



# Career talks with guest speakers: a guide to delivering an effective career development activity

Strong career guidance systems help students to explore potential futures in work through authentic and frequent interactions with people in work and their workplaces. One form of career exploration that can be expected to be of particular value to young people is career talks with guest speakers. Typically undertaken through secondary education, career talks allow students to hear directly from people in work about their jobs, careers and their pathways through education and training.

This Policy Brief:

- summarises available evidence on the impact of teenage career talks on adult employment outcomes;
- draws on the wider research literature and examples of practice in Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States to illustrate why and how career talks can be expected to benefit students, highlighting characteristics of more effective delivery;
- provides a step-by-step guide to the effective design of career talks in person and online;
- concludes by arguing that career talks are an easy and effective intervention that schools can introduce to enhance career guidance.

## What are career talks with guest speakers?

The OECD Career Readiness project reviews existing research literature and undertakes new analysis to explore the relationship between teenage career-related attitudes and experiences and better employment outcomes in adulthood. Its aim is to use the best available evidence to understand what works in career guidance and how benefits can be optimised. Undertaking a first of its kind review of longitudinal data from ten countries, the project has confirmed 11 teenage indicators of better employment outcomes and clusters them into three thematic areas. How teenagers in school explore, experience, and think about their potential futures in work can all be related to lower unemployment rates, higher wages, and greater job satisfaction in adulthood (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[1]</sup>).

This policy brief focuses on one area of teenage career development designed to help students explore their potential futures in work: career talks with guest speakers. This is a form of career guidance where evidence from national longitudinal studies consistently shows better long-term employment outcomes. During a career talk, a young person is given the opportunity to hear directly from a person in a particular field about their job, career and the pathways through education and training that they have followed. Career talks can be delivered to both large and small groups, in person and online and might be a mandatory or a voluntary activity. Career talks are similar to, but different from, job fairs and career carousels (where small groups of students engage with multiple employee volunteers), two related activities where students have the opportunity to interact with people in work. They are also different to more informal career conversations that students might have with people in work (discussed in (OECD, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>)) and one-to-one discussions with guidance counsellors.

## What evidence exists that career talks with guest speakers are related to better employment outcomes?

Studies of teenage participation in career talks with guest speakers that look for evidence of long-term impacts on employment outcomes over time are comparatively rare, but consistent in finding positive employment outcomes linked to student participation. Longitudinal studies from the three countries (Canada, the United Kingdom and Uruguay) have allowed analysts to investigate whether significant links exist between teenage participation in career talks and some form of better employment outcome such as lower unemployment, higher wages or greater job satisfaction than would otherwise be expected among their recipients. In all three studies, evidence has been found of positive associations (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Further quantitative research is available from the UK, providing additional evidence that career talks with guest speakers are a form of career guidance that can typically be expected to be of value to students in their transition into employment. These studies, moreover, provide helpful insight into how the long-term benefits associated with career talks can be optimised for young people. Longitudinal datasets are particularly valuable to researchers because they follow large numbers of young people from childhood into adulthood, collecting considerable background information about them. This allows statistical controls to be used to take account of the circumstances and characteristics that commonly shape how well people do in work. Unfortunately, very few longitudinal studies ask participants questions about their participation in career talks as a teenage career development activity.

### ***Greater participation in employment, education, and training: findings from Canada and Uruguay***

In Canada and Uruguay, analysis of longitudinal national datasets was undertaken within the OECD Career Readiness project (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). The study identified links between teenage participation in career talks at age 15 and lower levels of unemployment (young adults who were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)) at age 25. In both countries, young adults who had participated in career talks at 15 were found to be three percentage points less likely to be NEET at age 25 than comparable peers who had not participated. This was after statistical controls were used to take account of the influence of gender, academic achievement, and social background on economic success. In Canada, the data also allowed for links to be explored in relation to earnings and job satisfaction. No significant relationships were found with regard to these two outcome areas. In Uruguay, additional analysis with regard to earnings was conducted and no significant relationships were found here, either.

The OECD Career Readiness analysis followed a standardised methodological approach, which reviewed the impacts of participating in a single career talk. In the case of the UK, the study reviewed data from the British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS70) and concluded that while three or more career talks undertaken in

secondary education were related to substantially higher earnings at age 26, no significant impacts could be identified in relation to participation in a single talk.

### ***Career talks and higher earnings: findings from the United Kingdom***

The BCS70 provides a particularly rich dataset to explore the long-term impacts of career talks with guest speakers on long-term employment outcomes. While the data are now old – relating to students born in 1970, participating in career talks during 1984-86 and sharing outcome data from 1996 – analysis of the dataset provides rich insights into impacts and how they relate to both student characteristics and forms of delivery. (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>) draws on the BCS70 to explore the relationship between teenage participation in school-organised career talks and earnings at age 26. At age 16, the BCS70 asked participants (i) on how many occasions they had taken part in career talks with an outside speaker at school (ii) if yes, how old they were when they took part (14-15 and/or 15-16) and (iii) whether they found the talks to be useful or not. The authors find, with a range of controls in place for gender, ethnicity, academic ability, highest qualification achieved, home learning environment and socio-economic background, that:

- Young adults (in full-time employment) experienced a wage premium at age 26 of 0.8% for each career talk undertaken at age 14-15. Such long-term beneficial associations were identified after teenagers participated in three or more career talks.
- Where students agreed (at age 16) that the career talks had been ‘very useful’ to them, the premium per career talk increased to 1.6%.
- Young adults enjoyed a wage premium of 0.9% at age 26 in relation to career talks undertaken at age 15-16, but only if talks were found to be ‘very useful’ at the time they were experienced.
- Young people who found career talks to be ‘very helpful’ on average participated in 3.4 talks. By comparison young people who did not find them to be helpful typically took part in 2.25 talks.

### ***Other circumstances associated with higher wage premiums: school guidance and social networks***

In further research, (Percy, C. and E. Kashefpakdel, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>) draws on the same data to ask whether benefits were greater for young people who attended schools with richer cultures of career guidance. The initial BCS70 analysis was expanded to include questions related to teenage participation in (i) timetabled classes in which careers were discussed, (ii) personal contacts with a careers counsellor or teacher during which career interests were discussed, and (iii) meetings or other classes in which careers/jobs were discussed. For each category, students were invited to note how many times they recalled such engagement. From this basis, (Percy, C. and E. Kashefpakdel, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>) created a mechanism for measuring the ‘career richness’ of school provision, dividing the cohort into two groups based on cumulative exposure to these wider guidance activities. They found that the richer the culture of career guidance within a school, the more likely it was that young people found the career talks to be useful. Moreover, while none of the three elements of career richness was found to be independently associated with higher-than-expected wages at age 26, a richer environment of career guidance was linked to increases in the wage premium driven by participation in career talks (at age 14-15 the premium per career talk rises from 0.8% to 1.0%). Where respondents experienced less rich cultures of career guidance, wage premium at age 26 was only identified if the young person had taken part in more than five career talks. The authors conclude that the volume and the perceived authenticity of external speakers drive wage premiums, but that such “speakers can only be at their most effective if teachers work with them to prepare

their classes, brief the speaker and link the content to future in-school activities as appropriate” (Percy, C. and E. Kashefpakdel, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>)

A third study by (Mann, 2018<sup>[5]</sup>) returned to the dataset and introduced a further question. The British Cohort Study also asks young people at age 16 if they knew “a contact through their family or friends who could help [them] get a job after education.” The further study found that 41% of participants answered yes to the question. At age 26, on average members of this group earned 4.3% more than comparable peers. Isolating the 59% who did not believe that their personal contacts would help them find work, (Mann, 2018<sup>[5]</sup>) found this group to be much less likely to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds than their better-connected peers. The less advantaged 59%, however, gained much more from participation in career talks delivered through their schools. On average, they could expect a premium of 1.5% at age 26 for each talk they took part in at age 14-15 or 8.5% in total in relation to average participation in talks between the ages of 14 and 16. By contrast, the more advantaged 41%, who were already connected to potential future employers, experienced no statistically significant wage premium linked to career talks.

