

DELIVERING CAREERS TALKS

A CIEEM GUIDE



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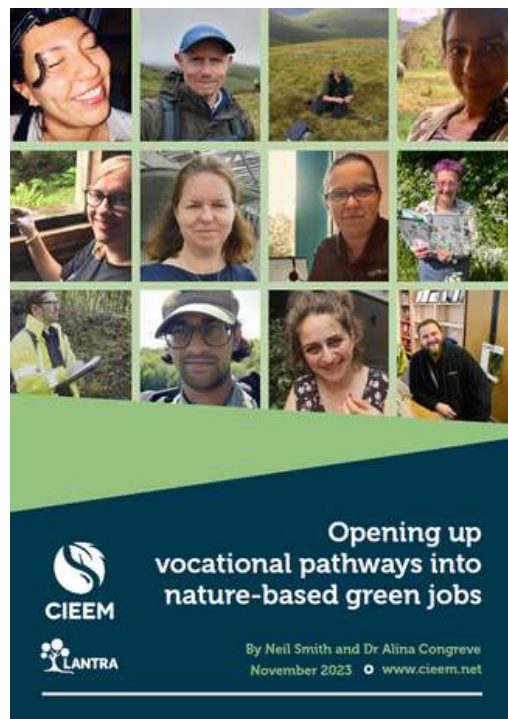
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INTRODUCTION

The environmental sector faces significant challenges in attracting and retaining talent, with many employers reporting serious difficulties in filling vacancies and finding people with the right skills. To address this, employers should actively engage with schools to promote awareness of careers in the sector and elevate the status of the profession (1). While some organizations are leading the way by building connections with schools, colleges, and universities, the wider sector has much to learn from these efforts (1).

Additionally, the environmental sector is one of the least diverse fields in the UK, second only to farming and agriculture (2). These challenges highlight the urgent need for targeted strategies to build a skilled, diverse, and engaged workforce for the future.

CIEEM are encouraging all members to deliver careers talks in schools and to support this we have carried out research and incorporated it into this pack to help underpin an approach to careers interventions which will hopefully be impactful. A separate resource pack will be produced to help guide the application of these principles, you will find some examples of these towards the end of this pack.



Alongside the resources produced by CIEEM, there are other sources of support that are available. Signing up to either one or more of the organisations below is likely to provide you with an easier route to finding schools to deliver talks to. Offering to do a talk at a school that you are already familiar with will be equally impactful.

STEM learning provides opportunities presented directly from schools, which STEM Ambassadors can volunteer for, these can range from themed events, panels, and asks for talks on specific topics. There is also a range of resources on the website for you to use. The signup process is relatively straightforward and includes a DBS check. During the signup process, if you make sure you select the option to say that you are from CIEEM, we will be able to see the activity undertaken by all members, allowing us to see the social impact. The minimum ask from STEM is one hour of activity per year.

The process to signup can be found at: <https://www.stem.org.uk/>

Inspiring the Future is similar to STEM in providing both resources for speakers and links to schools, they prioritise working with schools that are based in areas of diversity and deprivation. The signup process, takes around 20 mins and does not include a DBS check. Similarly, during signup you can indicate that you are a CIEEM member and your work will appear on our dashboard. The minimum ask is one hour per year.

The process to signup can be found at: <https://www.inspiringthefuture.org/>

The Careers and Enterprise Company (England only) has two tools that will be of use to employers. Firstly employers can undertake an Employer Standards audit, which will then help the CEC to provide a range of support tailored to your size and performance. As a Professional Body, CIEEM will be provided access to these aggregated results to help us further support the sector. The CEC also encourage employers to volunteer as Enterprise Advisers, this is a slightly different ask to that of STEM and Inspiring the Future and the role involves working with schools and other employers, as opposed to delivering talks to students (although you still can do both).

For more information, take a look at the CEC website: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>

THE VALUE OF CAREER TALKS

What are Career Talks?

Career talks are short, structured sessions where professionals share real-world insights with students. Even brief sessions can have a lasting impact on teenagers' future success.

Why Are They Important?

