

# Making chocolate teapots\* : Striving for ‘good’ youth work Career skills

**Policy brief, November 2021**  
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## TOP TIPS FOR CAREER MANAGEMENT

**Societal changes, such as digitalisation or globalisation, are leading to changes in the labour market and jobs.**

While important for everyone, investing in one’s employability to adapt to these changes is particularly valuable for young adults at the early stages of their careers.

Our research on education-to-work transitions identified three elements that are important when entering the labour market.



### ✓ Invest in developing career-related competencies

Many career competencies or skills have been identified in the past. In general, three categories are considered: (a) knowing-how relates to the skills and expertise you have that are relevant for your (future) job, (b) knowing-why refers to your motivation and values, for example what you find important in your future job, and (c) knowing-whom refers to the depth and breadth of your professional network. Our research indicates that young people who have stronger career competencies before entering the labour market are more likely to start in a job that fits their prior education, stressing the value of these competencies in the early career (Grosemans & De Cuyper, 2021).

### ✓ Go beyond formal learning for career-enhancing activities

To develop key skills, people often think in terms of taking additional courses or attending seminars and presentations. These activities are certainly valuable, but we encourage young people to learn informally too as this may be especially useful for developing career-related competencies. An example is to ask for feedback or to “learn by watching”, which can be very helpful in gaining insight into your own strengths before entering the labour market (Grosemans, Smet, Houben, De Cuyper, & Kyndt, 2020).

### ✓ Make a deliberate choice when entering the labour market

Finding a job can be a difficult process and it is tempting to quickly accept a job offer, even if this job does not fit your educational background. However, our research has shown that underemployment at the beginning of one’s career can have effects in the long-term, creating additional future career boundaries (Grosemans, Vangrieken, Coertjens, & Kyndt, 2020).

#### Sources:

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\*phrase used by European Youth Parliament to describe a lack of purpose in poor quality jobs.

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Michelle Trottier

## TOP TIPS FOR ENHANCING PARTICIPATION IN CAREERS SERVICES: ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

**Although high quality careers counselling services are offered by UK universities, only 50% of students use such services (Bradley et al. 2019; Purcell et al., 2012).**

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to engage with career services less (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008; Simpson & Ferguson, 2013). Evidence provided by Trottier (2021) shows that these students can be encouraged to participate when career support is offered through an online peer-led learning group on a virtual learning environment, otherwise known as an online community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

**Below, are five suggestions to enhance student participation in online communities of practice.**

**1. Understand the identity of your student body:** Students participate when they feel a sense of belonging. Consider whether your students feel belonging as a cohort, department, school or programme. Research has shown that community of practice groups of 5-10 students with a clear school identity result in cohesiveness between members (Trottier, 2021).

**2. Provide structure:** Formal structures can be useful for members to achieve specific targets. Trottier (2021) set specific topics for students each week.



**3. Encourage peer leaders:** Some students may be highly motivated by helping others. Informal leaders who are open to sharing their practice have the ability to engage and motivate one other (Donohoo, 2013).

**4. Signpost to other services:** Careers development is complex, with many factors affecting it. Trottier (2021) found mental health challenges and time management factors deter participation. Recognise that careers development falls within a more complex student wellbeing framework.

**5. Evaluate by participation, not posts:** Lave and Wenger's (1991) research demonstrates how members build skills over time by first observing and then doing. This means that the first step to doing is watching. Trottier (2021) found that students identified usefulness in reading others' posts even without contributing back.

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