### ***Retrospective quantitative studies from the UK***

Taking a different approach, a more recent UK study presents the results of a 2011 survey of 984 young adults aged 19-24 which, after controlling for gender, socio-economic background and academic achievement, explored relationships between better employment outcomes and recalled teenage receipt of ‘career advice from employers’ between the ages of 14 and 18 (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>).

The analysis found that, after using controls for social background and academic attainment, young adults (in full-time employment) who recalled receiving such advice while in secondary schools on average earned 10.6% more than comparable peers who had not participated in such activities. They were also 47% less likely to be NEET at the time of the survey (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). The survey also showed that young adults felt that such advice had ultimately proven helpful to them in their progression into adulthood, particularly when they had received career advice from employers on a greater number of occasions. Of participants who recalled receiving advice from employers on three or more occasions:

- 84% felt that the advice had been useful in deciding on a career, compared to 55% who only engaged once or twice.
- 54% felt that the advice had been useful in getting a job, compared to 33% who only engaged once or twice.
- 52% felt that the advice had been useful in helping to get into higher education, compared to 32% who only engaged once or twice (Kashefpakdel, E. & Mann, A., 2014<sup>[7]</sup>).

A second UK survey from 2017 using a similar methodology reviewed data from 1 744 young adults aged 19-24 and also found benefits linked to recalled participation in ‘career talks with employers’ between the ages of 14 and 18. Using a similar range of statistical controls, students who recalled such development activities could typically expect to be around 80% less likely to be NEET on the day of the survey than peers who did not recall undertaking the activity while in secondary school (Mann et al., 2017<sup>[8]</sup>).

### **Why career talks with guest speakers can be expected to improve the career readiness of young people**

At first glance, the positive economic benefits associated with teenage participation in career talks with guest speakers may seem puzzling. In terms of career guidance intervention, career talks are relatively quick interventions, being commonly delivered over 10 to 20 minutes with additional time allotted for questions from students. In terms of content, they are also focused on narrow parts of the labour market, discussing one of the thousands of discrete jobs which exist. Moreover, schools rarely exhibit the desire or possess the capacity to design programmes of talks that allow students to methodologically explore the

full breadth of the labour market. Rather, they may be delivered in a more episodic fashion with speakers who happen to be known and available to a school. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine substantial skill development taking place within a talk or a comprehensive exploration of the world of work (Mann, 2014<sup>[9]</sup>).

### ***Career talks as enablers of human, social and cultural capital accumulation***

A distinctive aspect of career talks with guest speakers is that they allow students to interact with employers and people in work. Such employer engagement is now seen as an essential element of effective career guidance (CEDEFOP, European Commission, European Training Foundation, ILO, OECD, UNESCO, 2021<sup>[10]</sup>). Research studies tend to make sense of the benefits identified in employer engagement in terms of student accumulation of resources of value within transitions: human, social and cultural capital (Stanley, J. & Mann, A., 2014<sup>[11]</sup>) (Jones, 2016<sup>[12]</sup>). Such capitals describe the qualifications, work-related experiences, personal contacts, know-how and personal confidence which are widely seen as helpful means of understanding how people get jobs in the adult labour market and why some individuals may do better than others in securing, and progressing within, the careers they desire (Brown, 2020<sup>[13]</sup>). Most commonly, career talks with guest speakers are seen as a means of building social capital, which in turn serves to enhance the likelihood of human and cultural capital.

#### **Box 1. Finding Volunteers**

Many schools find volunteer speakers through their social networks. Parents and alumni in particular are often called upon to provide career talks to students (Rodriguez, 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). Such approaches are efficient ways of securing speakers who are likely to be relatable to students. However, there is the risk that information received will be unduly narrow, reflecting geographic and potentially social circumstances.

In some countries, intermediary organisations (often directly funded by governments) help schools to find employers and people in work to support a range of guidance activities, including career talks. See for example, the role of [Chicago Public Schools](#).

Online technologies are making identification of appropriate volunteers easier. In the UK and New Zealand, the [Inspiring the Future](#) programme recruits large numbers of volunteers at a national level, providing schools with substantial information about their personal, educational, and employment backgrounds, and then allows schools to contact potential speakers directly (Mann et al., 2020<sup>[15]</sup>).

Studies suggest that such interventions, which bring students into direct contact with people in work in the context of career development, can be productively understood in terms of social capital (Kashefakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>) (Mann, 2018<sup>[5]</sup>). Social capital describes the resources provided by networks of people, which serve to influence the outcomes that an individual can expect in life. Such contacts (including family members, neighbours, and other contacts within a community) can provide emotional and practical support and establish norms to guide behaviour of relevance to career development. (Halpern, 2004<sup>[16]</sup>) (Fisher, 2018<sup>[17]</sup>). In the case of career talks, and many other career guidance activities that engage employers, relationships are short and typically not sustained beyond an initial encounter. In explaining the potential value of such provision, the work of US sociologist Mark Granovetter is influential within the academic literature (Jones, 2016<sup>[12]</sup>) (Jokisaari, 2005<sup>[18]</sup>) (Kashefakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>) (Mann, 2014<sup>[9]</sup>). Exploring how the character of an individual's social network relates to their success in job hunting, Granovetter finds that networks that are large and broad across a geographically-dispersed range of economic activities ('weak ties') are more consistently linked with finding desirable employment than networks where personal relations are closer and deeper ('strong ties') (Granovetter, 1973<sup>[19]</sup>). Characterised as the 'strength of weak ties', Nan Lin has refined the theory through further empirical studies, which found advantages for employment were especially strong where the social networks of job-seeking individuals included people

of higher occupational status, such as managers (Lin, N., 1981<sup>[20]</sup>) (Lin, 1986<sup>[21]</sup>) In these studies, great value was found with regard to access to new and useful information about work. Consequently, the interactions enabled by career talks can be conceived as bridges enabling the flow of what Granovetter calls non-redundant, trusted information, as well as widening access to experiences of ultimate value to progression within the labour market (Jones, 2016<sup>[12]</sup>).