Career talks give students an authentic glimpse into the labor market, making career paths clearer and more relatable. A simple 10–20 minute talk with a Q&A can inspire students and broaden their understanding of career possibilities (3).

The Evidence is Clear

Students who engage with employers during school years are more likely to achieve higher earnings and better job prospects in early adulthood (4, 5). Even short interactions provide new, relevant information that helps students make better career decisions (5).

"IN A SIMILAR FASHION TO THROWING MUD AT A WALL, THE MORE THAT IS THROWN, THE MORE CAN BE EXPECTED TO STICK" (3).

Short, but Impactful

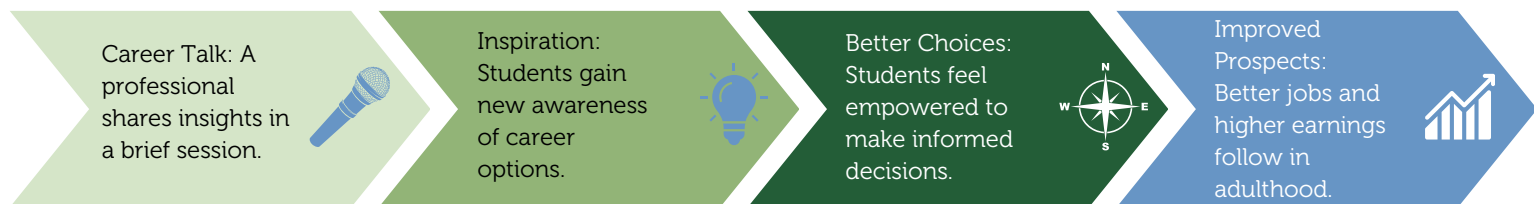
Research shows that brief, episodic interactions with professionals can deliver meaningful economic benefits by helping students understand the opportunities available to them (4).

Promoting Inclusion

Introducing primary school children to diverse role models in non-traditional careers reduces stereotypes and encourages greater inclusivity in sectors like ecology and environmental management (6, 7), which is the second least diverse in the UK (8).

"PARTICIPANTS WHO LACKED REAL SOCIAL CAPITAL BUT ATTENDED SCHOOL MEDIATED CAREER TALKS WITH EXTERNAL EMPLOYERS EARNED 8.5% MORE ON AVERAGE THAN PEERS WHO BELIEVED SOCIAL NETWORKS ALONE WOULD HELP THEM SECURE WORK." (5)

Without proper career guidance, students can become confused about what education and skills they need for their dream jobs, which can hurt their future success.



3: OECD (2023) Career talks with guest speakers: A guide to delivering an effective career development activity. OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 69. Paris: OECD Publishing.

4: Kashefpakdel, E.T. and Percy, C. (2016). Career education that works: an economic analysis using the British Cohort Study. *Journal of Education and Work*, 30(3), pp.217–234.

5: Mann, A. (2018) 'Socialised social capital? The capacity of schools to use careers provision to compensate for social capital deficiencies among teenagers', in Mann, A., et al. (eds.) *Essays on Employer Engagement in Education*. Routledge.

6: Bailey, B. A., & Nihlen, A. S. (1990). Effect of experience with nontraditional workers on psychological and social dimensions of occupational sex-role stereotyping by elementary school children. *Psychological Reports*, 66(3, Pt 2), 1273–1282.

7: Bigler, R. S., & Liben, L. S. (1990). The role of attitudes and interventions in gender-schematic processing. *Child Development*, 61(5), 1440–1452.

8: Policy Exchange. (n.d.). The two sides of diversity. [online] Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/the-two-sides-of-diversity/>.

Without proper career guidance, students can become confused about what education and skills they need for their dream jobs, which can hurt their future success. In particular, the complexity of post-16 education in the UK can cause 'career confusion', an issue which is particularly pronounced for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (9).

Many young people don't fully understand the educational pathways required to achieve their career goals. For example, a student who wants to become a lawyer but doesn't plan for university shows signs of this career confusion. Misaligned goals like these can lead to lower job satisfaction and income in adulthood compared to those who have a clearer understanding of what's needed. Misaligned expectations can be damaging, even for students who are otherwise talented. Gender stereotypes, social perceptions of certain careers, and a lack of self-belief often contribute to this issue (10, 11).

