

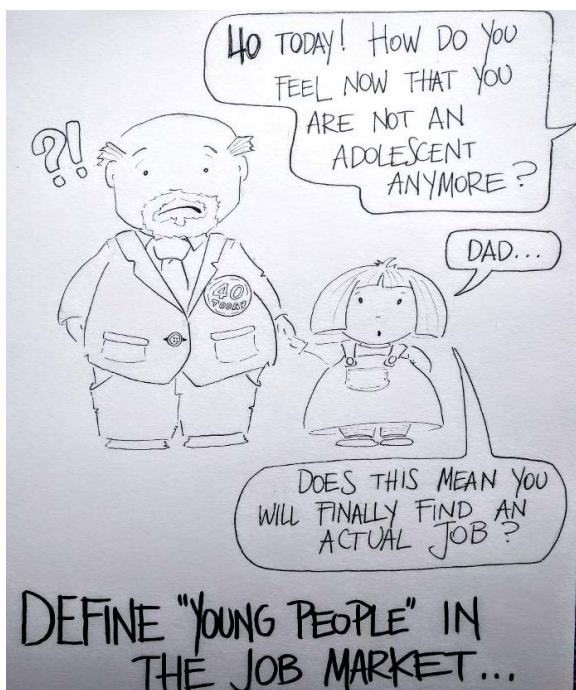
Special Issue on young people's work, employment and careers

Editorial

Belgin Okay-Somerville & Angela Carter

Youth employment is a global social and economic challenge. The difficulties young people face in accessing work that allows skill use and development, and a decent living wage, have multiple scarring effects (McQuaid, 2017) not only for young people's future employment and career outcomes but also for organizations (e.g., underutilisation of labour) and society (e.g., community welfare). The challenges of youth employment are therefore multi-faceted involving numerous stakeholders. This *Special Issue* features a mix of full-length empirical papers and stakeholder interviews focusing on key themes related to youth employment.

The idea for this *Special Issue* was conceived during the five-day *Small Group Meeting* (SGM) on *Young People's Work, Employment and Careers*, which was held online between 29th June – 3rd July 2020. Throughout the week, we worked with an artist, Carlo Tramontano, who illustrated key ideas from our discussions. We hope you will enjoy these drawings that say so much more than words.



This SGM was organised by Belgin Okay-Somerville (Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow), Dora Scholarios (Department of Work, Organization and Employment, University of Strathclyde) and Rosalind Searle (Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow). The meeting was funded by EAWOP and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK. Satisfying the requirements of each funder, the SGM had two main aims: a) to advance empirical and conceptual understanding of young people's work,

employment and careers; and b) to bring together researchers, practitioners and policymakers to set agendas towards improving young people’s current and future work prospects, with implications for more inclusive and prosperous societies.

The programme was divided into three key themes: diversity and inclusion; employability and career management; and young people’s work and well-being. Each day of the SGM started out with invited stakeholder talks, followed by discussion of empirical research by work and organizational psychology (WOP) researchers, and ended with a group reflection on key issues. The SGM attracted 43 attendees from nine countries. The final programme featured contributions from 14 non-academic stakeholders (e.g., European Youth Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament, Resolution Foundation, Mental Health Foundation, Centre for Work-based Learning and Youth Futures Foundation) and 17 selected WOP research presentations. Final day of the event was reserved solely for cross-fertilising ideas for improving youth employment. The SGM keynote was delivered by Dr Angela Carter, titled *The wicked problem of youth employment: Context, issues and ways forward*.



The SGM not only started an active dialogue between WOP researchers and stakeholders, but also contributed towards identifying further research questions that are grounded in real-life challenges. Feedback we received from participants showed that the SGM served to increase researchers’ appreciation of the policy relevance of WOP research (e.g., “*The meeting made me more aware about the relevance of being in touch with and trying to influence*

policymakers and social agents”) and highlighted the significance of WOP empirical research for policymaking (e.g., “*The meeting re-emphasised the value of research and practice/policy working closely together on this important area*”).

Discussions identified there are still many areas relevant to improving youth employment to be explored, including:

- How do we facilitate a 'systems' approach to improving young people's prospects and experience of the labour market?
- How do we help young people to navigate the career choices available to them?
- How can education systems contribute to young people's career management skills and self-efficacy?
- What are the different types of experiences that are gained from work? Why is work particularly important for young people?
- What role do employers play in preparing young people for the world of work?

The collection of papers we have assembled in this *Special Issue* contribute towards addressing the first three of these core questions. We mimic the format of the SGM in delivery and introduce the stakeholder view first (in the form of an interview) followed by empirical research or our new feature 'career paths' piece. The *Special Issue* starts with an interview with *Prof Rosalind Searle*, the inaugural director of the EAWOP Impact Incubator (EAWOPii). Ros' interview sets the tone by highlighting the unique contributions WOP research can and does make to improving youth employment. As the director of EAWOPii, Ros shares insights into how WOP researchers can best engage with policymakers and thereby making positive contributions to youth employment and accomplishing ground-breaking, topical research.

Following Ros' emphasis on WOP contributions to policymaking, the first theme the *Special Issue* covers is diversity and inclusion. Our interview with *Colin Convery* from Police Scotland focuses on the community benefits of youth employment. Noticeable in this interview is a focus on removing barriers to employment for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., young offenders) and doing so in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., Social Services and the Prince's Trust, a global charity providing opportunities for young people to build confidence and start their careers). Addressing one of the SGM key themes this interview reminds us of the importance of a systems approach.

Enabling young people's access to work is top priority when focusing on community benefits of youth employment relevant for inclusion in society. The first empirical paper in the *Special Issue* is an ethnographic study within a training centre for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) by *Beth Suttill*. This paper challenges the common policy and practice view that marginalises NEET young

people based on stereotypes (e.g., being un-employable and disengaged). The study demonstrates young people's attempts at distancing themselves from stereotypes and emphasises the multiple barriers they face in accessing labour markets.