This form of social capital has also been seen as enabling wider personal resources of value in transitions from education to employment: human and cultural capital (Jones, 2016<sup>[12]</sup>). Through a career talk with a guest speaker, students may gain new insights into the value of different academic subjects and training programmes in the competition for desirable work, shaping choices and informing engagement in secondary education. They may also gain information that will encourage and enable access to first-hand experiences of work. Such human capital, being the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and skills (as captured in academic qualifications) has been widely seen to drive access to desired employment (Brown, 2020<sup>[22]</sup>).

As students gain a more informed sense of their career aspirations in light of first-hand insights into the realities of the labour market, they can be expected to begin processes of ruling in and ruling out possible futures and pathways through education and training. Consequently, such interventions can enhance a student's sense of personal agency, making careers more thinkable and recruitment processes more tangible (Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>). To make sense of such changes in thinking and how they relate to the success of individuals in accessing, and succeeding in, specific professions, many researchers have drawn on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Stanley, J. & Mann, A., 2014<sup>[11]</sup>) (Archer, 2010<sup>[24]</sup>) (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). The power of such insights can be expected to be greater where students have limited or distorted understanding of possible career paths (for example, where their gender is underrepresented within a profession). Using metaphors like understanding the 'rules of the game' or becoming a 'fish in water', young people can be seen to be developing a sense of vocational identity, built on insights gained from, or confirmed by, authentic representatives of occupations of interest (forms of cultural capital) (Norris, 2011<sup>[25]</sup>).

### ***Career talks are a form of guidance enriched by employer engagement which is routinely associated with better employment outcomes for youth***

A career talk can be understood, consequently, as a managed interaction with a person who can provide authentic insight into the operation of the labour market (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>). Considerable evidence now exists that teenagers who engage with employers and people in work within a career guidance or work-related context can commonly be expected to go on to enjoy better employment outcomes in young adulthood (Mann, 2018<sup>[26]</sup>) (OECD, 2021<sup>[27]</sup>). Seven out of the 11 OECD career readiness indicators, based on analysis of data in 10 countries, relate to activities and experiences in which students explore or experience potential futures in work (the remainder relate to how young people think about their future lives in work). Of the seven, six of these can only be delivered or can be expected to be offered with substantially greater quality if employers and people in work are involved in their delivery:

- *84 career talks (which are considered alongside job fairs within the analysis)*
- *workplace visits/job shadowing*
- *application/interview skills development*
- *occupationally-focused short programmes (also known as career pathways)*
- *part-time working, and*
- *volunteering in the community (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[1]</sup>).*

In addition, currently incomplete evidence points towards *short work placements* also being likely to be of long-term value to young people (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). While not being based on evidence of direct interaction with employers, the seventh activity related to career exploration and experience identified

within the OECD longitudinal analysis is also very relevant to what happens within a career talk with a guest speaker. Career conversations are discussions in which young people engage with their interests in future employment. Available longitudinal data relates solely to conversations with friends, family members, teachers, and guidance counsellors (OECD, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>). However, it would be consistent (and unsurprising should data ever be collected) if conversations with employers and people in work could often be expected to provide students with experiences of value to their transitions. This is not to say that value may not be secured from participation in classroom-based activities that do not involve direct engagement of people in work. Indeed, the analysis of longitudinal datasets points as well towards school-based career activities also being likely to be of long-term benefit to young people. At this stage however, data are too limited for such interventions to be confirmed as providing a confident expectation of long-term employment benefits for students (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[11]</sup>).

Given the strength of the data, it is unsurprising that a recent joint publication from six international organisations, including the OECD, advised that effective guidance provision is enriched by engagements with people from the world of work:

*When people in work cooperate with schools and other providers, better understanding can be expected of the working world in all its varieties. This is particularly important for youth. It allows access to useful experiences and to new and trustworthy information which broaden and deepen career aspirations. First-hand encounters are powerful learning opportunities. ...Employer engagement within career guidance is a very effective means of helping employers to signal demand for labour. During a period of turbulence in the jobs market, it is especially important for guidance to be enriched through first-hand access to people in work. In an uncertain world, employers and their employees are best placed to advise future job seekers of how their workplaces and occupational skill requirements are changing (CEDEFOP, European Commission, European Training Foundation, ILO, OECD, UNESCO, 2021<sup>[28]</sup>)*

For governments and employer associations, career talks represent a means of enabling greater amplification or signalling of job opportunities in strategically important economic sectors that have struggled to recruit sufficient numbers of interested, qualified young people. In many countries, governments have focused on better amplifying careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, creating networks of volunteers working in the fields who will be available to support career guidance initiatives in schools. In the Canadian province of New Brunswick, for example, four [Centres of Excellence](#) have recently been created as a collaboration between the ministry of education and economic communities. The centres work with multiple schools across the province and focus on four economic areas: health, energy, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship. They aim to make it very easy for schools to connect with employers in these fields to support a range of career development activities, including face-to-face, virtual, live, and pre-recorded career talks. In this way, employers gain new opportunities to encourage and enable young people to explore and develop experience relevant to the pursuit of in-demand careers.

In most countries however, it is relatively rare for young people in full-time secondary education to encounter people in work through their school's guidance provision. On average across participating OECD countries, by the age of 15 only 41% of students had taken part in a workplace visit or job shadowed, and only 39% attended a job fair (Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>). UK surveys of young British adults from 2011 and 2017 show that, on average, young people recalled meeting any employers or people in work through their schools within a guidance context on fewer than two occasions through their post-14 secondary education (Mann et al., 2017<sup>[8]</sup>).

### ***Career talks as mechanisms for enabling access to new and useful information***

Interactions with employers and people in work within guidance systems provide young people with the opportunity to gain information that is potentially useful to their career development that they would not otherwise have access to in such a trusted manner. When employers work with schools to enrich career guidance, they provide resources that educational institutions cannot easily replicate without their participation (Stanley, J. & Mann, A., 2014<sub>[11]</sub>). It is likely to provide access to sources of new information that go beyond those available from more naturally occurring social networks (families, teachers, neighbours etc.). More limited social networks can be expected to be found where students live in more rural areas, are from more disadvantaged or migrant communities, or when students express interest in fields where people of their gender or other background are underrepresented (OECD, 2021<sub>[27]</sub>) (Musset, 2018<sub>[29]</sub>). Here, it becomes additionally challenging for young people to engage with people who can provide first-hand testimony as to what it is like to work in such an atypical field (OECD, 2022<sub>[30]</sub>).

Of course, it is also possible for young people to use media and the Internet to find out about careers and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that a majority of students aged 15-16 go online to research careers and continuing education pathways. Such approaches provide limitless opportunity to gain access to new information about the labour market. However, the value of such information is constrained if students find such material to be untrustworthy or difficult to relate to their personal circumstances and ambitions. To be useful, career information must be seen as trustworthy as well as relevant. By engaging directly with people in work, students gain access to information that is likely to be perceived as more authentic (Linnehan, 2004<sub>[31]</sub>) (Rehill, 2017<sub>[6]</sub>). In a career talk with a guest speaker, students are required to concentrate and engage with new information and judge for themselves whether it is relevant to their interests and believable in content. As (Rehill, 2017<sub>[6]</sub>) stresses from interviews from UK career advisors, students typically respond differently to information received from people in work to that coming from within the school. It is commonly seen as being more believable (and consequently more difficult) to ignore (Rehill, 2017<sub>[6]</sub>) (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sub>[3]</sub>). The value of such provision is highlighted by understanding of the extent to which teenage students commonly demonstrate uncertainty and confusion about their possible futures in work.