Without career guidance, young people may form misconceptions about the skills different jobs require, limiting their career aspirations. It can also reinforce gender stereotypes about which careers are appropriate for different people, narrowing future opportunities (12).

TAILORING DELIVERY

Children's understanding of careers evolves as they grow. Younger children typically describe jobs by what people do in them, while older children focus more on the skills, talents, and interests required for those roles (13). Recognising these stages can help tailor career talks to an appropriate level and guide them effectively toward informed career choices.

Howard and Walsh's framework on Conceptions of Career Choice and Attainment (14) is one of the few models that identifies clear developmental stages in how children think about careers.. This research highlights how younger children often see careers as a result of luck or external help, while older children develop a more nuanced understanding, considering effort, skills, and decision-making. The framework itself provides a valuable basis for tailoring career guidance to different age groups.

In practice, this means that talks aimed at Level 1 could introduce careers in simple, relatable ways, focusing on what people do in their jobs without delving any further. For example, explaining that "a ranger protects animals" helps make abstract concepts tangible. For Level 4 talks, however, discussions might explore how their interests and abilities could align with specific roles, emphasising the process of developing skills and matching them to job requirements. This practical application ensures messages resonate with students' current understanding.

9: The Careers and Enterprise Company. (2021). Effective Careers Interventions for Disadvantaged Young People: Evidence review. [online] Available at: <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-evidence/evidence-and-reports/effective-careers-interventions-for-disadvantaged-young-people-evidence-review/>.

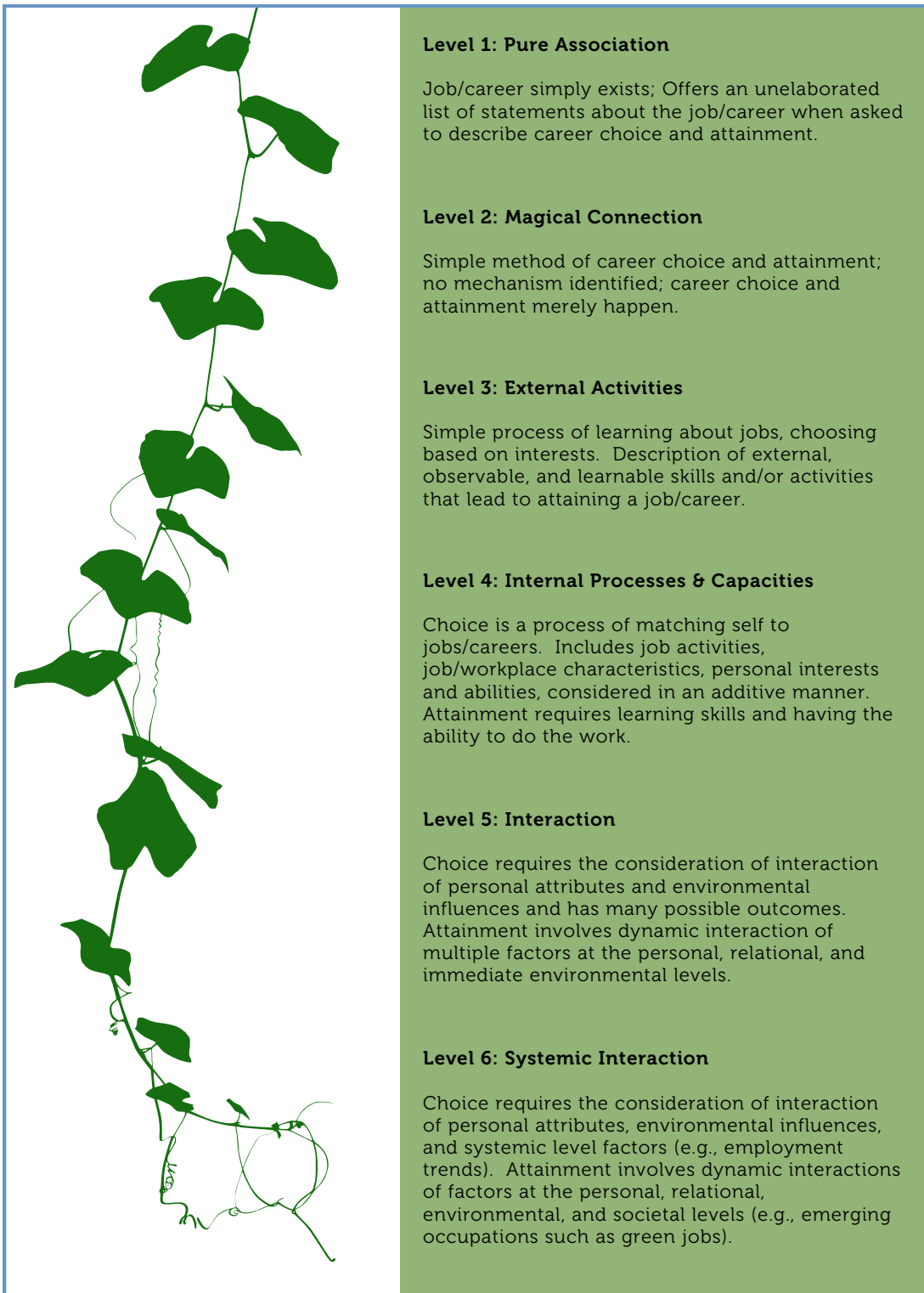
10: Chambers, N., Kashfepakdel, T., Rehill, J. and Percy, C. (2018). Exploring the Career Aspirations of Primary School Children from around the World. [online] Available at: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Drawing-the-Future-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>.