Our interview with *Matthew Caine* from the European Youth Parliament (EYP) offers some answers as to how we can help facilitate young people's navigation of career choices. The EYP's youth-led events show acknowledgement of the importance of developing and utilising career skills. We observe that the EYP achieves this by means of social and interactive activities. We can relate this to the psycho-social definitions of employability (e.g., Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004), considering not only human capital but also social capital, identity, and adaptability. The interview further strengthens the arguments for a systems approach to tackling youth employment challenges, involving multiple stakeholders.

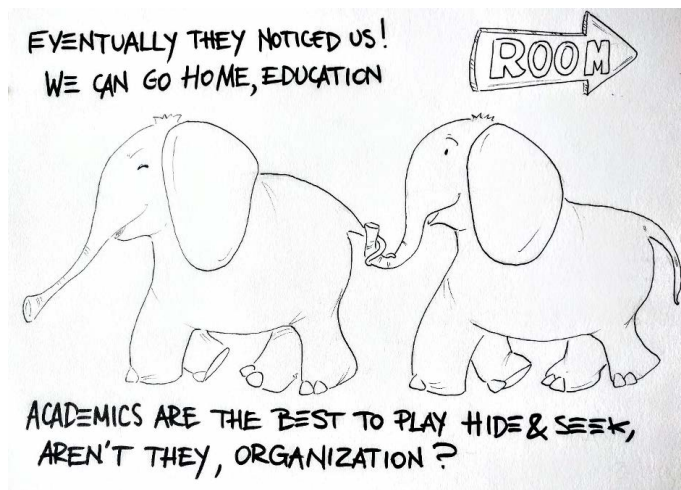
Also taking a peer-led approach to career skills development, *Michelle Trottier's* empirical research confirms the relevance of social learning theory (e.g., Bandura & McClelland, 1977). This research shows the efficacy of an online peer-led community of practice intervention for improving careers service engagement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Findings demonstrate student concern for enhancing their own, as well as their peers', employability. There is also evidence of passive career engagement through vicarious learning. For careers practitioners, supporting a social learning theory approach, this research clearly shows value of online, peer-led interventions.



We continue with the theme of career guidance presenting a practitioner interview with *Hannah Courtney Bennett* a Chartered Psychologist and Career Coach focusing on the place of career practitioners in schools preparing young people's transitions into further study and employment. Hannah has been one of the pioneers in the UK in adapting delivery of the single interaction model

of career guidance (Reid & Fielding, 2007) to the online platforms, following Covid-19 lockdown and remote working. The interview provides clear support and guidelines encompassing issues of safeguarding young people in their homes.

Our final contribution is a ‘career paths’ piece, where *Sakshi Bansal* shares experiences of career crafting and the conflicts and dilemmas of following multiple interests and activities. *A suitable marriage* describes a happy ending with the realisation that while this myriad of activities may appear to be a puzzle consisting of many unconnected pieces these goals sit within the area of Humanitarian Psychology. We hope by offering this and other career path accounts that work and organizational psychologists will be able to make decisions and identify with their disparate choices to enable fulfilling and diverse careers.



Reflecting on the SGM and the contents of this *Special Issue*, it is clear that WOP research and practice has much to offer for improving youth employment. Our emphasis seems to be heavily sided with equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and abilities that will enable them to secure work. While this may be empowering some young people in the

labour market, such strong emphasis on individual responsibility may run the danger of blaming the victim, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for their predicament. The SGM questions that are left relatively unanswered in this *Special Issue* (e.g., surrounding with a systems approach, the specific roles of various stakeholders and the importance of work for young people) suggest a need to re-centre our focus and increase our emphasis on young people’s work. A plethora of WOP research, especially from a vocational psychology perspective, focus on education-to-work transitions. Yet, we rarely examine crucial ‘work-related’ questions such as ‘*what explains employer motivation/reluctance for engaging with and employing young people?*’. Accordingly, although we write about the importance of work and work experience for young people, our empirical evidence is limited. This is partly because most of our outcome measures are rather short-sighted (e.g., focusing just on a binary measure

of employment or education status). We also observe similar emphasis in short-term solutions in policymaking such as the EU Youth Guarantee programme which aims to provide all young people employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed. In order for WOP research to influence policymaking for improving youth employment, we need empirical evidence on what 'good work' looks like for young people, including the impact of 'good work' for sustainable labour market integration (Fuentes, McQuaid & Robertson, 2021).

We hope you enjoy reading this *Special Issue* and that this content raises your awareness of the challenges young people are facing finding their place in work. Looking ahead, we are putting together a general edition of InPractice with a focus on *broadening the boundaries of WOP*. This should be with you in the autumn.

We also look forward to your contributions either as a full-length empirical paper, a case study, career paths discussion, reflections on practice, or a presentation of practice-oriented tools used in WOP. Please contact us (InPractice@eawop.org) with your ideas and a short plan of the paper and we will be delighted to work with you to bring this material into publication.

Finally, we are sending you greetings from Glasgow where the 20th EAWOP Congress will take place from 11 to 14 January 2022 (see www.eawop2022.org/0). Our attention is drawn to this date as we are currently completing our submissions. Most importantly we look forward to meeting you at the congress face to face! There will be a strong Science + Practice theme throughout the congress and pre-congress workshops. Look out for the S+P logo and the InPractice editors. There will also be a youth employment policy panel as part of the EAWOPii presentations and Sakshi and Angela will be joining an *International Humanitarian Panel* making the case to improve the well-being of workers around the world.



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