### ***Many young people demonstrate uncertainty and confusion about the labour market***

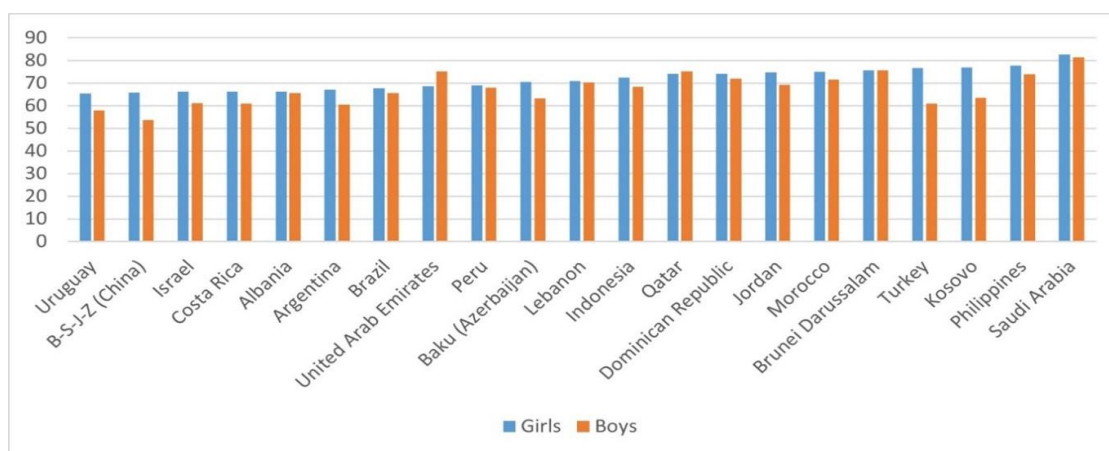
Data from 2018 OECD PISA provide insight into young people's thoughts about their futures in work. With over half a million 15-year-old students responding from 79 countries and economic areas, the study reveals widespread uncertainty and confusion in the occupational plans of teenagers. On average across OECD countries, 24% of respondents were unable to name the type of occupation they expected to be working in at age 30, rising to 27% among the lowest quartile of performers on PISA's academic tests. Of those students who did name an occupational expectation, 20% stated that they planned to work in a managerial or professional role that typically requires university level study, but did not plan on attending tertiary education, a proportion that rises to 38% among the lowest performers.

### ***Occupational expectations are typically highly concentrated***

Teenagers also show remarkable degrees of unanimity in their job plans. In PISA, students are asked to name the type of job they expect to have at around 30. Using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) to categorise job plans, on average 48% of boys and 52% of girls in OECD countries say they will work in one of the 10 most popular choices of jobs cited by national peers of the same gender. In many countries, particularly outside of the OECD, such levels of concentration exceed 65%. In Saudi Arabia, more than 80% of girls and boys expect to work in one of ten jobs by the age of 30 (Covacevich et al., 2021<sub>[32]</sub>) (Mann et al., 2020<sub>[15]</sub>).



**Figure 1: Countries where the concentration of occupational expectations for girls and/or boys exceeds 65%. PISA 2018.**



Source: OECD PISA 2018 Database - <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed on 20 January 2020).

Further analysis shows that the career expectations of young people are highly focused on jobs in the professions. Major category 2 in the International Standardised Classification of Occupations includes such jobs as doctors, nurses and other medical professionals, scientists, teachers, lawyers, and accountants. In Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States for example, between 71% and 80% of girls and between 50% and 68% of boys expect to work in this narrow category of employment in spite of the fact that in none of these countries do more than 27% of women or men work as professionals.

### ***Clearer career thinking is associated with better employment outcomes***

The OECD career readiness indicators highlight four aspects of career thinking that are associated with better employment outcomes typically at the age of 25: career certainty, career ambition, career alignment and instrumental motivation (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[32]</sup>) (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[11]</sup>).

**Table 1: Forms of teenage career thinking associated with better employment outcomes**

<i>Form of career thinking</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Career certainty	The capacity of teenagers to name an occupation in which they expect to work as an adult. No assumptions are made that students will retain the same occupational expectation through their schooling.
Career ambition	The articulation of a managerial (ISCO major category 1) or professional (ISCO major category 2) occupational expectation. Data also suggest that the expectation of attending tertiary education is also associated with better adult employment outcomes.
Career alignment	The alignment of occupational expectations with educational plans. Poorer adult employment outcomes are commonly observed where teenage ambitions are misaligned, typically so categorised where students plan on working in an ISCO 1 or 2 occupation, but do not intend to pursue tertiary education.
Instrumental motivation	The recognition that engagement in schooling will provide long-term extrinsic benefits in employment, typically tested through student responses to such statements as 'Working hard at school will help me get a good job.' or 'School is a waste of time.'

Source: Covacevich, C. et al. (2021), "Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries", *OECD Education Working Papers*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In addition, analyses of longitudinal data point towards better employment outcomes being associated with more original teenage occupational expectations at 15. However, data are less conclusive (Covacevich et al., 2021<sup>[11]</sup>)

Analysis of PISA 2018 data shows many significant relationships between these four more beneficial forms of career thinking and participation in career development activities where students explore and reflect on their potential futures in work. This is after statistical controls are put in place to take into account the gender, social background and academic performance of students.

**Table 2: Relationship between student participation in career exploration and experiences and more beneficial career thinking**

<i>Agreement with the following career development statements'</i>	<i>Career certainty (more certain than uncertain in occupational expectations)</i>	<i>Career certainty (more certain than uncertain in occupational expectations)</i>	<i>Alignment (more likely to be alignment in ISCO 1 and 2 plans and expecting to do tertiary education)</i>	<i>Instrumental alignment (more likely to believe that school is useful for employment)</i>
'I spoke with a Career Advisor (either in or out of school)'.	+++	++	NA	++
'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'.	+++	NA	+	NA
'I attended a job shadowing or work-site visit'.	+++	NA	NA	NA

Note: +\* / ++ / +++ = statistically significant positive relationship at 10%, 5% or 1%; NA = no significant association. Source: (OECD, 2019), PISA 2018 Database, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/> (accessed on 24 September 2021).

Source: Covacevich, C. et al. (2021), "Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries", *OECD Education Working Papers*.

Consequently, while PISA does not ask students if they had participated in career talks with guest speakers, it would be surprising if they were not also associated with more beneficial teenage career thinking. As discussed below, in UK studies of young adults aged 19-24, majorities agreed that the careers advice that they had received from employers while in school proved to be useful in deciding on a career (Kashefpakdel, E. & Mann, A., 2014<sup>[7]</sup>).

### Key factors in the more effective delivery of career talks with guest speakers

A small number have looked in depth at the delivery of career talks with guest speakers, drawing on different datasets to identify aspects of delivery which are associated with better later outcomes, or which are identified by participants (students, school staff, and volunteer speakers) as providing greater value.