11: Nagengast, B. & Marsh, H. W. (2012) 'Big fish in little ponds aspire more: Mediation and cross-cultural generalizability of school-average ability effects on self-concept and career aspirations', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), pp. 1033–1053.

12: Conlon, R. A., et al. (2023) 'Young children's career aspirations: Gender differences, STEM ambitions, and expected skill use', *Career Development Quarterly*, 71(1), p. 15+. [Accessed 7 Nov. 2024].

13: Borgen, W.A. and Young, R.A., 1982. Career perceptions of children and adolescents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 21, pp.37–4

14: Howard, K.A.S. and Walsh, M.E. (2010) 'Children's conceptions of career choice and attainment: Model development', *Journal of Career Development*, 38(3), pp. 256–271.



Adapted from Children's Conceptions of Career Development (14).

Key findings from this research:

- Level 1: Pure Association and Level 2: Magical Connection are most common in the younger age groups (ages 5-9), with children seeing careers as resulting from external help or luck, rather than a conscious choice.
- As students enter secondary school (ages 10-14), they begin to develop a more nuanced understanding of careers, focusing on observable skills and external activities (Level 3) and matching personal interests to job roles (Level 4).
- Level 5: Interaction becomes more prevalent at ages 14-16, where students are increasingly considering both personal attributes and external influences as part of their career decisions.
- Level 6: Systemic Interaction, involving complex factors like employment trends and societal changes, is most commonly seen post-16.

TAILORING LANGUAGE IN CAREERS TALKS: CAREER LITERACY

In 2012, Derby University conducted research on how young people understand career-related language (15). Here are some key takeaways:

- Most young people (ages 11–19) could define the word "career," but their understanding varied. Interestingly, when talking to peers, they avoided the word "career" and preferred terms like "the future" or "what you're going to do after school." They saw "career" as a formal word used by teachers.
- While the term "career" is generally understood, it's not a popular word for talking about progression. Many young people associate "career" with pressure to plan, think, and act. This perception may create anxiety about the future.
- Students across secondary education could define the concept of skills and understood that skills relate to competencies gained through education and experience.
- Teachers typically introduce the concept of college around ages 15–16 (Key Stage 4), and university is formally introduced in Year 10 (ages 14-15) as part of job search activities. By age 18, students have a strong understanding of what university is and what it offers.
- The term "industry" was often misunderstood, particularly by younger learners. By age 18, students had a clearer understanding of "industry" and were able to distinguish between different sectors of the economy.

