interventions to address inequalities and enhance access to "green jobs", the identification and dissemination of effective practice in schools that aligns with empirical findings, the use of online technologies in career guidance and reviews of national practice to enhance provision.



OECD Career Readiness

Visit the Career Readiness website:

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

Key publications

Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ILO, OECD, UNESCO (2021), "Investing in Career Guidance", https://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness/collapsecontents/Investing%20in%20CG_booklet_EN.pdf

Covacevich, C. et al. (2021), "Indicators of teenager career readiness: an analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries", *OECD Education Working Papers*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

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Mann, A. et al. (2020), "Dream Jobs?: Teenagers' career aspirations and the future of work", *OECD Publishing*, Paris, www.oecd.org/education/dream-jobs-teenagers-career-aspirations-and-the-future-of-work.htm.

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