### ***Authenticity: keeping it real***

Surveys of students and teaching staff from the UK consistently highlight the perceived importance of career talks being delivered by people who actually work in the job or career about which they are speaking (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). As one member of school staff interviewed by Rehill et.al. stressed:

*Trust me, when I start talking about careers you can see their eyes glaze over. I haven't been in the 'jobs market' for over 30 years! They think I'm out of touch. When you have the younger volunteers come in, they stand up and take notice. We had a couple of apprentices from [Transport London] this morning and you could hear a pin drop, they were so attentive as the volunteers are fresh out of the system. They can offer them insights that are more useful as they've just been through the application process (Rehill, 2017, p. 32<sup>[6]</sup>).*

With a speaker drawn from the profession about which they are speaking, it is more likely that students will find the information that they receive to be trustworthy. Where career talks appear authentic to young people, it can be expected to create a greater openness to learning and can be expected to contribute to students securing a more realistic understanding of a profession than might be expected through other communication methods. Unsurprisingly, studies show that recruits who come into a profession with a 'realistic job preview' have consistently found them to stay longer in the job than comparable peers (Earnest, 2011<sup>[33]</sup>) (Earnest, 2015<sup>[34]</sup>).

### ***Quantity: a lot of a little goes a long way***

A number of the studies discussed in this paper highlight the growing value to students engaging in larger numbers of career talks with guest speakers. In (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>)'s study of longitudinal data from the British Cohort Study most notably, positive impacts on later earnings are found to begin after participation in three talks, with benefits growing exponentially. The study also found that students who participated in a higher average number of talks were more likely to have found them to be 'very helpful' at the time, a factor also associated with greater wage boosts ten years later. Other UK studies also find more positive benefits linked to student participation in a larger number of talks. As noted, Mann and Kashefpakdel's study of 985 young adults (aged 19-24) for example, finds that 84% of participants who had received 'career advice from employers' on three or more occasions while in secondary school found the information to be useful in deciding on a career (with 28% saying that it had been very useful) compared to 55% (and 8%) respectively for those who received such advice on just one or two (Kashefpakdel, E. & Mann, A., 2014<sup>[7]</sup>; Percy, 2014<sup>[35]</sup>). (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>) also finds that students who engaged with six more or people in work through career events were more likely to have found them to be helpful than peers who engaged with fewer than five volunteers. In a similar fashion to throwing mud at a wall, the more that is thrown, the more can be expected to stick. Students bring with them different interests and experiences and consequently will be open in different ways and at different ages to taking advantage of the information provided.

### ***Relevance: connecting with students***

Consequently, it is important to provide students with access to speakers from a wide range of occupations and with different personal characteristics. Effective programmes will deliberately seek to broaden young people's understanding of the labour market and the work opportunities it provides, focusing on careers entered through programmes of both continuing academic and vocational provision. Moreover, given the widely acknowledged influence of personal and social characteristics on shaping the extent to which students perceive different occupational areas as reasonable or 'thinkable' to pursue, it is important for schools to seek out volunteer speakers who are underrepresented in their field (e.g. men who work in nursing or women who work in construction) (Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>). In this way, it becomes more likely that students will be open to learning new and useful information about their possible futures,

potentially broadening aspirations through authentic interactions with people who can provide first-hand advice on what it is like to work in a profession where they are a minority.

A number of programmes, such as that delivered at [Colegio Legamar](#) in Spain (see below) deliberately build this objective into their programmes. It is likely, moreover, that students will engage more diligently if they share personal characteristics linked to gender, social class, and ethnic origin with the speakers they hear from (Gladstone, 2021<sup>[36]</sup>) (Linnehan, 2004<sup>[31]</sup>). . It can be expected too that career talks that link to a school's curriculum will resonate more clearly with students whose immediate frame of reference focuses on engagement in education, which will typically be narrowed down during the progress from lower to upper secondary education. Some schools consequently put in place programmes of career talks as students approach important decisions about narrowing the curriculum (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). One approach that schools can take is to survey students about their career plans, asking whether they had ever met someone working in their profession of interest, and then seek out relevant speakers. Holding sessions with two or more speakers at the same time can moreover be expected to secure the attention of larger numbers of students.

### ***Mandatory or voluntary: career talks within a continuum of practice***

There is a strong case for making student participation in career talks with guest speakers mandatory at a younger age. Through primary and lower secondary education, students are primarily involved in processes of potential career exploration, often broadening aspirations. Surveys consistently show that student career plans are highly concentrated (Mann et al., 2020<sup>[15]</sup>) and heavily shaped by personal characteristics (gender, socio-economic background, migrant status) (Musset, 2018<sup>[29]</sup>). Mandatory provisions reduce the chance that student preconceptions will prevent receipt of information that may prove to be of long-term value. At an older age, as career planning matures, voluntary participation allows students to deepen their understanding of careers of known interest. In New Zealand, the [WE3 continuum programme](#) changes the emphasis of career talks as students become older. At a lower secondary level, talks focus on 'the jobs [that speakers] do and the value they find in them', encouraging curiosity and exploration among students. At older ages, the focus changes to how the jobs that speakers do can be accessed, providing more practical information about how to prepare for later successful entry into specific employment. Reviewing survey data of UK secondary school students (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>) finds that young people who chose to participate in a career talk were marginally more likely to agree that they had found the event to be helpful to them.

### ***Enhancing equity: career talks tackling disadvantage***

Relatively few studies have looked specifically at the role of social advantage and disadvantage in determining how students can be expected to react to participation in career talks. However, given that PISA and other studies often show higher levels of career confusion (misalignment) among more disadvantaged students (Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>) and the insight of (Lin. N., 1981<sup>[20]</sup>) from the adult labour market regarding possession of social contacts occupying positions of greater power in the labour market, it can be expected that career talks can have a potentially important role in challenging social inequalities. This is the conclusion of (Mann, 2018<sup>[5]</sup>). National programmes make access to guest speakers more equitable by prioritising schools in more disadvantaged areas and help address imbalance within the labour market based on gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics. In the UK, where studies have shown that private schools typically find it is easier than public schools to connect with potential speakers to engage with students (Huddleston, P., Mann, A. & Dawson, J., 2014<sup>[37]</sup>), a number of free national initiatives only allow schools in the state sector to use their services. This is an approach undertaken by the [Inspiring the Future](#) programme, which also targets campaigns on more disadvantaged areas. A similar approach is taken by the [Speakers for Schools](#) initiative. Launched by a prominent political journalist who had received many invitations to speak in fee-paying private schools, but was rarely

approached by state schools, Speakers for Schools recruits leading figures in public life and uses online technologies to enable schools to invite them to speak to students about their career and professional life.

Data suggest that girls may well be more open to benefiting from career talks than boys. The PISA 2018 study shows that girls are consistently less likely than boys to engage with people in work through the career development activities offered by their schools. However, (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>) shows that girls are more likely than boys to agree that they found the career events where they engaged with employers to be more helpful to them. National campaigns are often targeted on girls in relation to careers where their gender is underrepresented. In France for example, the [Fondation L'Oréal](#) supports a network of female scientists who are available as speakers to secondary schools. There is no reason why similar campaigns could not also focus on helping boys to better understand strategically important careers where their gender is underrepresented, such as nursing, but these are much rarer.