| Age Group | Words to Avoid | Why | Words to Use |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 7 - 11 (Primary) | Career, industry, College, A-Level, University, Salary | These terms feel formal and distant for younger students. "Career" as a word is unpopular. | The future, what you want to do when you grow up |
| 11 - 14 (Lower Secondary) | Career, industry, College, A-Level, University | Students are still exploring career paths, not yet formalising them. "Career" as a word is unpopular. | What you want to do after school, Job options |
| 15 - 16 (Upper Secondary) | Industry | Students are starting to think about future education paths and skills development. | College, University, Skills |

OPTIMISING CAREER INTERVENTIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR

Career interventions for students aged 10-11 are most effective at raising career awareness and shaping future aspirations, making this a critical age for inspiring interest in environmental careers (9).

INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS AGED 10-11 ARE MOST EFFECTIVE AT RAISING CAREER AWARENESS

Alumni talks provide relatable role models who can motivate students to explore careers in the environmental sector, making these career paths feel more accessible.

Employer-led talks help build social capital, particularly for disadvantaged students, by offering direct exposure to career opportunities. These interactions are linked to better job prospects and higher wages, especially for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (9).

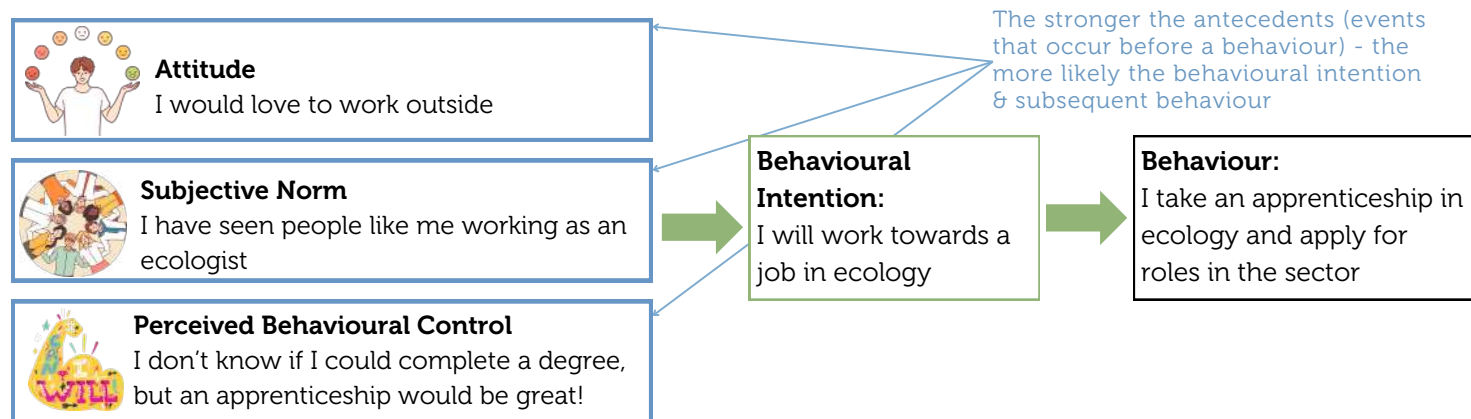
Finally, early exposure to STEM careers is key; students who don't express interest in STEM careers by age 10 are statistically unlikely to do so by age 14, highlighting the need for early career guidance in fields like ecology and environmental management (16).

