

PROJECT PROPOSAL: Career Preparation in a Rapidly Changing World: *A Comparative International Review of Career Pathways*. (February 2023)

What? Helping young people launch into a successful life and career in this rapidly changing world has become more important than ever. Given the dramatic expansion of career pathways in the U.S. and globally, the Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD), an international organisation based in France, will partner with Rodel, a U.S.-based non-profit, doing leading-edge work in the U.S., to surface what's working in college and career success for youth in the U.S. and abroad. Specifically, the project will provide a first international comparison of career pathway programmes. While the project will extend beyond this window, field work will be from April to July 2023.

Why? This project builds on the first-of-its-kind [longitudinal analyses](#) by the OECD that shows that career pathways can routinely be associated with better employment outcomes for youth. This will be the first time that a comparative international study has been attempted. While there has been considerable analysis of some of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) models, we know far less about how OECD countries integrate vocational exploration and preparation for the world of work within general secondary education. By building on the longitudinal analysis of 10 countries, this project will surface lessons learned through targeted visits and interviews in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, and Canada. The intent is to enable peer learning in order to accelerate how countries and municipalities can help young people transition from education to work by surfacing new insights and sharing innovations.

Why Now? Our young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world. Climate change, social injustice, a global pandemic, and political polarization frame their lives.

Complicating things further, we have a “mismatch” between those in the workforce and the kinds of skills and capabilities needed for available jobs. Although, this issue is not new, it is reaching a new level of crisis. In the U.S., for example, there are 11 million open jobs and eight million job seekers. The U.S. and E.U. are investing nearly a trillion dollars in green energy, technology, healthcare, and education. But the skills to fulfil jobs in these sectors, like building electric vehicle charging stations, may require developing new training and talent pipelines from scratch. To address this gap, countries are working to break down the silos between education, training, and work through an approach broadly defined as “career pathways.” This work is expanding rapidly, but there is a dearth of comparative research on what's working.

What's the Research Focus? The aim of the study is to undertake a first global comparison of the design and delivery of career pathway programmes delivered in multiple countries.

How are Career Pathways Defined? Career pathways, in this study, are programmes that are:

- Delivered within a specific stream of general education, commonly over one to two days a week over several months or longer.
- Delivered in the final years of secondary education, commonly between the ages of 15 and 18.
- Focused on introducing students to broad vocational fields with possible opportunity to gain occupationally specific experience and/or credentials (rather than preparing them for a specific occupation).
- Typically structured around work-integrated curricula, work-based learning and project-based learning.

- Provide students with the opportunity to prepare for employment in a specific vocational area (e.g. healthcare or IT) without closing off options including continuation into postsecondary education

Career pathways are programmes of enhanced career exploration, offering a structured introduction to strategically important vocational fields such as healthcare, engineering, IT, and logistics, where demand for high-quality employment is strong. Such programmes often prepare students for intensified vocational education at a later stage or connect young people to postsecondary/tertiary programs leading to good “middle skill” jobs, i.e. jobs in healthcare or IT with good career trajectories that can be entered with less than four-year degrees. The programmes do not prepare students for direct entry into specific occupations immediately after graduation from secondary education, but may include the opportunity to secure credentials of value to postsecondary progression and training. Career pathways are designed to support serious career exploration within a specific area, enabling progression without closing off alternatives.

What is the Early Evidence that Career Pathways Work? The 2021 OECD longitudinal data analysis of 10 countries confirmed that career pathway programmes are one of [11 indicators](#) that result in better career readiness. Students undertaking such programmes at age 15 could commonly be expected to experience better employment outcomes (such as lower youth not in employment, education or training, or NEET rates, higher wages and greater job satisfaction) at age 25 than comparable peers.

A review of 17 longitudinal analyses of such programmes in Australia, Canada, and the United States found that 14 studies demonstrated statistically significant evidence of better employment outcomes in young adulthood linked to teenage participation in career pathways.

What is the Methodology? The project will use several approaches:

- **Comparative analysis** on the design and delivery of career pathways with a focus on how countries vary in responding to strategically important skills shortages (e.g., green jobs)
- **Review of existing longitudinal, quantitative data** on the long-term impacts of career pathways
- **Review of relevant literature** on the effective design and delivery of such programmes
- **Semi-structured interviews** with policy officials, practitioners, students, and employers during field visits to at least three OECD countries (provisionally, Australia, Scotland, and New Zealand), bolstered by targeted interviews with leaders in the European Union, Canada, and the United States

What Will the Work Products Be? The outputs of this work will include:

- Publication 1. An OECD working paper:
 - Conceptualising career pathway models and design features by country
 - Summarizing available data on engagement and impacts
 - Insights into more effective design and delivery
 - Lessons learned for policymakers in the U.S. and globally
- Publication 2. An OECD policy brief. A short paper summarizing the working paper.
- OECD Webinar. Virtual forum with policy officials/practitioners from selected countries exploring similarities and differences among the different career pathway models.
- Rodel Blogs and podcasts. Synopses to capture lessons on each country along the way.

When Will this Take Place? The general timeline consists of: Field visits and data collection (April-June 2023); Working paper and webinar production (July-September 2023); Working paper/policy brief release and webinar (October-December 2023).

How Will this Work be Shared? This work will be shared globally through the OECD's network and a webinar. In the U.S., it will be shared via Rodel and the Carnegie Corporation of New York as well as through national intermediaries such as Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the Education Strategy Group (ESG) in conferences and on social media.

Who will do the work?

- **Dr. Anthony Mann** – Senior Policy Analyst (Education and Skills) at the OECD. Anthony leads the OECD's [Career Readiness team](#), responsible for global research on teenage career development and will be the supervising manager for the project design and implementation.
 - o The OECD will also dedicate two additional junior staff to the project to support the research and production of the final work products.
- **Dr. Paul Herdman** – President/CEO of [Rodel](#), will be on loan to the OECD for the spring of 2023 to lead the fieldwork. Herdman has been a leader in career pathways in Delaware and nationally and chairs strategic planning for Delaware's Workforce Development Board. He has conducted qualitative research projects nationally and has led several international benchmarking trips. He received his BA from the University of Delaware and master's and doctoral degrees from Harvard University.
- **Rex Varner** – Founder, BVE Strategy. A Wharton graduate, former COO and McKinsey alumni with over 20 years of C-suite and board-level consulting experience in the private and nonprofit sectors. Rex will support Paul in research, analysis, and writing the working paper.
- **Dr. Robert Schwartz** – Professor Emeritus Harvard University is the co-founder of the Pathways to Prosperity Network, and has written and spoken on a range of K12 issues both in the US and globally. He will serve as a senior project advisor.

How will this work be funded? This project is made possible by generous support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Rodel.