As noted in the case studies below from Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, schools often work hard to find speakers who students will find relatable, based on observations that they are listened to more intently than other speakers. Research studies validate such approaches (Linnehan, 2004<sup>[31]</sup>) (Makola, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>) (Gladstone, 2021<sup>[36]</sup>). Through such interventions, additional barriers preventing students from progressing successfully into specific careers are addressed, allowing students to explore whether working environments would be conducive for someone of their background to succeed and to gain information that may not be so readily available within naturally occurring communities.

### ***Managing a career talk: creating a positive learning environment***

A member of school staff should always be present during a career talk to ensure appropriate student behaviour (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). More than this, they can act as an intermediary between the speaker and their audience, helping to explain concepts and words that students are unfamiliar with and to draw connections with the wider school curriculum. Speakers may need reminding to adjust their presentation to make it better understood by students and to circulate work-related materials that provide visual stimulation. The member of school staff will also be well-placed to call upon students to ask questions or to ask them on behalf of students. For example, they might encourage a speaker to reflect on pathways into the profession or, if one gender is underrepresented in a particular workforce, what experience they might expect of working in the occupation.

### ***Preparation and reflection: making the most out of the career talk***

Prior to a career talk, some education systems require police checks to be made to ensure the guest speaker is a suitable person to interact with children. In others however, because it is not expected that the speaker will be left alone with students and will always be in supervised sessions, speakers are treated like any other visitor coming into a school. Practical considerations are also important, notably reserving a parking place if necessary. In the [Chicago Public School system](#), background information is sought from the speaker before the talk. Details about the speaker's occupation, employer, and industry, often in the form of internet links, are then shared with students to enable their preparation, helping in the development of relevant questions. This can be undertaken through classroom activities.

In Chicago, moreover, speakers are provided with tips before they come into the school. They are encouraged to avoid swearing and specialist language (jargon) used in their occupational sector, to bring visual aids with them and to wear their normal work clothes. They are encouraged as well to think about a typical day at work, to tell the story of how they secured their job and to identify links between their employment and the subjects they studied in school. Speakers may also be encouraged to give some insight into their wider lives, which are enabled by their employment.

For students, benefits can be expected to be greater if programmes of career talks follow and then accompany periods of investigation and reflection about their possible futures in work (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). This

might include classroom discussions, research projects, and completion of personal questionnaires that explore career interests in light of personal preferences.

### Box 2. Delivering Career Talks in primary education

In the United Kingdom, the National Association of Head Teachers (the professional association representing primary school principals) has worked with the Education and Employers charity to develop [Primary Futures](#), a programme that brings volunteers from the world of work into schools serving children aged 4 to 11. The aim of the programme is to challenge stereotypical thinking about the type of people who are well-placed to succeed in particular professions, to help children see the links between their education and ultimate employment, and to nurture a spirit of curiosity about the world of work. Volunteers often take part in a ‘What’s my line?’ event. Children ask a panel of volunteers a series of questions that can only be answered with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ about the work they do. They then guess the occupations of the volunteers after which they return in work dress (if appropriate) or with materials used in work to talk to small groups of children about the jobs that they do. Using the [InspiringtheFuture.org](#) database, schools can select volunteers based on a range of criteria, including geographic location, profession, gender, ethnicity, and disability.

After the event, it is important to thank the speaker and secure student feedback on how helpful the presentation was: did they learn something new and useful? Not all students will be interested in the occupation discussed, and here learning opportunities exist in better understanding individual preferences and dispositions. Interested students can further explore their career interests either through one-to-one discussions with career advisors, or through classroom-based activities. Students can be helped to deepen their understanding of professions discussed during talks by investigating the occupation online, researching Labour Market Information and job advertisements, or potentially arranging further interactions (such as individual conversations, job shadowing (OECD, 2022<sup>[30]</sup>) or a short work placement (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). ). Given the longitudinal analysis of (Percy, C. and E. Kashefpakdel, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>) that long-term earnings are on average greater if a student receives a career talk when his or her school includes a richer, wider culture of career guidance, benefits can be expected with relation to long-term and more immediate engagement in activities designed to enhance the career preparation of a student.

### ***Delivering career talks online***

There has long been a culture of producing pre-recorded videos aimed at students where speakers describe their occupation and how it was secured. Examples from the UK include the [Icould](#) library of more than 1 000 videos in the UK and [See it Be it](#), which records videos with people in work, notably green careers, who are atypical (given their gender, ethnicity and/or social class) of people working in their profession.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many career guidance programmes accelerated the delivery of career talks online. Interactive video career talks have become commonplace making use of Zoom, Skype, Teams, and other video streaming technology. Such initiatives have been launched by private companies as well as by educational ministries, schools and not-for-profit organisations. In the United States for example, the Amazon corporation launched a programme of [Class Chats](#), connecting employees working in computer science with students in live sessions. In France, [Les Métiers en direct](#) is managed by Onisep, the national agency for career guidance. The programme seeks to replicate the authenticity of face-to-face interactions through video streaming. Aimed at secondary school students, volunteer speakers participate in live sessions from their workplaces where they are encouraged to introduce students to their working environment, including equipment that they most commonly use. They speak for 10-15 minutes about their professional lives and the journey that they took to secure their occupation before responding

to questions from students. To ensure student privacy and to optimise the immediacy of events, sessions are not recorded. In advance of such career talks, school staff are provided with learning materials to support student preparation and reflection. In the UK, thousands of ‘career chats’ have been delivered through the online platform, [Inspiring the Future](#). The organisers provide advice for school staff planning an online event (Box 1) stressing the need to make use of the tools available within video streaming programmes and classroom management to optimise student engagement.

To date however, little analysis has been undertaken comparing the most effective delivery of, and likely impact of, such virtual provision. For example, very few comparisons exist of the effectiveness of face-to-face, live, virtual, and pre-recorded career talks. Beginning in the spring of 2023, the OECD [Observatory on the use of Digital technologies in Career guidance for Youth](#) (ODiCY) will begin collecting and sharing examples of practice in relation to specific career guidance activities.

### Box 3. Delivering career talks online: Increasing access to new and useful information

#### Advice for guidance counsellors and teaching staff

##### *Prepare well*

- Familiarise yourself with the video platform being used, including chat and interactive functions (waves, claps, raised hands etc.) which will enable student interactivity
- Brief the volunteer on the age of the students and provide any other information, which will help to adapt the presentation to the audience
- Ask guest speakers to talk for a short time on their job role, career journey, curriculum links, and the skills they have developed
- If the speaker wishes to use slides to illustrate their presentation, ask to see them in advance to check they are appropriate for the students
- Confirm a host for the session, who will introduce the speaker(s), ensure student engagement, and manage time

##### *Engage students*

- Use ice breakers (such as asking students to type in jobs they are most interested in for online sessions) or polls and quizzes to engage students
- Keep the volunteer presentations short: five minutes followed by 5-10 minutes of questions is recommended
- Ask students to prepare questions in advance and be ready to contribute them. Common questions include:
  - What education/training route did you take?
  - What's your favourite thing about your job?
  - What's the most challenging thing about your job?
  - Did you always know you wanted to be a...?
  - What school subjects and skills do you use most in your work?
  - What would you go back and tell yourself at my age?
  - What can I do now to prepare me for this kind of career?
  - What does a typical day/week look like for you?