STUDENTS WHO DON'T EXPRESS INTEREST IN STEM CAREERS BY AGE 10 ARE STATISTICALLY UNLIKELY TO DO SO BY AGE 14

APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY TO CAREER TALKS

Psychology's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (17) has been shown to predict career intentions in fields like accounting, teaching, and nursing, suggesting its potential in shaping environmental career guidance. The research shows that the three core factors of TPB can predict people's careers choices, attitude (how someone feels about a job), subjective norm (social influence) and perceived behavioural control (how confident someone feels about their ability to do something). The stronger the influence of these factors, the more likely that someone will choose a certain career path. By focusing on these key factors, we can design more impactful resources for students:

- **Attitudes:** Attitudes have been found to play a key role in shaping career intentions (18). In a career talk, speakers can enhance attitudes towards the environment by highlighting its personal relevance, showcasing inspiring role models, and emphasising the positive impact of environmental careers.
- **Social Influences (subjective norms):** Challenge stereotypes, especially for underrepresented groups, and show how diverse and inclusive environmental careers can be. Social norms do influence career choices (18, 19).
- **Perceived Barriers (perceived behavioural control):** Address misconceptions about environmental careers, such as job scarcity or required skills. While perceived barriers don't always deter students, alleviating concerns can boost confidence in pursuing these careers. Research suggests that addressing concerns about job availability or skill gaps can improve students' career confidence (20).



TPB adapted for the context of careers choices

16: Hughes, D. et al. (2022) Career-related learning in primary schools: a city collaborative approach in England. *British journal of guidance & counselling*. [Online] 50 (3), 443–461.

17: Ajzen, I., 2020. The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(4), pp.314–324.

18: Zaremohzzabieh, Z. et al. (2021) 'Towards agriculture as career: predicting students' participation in the agricultural sector using an extended model of the theory of planned behavior', *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 28(1), pp. 67–92.

19: Arnold, J., Loan-Clarke, J., Coombs, C., Wilkinson, A., Park, J. and Preston, D., 2006. How well can the theory of planned behavior account for occupational intentions?. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(3), pp.374-390.

20: Mokhlis, S., Nik Hussin, N. S., Nizam, N. Z., Mohd Noor, N. A., & Muslim, N. A. (2022). Predicting Malaysian university students' intent to pursue retailing career: Applicability of theory of planned behavior. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, 7(1), e0277.

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK ABOUT CAREERS

Research has shown that visiting a school you once attended can have a particularly profound impact, but as we have shown above, if this is not possible then a visit to any school will be beneficial to those students.

Cold contacting schools may yield some results, and we have provided a email template alongside this resource to help you do just that, providing information about the many ways a careers talk about the environment will benefit students, and linking to key areas of schools provision, such as the Gatsby Benchmarks (21), which form the statutory guidance for schools (in England), or the Careers Education Standard (Scotland) (22) in their provision of careers information.

As schools are busy places, and teaching staff are time poor, you might not always receive a reply immediately and on occasion you might not receive a reply at all, there are easier ways to connect with schools, which include registering with the services that are designed specifically for this, namely STEM, Inspiring the Future and Speakers for Schools, highlighted in the Introduction (there may be others). These can help link you to those schools who lack the network to reach out, these could be, for example, schools in areas of deprivation.

Another largely overlooked group of students are those who are home-schooled. Speakers in other sectors have found some success by advertising employability talks in local libraries which are then attended by home-schooled students. Contacting your local library would be a good first step in this instance.

21: The Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2014). Good Career Guidance. London: the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

22: Education Scotland (2015). Developing the Young Workforce Career Education Standard (3-18). [online] Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/media/1okhy35c/dyw2-career-education-standard-0915.pdf>.

SUMMARY: KEY POINTS FOR DELIVERING CAREERS TALKS

Preparation

Know Your Audience:

- Understand the age group, interests, and knowledge level of the students.
- Tailor examples and language to ensure relevance and accessibility.

Understand Your Goals:

- Highlight the variety of careers in the environmental sector.
- Inspire students by connecting careers to real-world impact (e.g., biodiversity, climate change).

Plan Your Message:

- Focus on your personal career journey to make it relatable.
- Emphasize key themes like sustainability, problem-solving, and making a difference.

Delivery

Engaging Storytelling:

- Use personal anecdotes to demonstrate how environmental careers positively affect communities and ecosystems.
- Include "A Day in the Life" examples to make abstract roles tangible.

Visual Aids and Props:

- Use diagrams, photos, or simple props (e.g., field equipment) to create interest.
- Incorporate before-and-after visuals for projects to illustrate impact.

