Careers Ecosystem of the Future
Career Review Whitepaper

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Young Person's Guarantee

Introduction

The report **"Exploring Scotland's Career Ecosystem"** concluded that there is much to recommend in career services in Scotland. Young people across a wide range of learning and community settings can access career services and gain help with their career. However, there is also room for development as services are variable, fragmented and at times patchy. Not everyone can access the same level of help, and even those who can get help may find that its nature and quality vary as their circumstances change.

It is common for career services to be commissioned for different government departments and levels of government and to be asked to pursue different policy aims. The fact that career services are a tool that can be used for multiple aims is a strength, rather than a weakness of the activity, but it can, at times, result in confusion and inconsistency.

Shaping the careers ecosystem

There are a wide range of factors that shape the overall operation of the career's ecosystem. Some important issues include:

- **Scotland offers universal access to career services, but not all access is equal.** Different users, in different institutions receive different services. But there are questions about whether the right level and ease of access is available to the right people.

- **Career services are embedded in a wide range of different policies, but policy does not manage them as a national ecosystem.** There is a distinction between needs-based policies and asset-based policies as well as the divide between education and labour market policies.

- **The overwhelming majority of career services are funded by public money. But there is limited management of this investment.** The design of the system will vary depending on the resourcing that is available. Given that most of this funding for careers services in Scotland is public money it should be possible to gain a clearer overview of it for strategic planning purposes. In addition, there is the question as to whether resourcing is sufficient. The challenges of resourcing is an important limiter on the services provided. This could be addressed either by increasing the overall size of the funding envelope or by changing the allocation of funding between the different components as funding changes.

- **Multiple stakeholders are involved in the career ecosystem, but there is a need to define more clearly who they are and what their roles should be.** Career services are of interest to a wide range of different stakeholders. Who are viewed as the key stakeholders and how far should these stakeholders be actively built into the design and delivery of the system? For example, should employers be involved in the governance of the system and/or actively involved in the delivery of career services through further investment, beyond that already described, in brokerage and employer engagement activities designed to help young people to understand work and careers whilst they are in the education system.

- **Some elements of the ecosystem listen carefully to the voices of users, but users are rarely asked to comment on the ecosystem as a whole.** How important is it to involve young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of the service? For example, should there be formal user representation in the governance of key organisations and of the ecosystem as a whole?

Quality

Attending to quality is an important element of building effective career services, but there are many different approaches that can be taken to quality assurance. At one end national approaches to quality assurance, which potentially include requirements around consistent professionalism, processes, organisations and outcomes can exert pressure on a system to become more coherent and to exhibit greater fidelity to policy. At the other end institutions and sectors can be encouraged to develop their own approaches to quality which recognise and emphasise their distinctive contribution.

Co-operation and collaboration

Scotland has a decision to make about the level of inter-organisational integration and co-operation that characterise the system. At one end is a system comprised of a series of independent organisations and sectors which have little to do with each other. At the other end the various organisations delivering career services are tightly connected through shared policies and accountabilities. In the middle of these two extremes is an increase in voluntary collaboration between actors, without the requirement for formal structures.

On one hand the existence of SDS as a national skills and careers agency pushes the system towards greater integration and coherence. On the other hand, the burgeoning localised and marketised employability provision suggests a system comprised of independent and distinctive actors. There may be value in taking a more over-arching national position on this.

Effectiveness of career services in Scotland

The report "Exploring Scotland's Career Ecosystem" introduced evidence-based statements for the design of career systems drawn from international research by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. The table below summarises how provision in Scotland measures up against some of these statements.

Career services are effective when they...	In Scotland...
are lifelong and progressive.	there is high quality provision across the life course (with some gaps), but the fragmentation of services means that users are likely to encounter new approaches and paradigms as they move through the system, rather than view career learning as a progressive process.
connect meaningfully to the wider experience and lives of the individuals who participate in them.	the level of integration between career services and wider education and support services is often good, with many services strongly embedded and others making effective use of referral. However, there is considerable variation across the system and where partnerships fail there is a danger that services and providers become disconnected from one another. Strengthening co-ordination and co-operation structures could further improve this.
recognise the diversity of individuals and relate services to individual needs.	many career services in Scotland report an engagement with diversity and a concern about inclusion of learners and customers from diverse backgrounds. Services are often targeted according to need in ways that attend to demographic and geographic diversity.
combine a range of interventions together into a coherent programme of career development.	the way that these different elements of provision are understood and combined varies across the different components of the system. Decisions about the best approach to combine interventions and achieve coherence (e.g. what blend of the I A G Ed Em B model should be used) are largely taken at the institutional or local level. This inevitably leads to variations in the nature and quality of services provided.
support the acquisition of career management skills.	the concept of career management skills is well understood in some parts of the Scottish system (along with similar, and at times competing concepts like graduate attributes or metaskills). However, other elements of the system are not strongly invested in the idea of learning outcomes as central to careers provision. Furthermore, the diversity of frameworks probably hampers much growth of understanding in this concept amongst users and stakeholders.
are holistic and well-integrated into other support services.	there is a clear recognition of the value of integrated public service provision for young people in numerous policy documents. Partnership agreements exist between many agencies to ensure that this is working effectively. The local nature of these relationships means that there is some variability in their effectiveness and in the extent to which wider public partnerships designed to support young people include the provision of career services.

Career services are effective when they...	In Scotland...
involve employers and working people, and provide active experiences of workplaces.	understanding is growing that employer engagement and experiential learning are critical to the delivery of effective career services. This is a core focus of DYW partnerships and potentially of a range of other components of the system. However, this activity remains emergent and there may be value in exploring how employer engagement and experiential careers education can be started earlier, be more deeply embedded, its volume increased, and its integration with other career services improved.
are delivered by trained professionals.	there is a highly professionalised career workforce but this is concentrated within SDS and HE rather than spread across the whole system. The careers profession and careers professionalism are also narrowly defined in ways that do not recognise the need to professionalise the full range of roles involved in the provision of career services.
are quality assured and evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and support continuous improvement.	quality assurance is patchy and often embedded within wider processes rather than specific to career services.