##### *Keep it interactive*

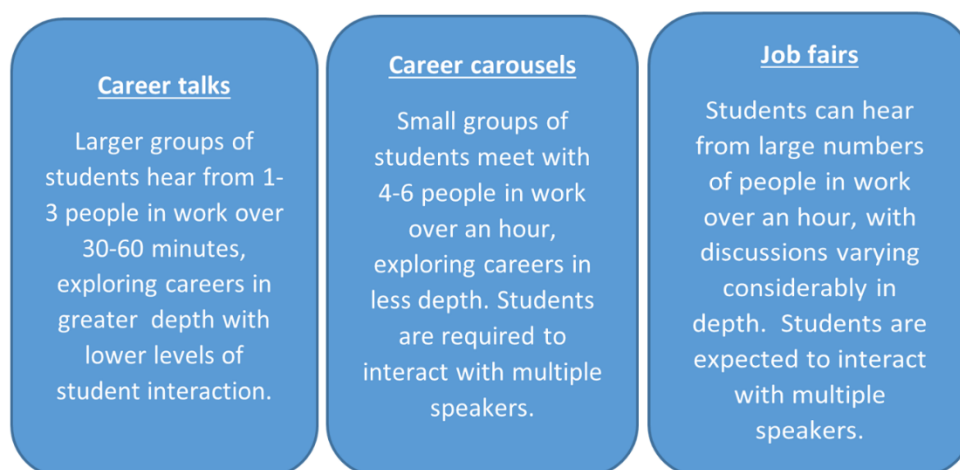
- Encourage students to raise their hands or use the chat function to ask questions or, if in a classroom setting, through the host or student spokespeople
- At the conclusion of the session, ask volunteers to provide one final piece of advice for the students

Note: With kind thanks to the team at <https://www.inspiringthefuture.org/>

## How career talks with guest speakers compare to related career development activities

Career talks are closely related to job fairs and career carousels in that they enable secondary school students to interact with people in work to explore potential futures in work. All three forms of career development place value on students coming into first-hand contact with people in work with the objectives of broadening, raising and more deeply informing the career aspirations of young people. All are based on the premise that students can be expected to find value in the information they gain through such interactions due to the perceived authenticity of the people with whom they interact.

**Figure 2. Comparison of three forms of typical student interaction with people in work through career guidance**



Source: Rehill, J. (2017), *How to make the most of careers events with employers: Technical report from the Evidence review for the Careers and Enterprise Company report What works?: The evidence on careers events with employers.*, Education and Employers, <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/how-to-make-the-most-of-careers-events-with-employers/>.

To see how such provision in New Zealand compares within a continuum of career development through secondary education, see [WE3 Continuum and Activities](#). (Rehill, 2017<sub>[6]</sub>) and (Rehill, 2017<sub>[39]</sub>) set out the results of a study that draws on insights from students, school staff, and guest speakers to compare the perceived impacts of the different forms of career event. Of the three different means by which young people can engage with people in work, career talks typically provide the greatest opportunity to hear in depth about a specific job or career (Rehill, 2017<sub>[6]</sub>) and are seen by teaching staff as being especially effective in broadening or raising career aspirations (Rehill, 2017<sub>[39]</sub>). Whereas during a career talk, a volunteer from the world of work might speak for 15 minutes or longer about their profession and the routes they took into it, a [career carousel](#) (where small groups interact with a series of volunteers on a rotational basis) assumes a briefer, more intense interaction. At a job fair, students are given more



agency to choose who they wish to interact with, potentially spending all their available time speaking with just one person. However, it is more likely that they will spend short periods of time visiting different stands, or be open to the influence of classmates in deciding with whom to engage (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>). A comparative advantage of a career talk is that students can expect (and be expected) to receive information in an orderly, extended, and calm atmosphere. A drawback of the career talk model is that students may struggle to engage with the subject matter and may have comparatively little opportunity to ask questions to a smaller number of speakers than available through other career event formats. In career carousels such interaction is expected of all students, while in job fairs multiple opportunities for interaction are presented even if they are not always taken up by students (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>).

## How career talks are delivered: models from three countries

### **Spain**

[Colegio Legamar](#) in Madrid, Spain is a private, non-denominational educational institution that covers early childhood, primary, lower, and upper secondary educational stages (ages 1-18). The school organises monthly sessions of career talks for students aged 15-18, highlighting occupations related to academic subjects studied within the Spanish Baccalaureate, an upper secondary academic qualification. For example, the designated subject one month might be Medicine, followed by Information Technology the next, and followed by Law and Business Administration the month after. Each session lasts for an hour and a half (Fridays between 3:30pm – 5:00pm) and features three volunteer professionals. Each volunteer is given 15 minutes to speak about their occupation. After all volunteers have spoken, they engage in a 45-minute Q&A discussion with the students. The speakers are selected mostly (and preferably) from the school's alumni network of former students, but may also be drawn from other networks including relatives of the students. Effort is made to identify volunteers who defy gender stereotypes in occupational choice. This has included female engineers, architects, and police officers, as well as male early childhood teachers and nurses. In addition, the school works to ensure that volunteers have undertaken both university and vocational post-secondary education and training routes.

At the end of each session, the students complete an assessment survey, providing their reflections on the talks, as well as adding suggestions for future talks. The career talks are advertised three weeks in advance on the school's bulletin board as well as the school's social media channels, and students are encouraged to register online for them. Student attendance to the talks is voluntary. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Colegio Legamar began delivering career talks virtually via Microsoft Teams. They have also used Microsoft Teams to have speakers from other countries join the talks as well.

To learn more, please visit: <https://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness/examples-of-practice/collapsecontents/spain-career-talks.pdf>.

### **United Kingdom**

[Addey and Stanhope School](#) in south London is located in one of the most disadvantaged areas of the city with more than 60% of students entitled to free school meals, well above national averages. In the English education systems, at the age of 14 students decide on how they will focus their studies, dropping some subjects for Year 10 and 11. Between the ages of 11 and 14, the schools ensures that students have substantial opportunity to engage with guest speakers. The school provides both compulsory and optional career talks. Compulsory career talks are typically undertaken using the carousel format. Over the course of one to two hours, students engage with up to 10 different employee volunteers. Guest speakers, individually or in pairs, will rotate around a large room and join small groups of students to share details of, and respond to questions about, their career journeys and daily working lives. Typically, conversations last for 8-10 minutes before the volunteers move to the next table. Students are encouraged to be pro-active

and are helped to prepare questions in advance. In addition, students are expected to attend career talks focused on particular themes. These provide opportunities to address wider social barriers that can prevent effective transitions. During a day focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) for example, students are given opportunity to meet with women working in jobs where they are commonly in a minority and may be difficult to encounter personally without the intervention of the school. During Black History Month, students meet with people from ethnic minorities undertaking a wide range of different professions. The school finds that students (who are predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds) connect particularly well with such volunteers and with speakers from similar social and educational backgrounds. The school is working to create an alumni association and plans to invite former pupils to come into the school to share their experience of upper secondary education and training, transitions, and employment with current students.