Interaction is Key:

- Encourage questions to maintain engagement and build rapport.
- Use relatable, interactive elements like small quizzes or hypothetical scenarios.

Content to Include

Career Pathways:

- Explain common routes into the sector (e.g., relevant degrees, apprenticeships, volunteering).
- Break down key steps to entering the field.

Skills and Qualities:

- Highlight essential skills: communication, teamwork, observation, problem-solving.
- Relate these to their studies (e.g., biology, geography) to show relevance.

Real-World Relevance:

- Connect environmental roles to their local area (e.g., parks, wildlife, urban projects).
- Frame careers as crucial to solving global challenges like climate change.

Follow-Up

Resources and Support:

- Direct students to resources for further exploration (e.g., websites like Green Jobs for Nature, volunteering opportunities).
- Offer to answer additional questions via teachers or online platforms.

Call to Action:

- Encourage students to explore their interests through school projects, nature observation, or volunteering.
- Inspire them to think about how they can make a difference.

EXAMPLE CAREER TALKS: APPLYING THE THEORY

So far we have provided a lot of information in context of research, to demonstrate that evidence-based practice, similar to environmental work, is by far the best approach. The following pages will provide some simple ideas of how to put this into practice.

"Mini Explorers: What Does an Ecologist Do?" (Aimed at Ages 7–11)

- Connection to Theory:
 - Introduces young audiences to environmental careers by fostering curiosity and using relatable, hands-on examples.
- Example Content:
 - Activity: Show them simple tools you use, like a magnifying glass or field notebook.
 - Example: "When I was your age, I loved finding bugs and counting them. Now I do this for my job helping protect wildlife areas!"
 - Visual Aid: A "nature detective toolkit" showing items like binoculars, field guides, and sample jars.
 - Hands-On Idea: Lead them in imagining what they might find in their school grounds and how they might protect it.

"Saving Habitats: My Role as a Conservationist" (Aimed at Ages 9–14)

- Connection to Theory:
 - Helps students connect abstract environmental concepts with real-world impacts.
- Example Content:
 - Share a story about a project: "We helped clean a polluted river, and now it's full of fish and birds again."
 - Link your work to something they know: "Do you like parks? Imagine if we didn't take care of them—no more trees or birds."
 - Visual Aid: A "before-and-after" graphic of a habitat you've worked on.
 - Interactive Element: Ask students how they would restore an area and what animals they'd love to see return.

"How My Job Impacts Your World" (Aimed at Ages 11–16)

- Connection to Theory:
 - Builds on connecting careers to students' lives and community.
- Example Content:
 - Share specific benefits of your work: "We designed green spaces in your town that help with flooding and give people a place to play."
 - Highlight real-world relevance: "If you've noticed more butterflies around, it's because we planted wildflowers."
 - Visual Aid: A ripple-effect diagram showing how your job helps local wildlife, people, and the planet.

"The Life of an Environmental Planner" (Aimed at Ages 14–18)

- Connection to Theory:
 - Supports the emphasis on engaging storytelling and showcasing diverse roles.
- Content:
 - Share a detailed narrative: "In the morning, I review plans for a new eco-friendly school building. After lunch, I meet with architects to add more trees to the design."
 - Relate back to their studies: "Do you enjoy geography or biology? These are the tools I use every day."
 - Visual Aid: A timeline of your day with icons for activities (e.g., meeting, surveying, designing).
 - Engagement Element: Ask how they'd balance green space and buildings in a project.

EXAMPLE CAREER TALKS: APPLYING THE THEORY (PAGE 2)

"How I Got Here: My Path to Being an Ecologist" (Aimed at Ages 14–18)

- Connection to Theory:
 - Reinforces the importance of relatable, clear career pathways.
- Example Content:
 - Use a timeline to outline your journey:
 - i. "I was inspired by a school trip to a nature reserve."
 - ii. "I studied a technical qualification in countryside management."
 - iii. "I did an internship with a conservation charity during university."
 - Include your lessons learned: "It's okay to not know exactly what you want to do straight away!"
 - Visual Aid: A career progression chart with steps and milestones.
 - Interactive Element: Encourage students to think about their own skills and interests