A series of optional career talks are offered on Mondays at the end of the school day. The talks are promoted to students of all year groups, their parents, and school staff. These career talks are longer – typically of a 90-minute duration. Students are encouraged to interact with the guest speakers and have used the opportunity to secure access to other activities enabling career development, including job shadowing and work placements.

To learn more, please visit: <https://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness/examples-of-practice/collapsecontents/uk-addey-stanhope.pdf>.

### ***United States of America***

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), in Chicago, Illinois, is the third largest school district in the United States. It oversees more than 600 schools and serves over 330,000 students. More than 80% of CPS students are either Hispanic or African American and over 75 percent of the student population qualifies as low-income.

As part of its work-based learning programming, CPS organises an annual ‘Guest Speaker Week’, where volunteers from the local workplaces are recruited to speak to students directly in a classroom setting. Guest speaker presentations are tied to the curriculum and designed to help students connect what they are learning in school with the world of work. Guest speaker sessions are typically attended by students aged 14-15. CPS is working on expanding guest speaker opportunities to lower secondary school students (ages 10-13). Presentations are usually conducted in the school, but in some cases, they may take place electronically via Google Meets or other online platforms. The time of the year that ‘Guest Speaker Week’ takes place varies, but it is usually towards the end of the calendar year. CPS uses a customized Salesforce CRM to manage the recruitment of guest speakers. The CRM currently includes some 1,200 contacts. In some cases, CPS also reaches out to local non-profit organisations to recruit speakers. Preparation for guest speaker presentations begins 6-8 weeks beforehand, and includes confirming logistics, vetting volunteers, briefing teachers, introducing the volunteer to the classroom teacher, and providing the volunteers with an advisory ‘speaker’s guide’. Students also prepare for the guest speaker presentations by researching the employers and their respective industries in advance, as well as preparing questions to ask. During the presentation, teachers encourage students to ask their questions, handing out materials relevant to the presentation such as activity sheets, industry facts, company brochures and sample products. After the event, students are required to reflect upon their experience verbally and in writing. Common questions to prompt student reflection include:

- What aspects of the guest speaker presentation were interesting? Which were not? Why?
- What did you like about the guest speaker presentation? What would you change?
- Would you consider a career in the guest speaker’s field? Why or why not?
- What knowledge and skills are you learning in school that are likely to be used at the guest.
- Speaker’s workplace? Please explain.

- What knowledge or skills do you need to strengthen to be successful at a workplace like the guest speaker's? Please explain.
- Would you recommend that other students hear this presentation in the future? Explain.

Some students might also present about the occupation to their peers who were unable to attend the event. To learn more, please visit <https://www.cps.edu/academics/work-based-learning/toolkit/guest-speaker>.

## Conclusion: an easy and effective career development intervention

In a career talk, students hear from a guest speaker about a job they do and how they secured it. They might also hear about the wider life of a speaker. Based on a simple format, speakers typically talk for 5-20 minutes and then respond to questions posed by students. Longitudinal studies in three countries (Canada, United Kingdom, and Uruguay) allow analysts to explore whether links exist between student participation in career talks (at age 15) and better employment outcomes (at age 25). In all three countries, having taken into account factors that strongly shape adult economic outcomes (notably academic attainment, gender and social background) positive relationships are found, with students on average experiencing lower levels of unemployment in Canada and Uruguay and higher wages in the UK, results which are echoed by wider quantitative UK studies.

Career talks provide little opportunity for substantial skills development. In explaining the long-term benefits of provision that is typically of short duration and is often integrated in only a limited way to wider school work, many scholars have drawn on social capital theory (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>) (Makola, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>)

In this conceptualisation, it is within the capacity of the career talk to provide students with new and useful information that its power lies. PISA shows that teenagers commonly have very limited career ambitions. In any career talk, it is likely that students will gain new insights into the world of work. As speakers are typically viewed as providing trustworthy, authentic insights into their profession, the likelihood of talks being perceived as useful grows. In turn, such insights will allow more informed decision-making about investments in education and training, enable access to work-based experiences (forms of human capital) and develop a stronger sense of personal agency and confidence in understanding the characteristics of distinct professional pathways (cultural capital).

Research studies provide insights for practice:

- Multiple opportunities (a minimum of five career talks a year through secondary school) should be available to students, optimising the chance of their accessing new and useful information (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>)
- Students should be part of a school environment encouraging critical discussion of, and reflection on, career interests (Percy, C. and E. Kashefpakdel, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>)
- Delivered in an adapted fashion, career talks should begin at primary school, broadening aspirations, challenging stereotypical thinking, and deepening understanding of the links between education and ultimate employment (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>)
- Student perspectives on the value of career talks should be secured, and students should be engaged in the process of identifying possible speakers (Kashefpakdel, 2017<sup>[3]</sup>)
- Speakers from different backgrounds and career pathways (academic and vocational routes) should be secured, including volunteers who can speak about what it is like to work in a field where their gender (or other personal characteristic) is underrepresented and who share personal characteristics with students (Makola, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>) (Gladstone, 2021<sup>[36]</sup>)

Career talks represent a comparatively easy way for schools to enrich career guidance through direct engagement with employers and people in work (Musset, 2018<sup>[29]</sup>). Online provision makes such

interaction still easier. However, to date, very little online provision has been evaluated and a number of important research questions require attention. These include exploring how different students respond to different online approaches (for example, the character and duration of presentations, the role of a host, how student interaction is enabled, comparison of pre-recorded and live events) more effective preparation and reflection activities, and acquiring a better understanding of how impact varies with regard to traditional face-to-face events. Indeed, further studies will be welcome from a wider range of countries using qualitative and quantitative techniques to better understand the optimal delivery of talks within schooling, echoing for example the approaches of (Rehill, 2017<sup>[39]</sup>) (Rehill, 2017<sup>[6]</sup>), who survey students, school staff and volunteer speakers to understand the perceived value of career talks in relation to career carousels and job fairs. It would also be advantageous if future PISA studies collected data on student participation in talks alongside other career development activities.

## The bottom line

**Engaging teenage students in career talks with guest speakers can be expected to provide insights of value to long-term adult employment outcomes.**

To maximise the benefits of career talks, schools can:

- Provide frequent opportunities for students to hear from people in work about their jobs and the pathways they took into them
- Prepare students to engage critically with the new information that they receive
- Ensure that speakers come from a wide range of backgrounds

## Career Readiness in the Pandemic

The OECD Career Readiness project provides policy makers and practitioners with evidenced guidance on how schools can best prepare young people for employment during a period of economic disruption. The project makes particular use of the results from the 2018 round of PISA and new analysis of national longitudinal datasets in ten countries.



**For more information, visit:** <https://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness>

**Contact:** Anthony Mann, project leader, [Anthony.Mann@oecd.org](mailto:Anthony.Mann@oecd.org)

### Key papers include:

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

Mann, A., V. Denis and C. Percy (2020), "Career ready?: How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19", OECD Education Working Papers OECD (2021),

OECD (2021), "Getting the most out of employer engagement in career guidance", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 36, OECD Publishing, Paris

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This Education Policy Perspective has been authorised by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.

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