



# International Best Practice in Career Services

## Career Review Whitepaper

October 2021



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# Introduction

The report “Exploring Scotland’s Career Ecosystem” included an international review which looked at six parallel systems from overseas and examined how they organise their career services. These were:

- Austria
- Canada (Newfoundland)
- Estonia
- Finland
- New Zealand
- Singapore.

These countries were chosen for their ability to offer a range of different experiences that Scotland can learn from and because each has a well-developed careers system. Although it is very difficult for policies to be uprooted and replanted in a different context, there is still a lot that can be learned.

## Key components of effective delivery

Career development is necessarily a transversal activity that operates across and between multiple policy and practice domains. Career services are about helping individuals to manage their careers across the life course, including managing transitions. Because careers inevitably move people between different social and policy systems (e.g. education and employment) careers services are strongly engaged with helping people to manage these complex and often fragmentary systems.

Our international review suggests that where countries do this effectively, they:

- fund career services;
- embed them into multiple systems (notably into the education system, employment system and wider social welfare systems); and
- provide additional interventions to plug gaps where they emerge.

They also recognise and actively manage this complexity by putting co-ordination and co-operation structures in place, building underpinning infrastructure and strengthening the profession that makes the whole system work.



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In many ways, Scotland exemplifies many of these system features. Career services in Scotland are pre-dominantly publicly funded and connected to a range of different policy aims. While delivery is fragmented in some ways, the existence of Skills Development Scotland provides a strong central coherence to the system and offers the opportunity for more co-ordination. Scotland has invested in strong labour and learning market data, online careers provision through My World of Work and the development of other resources. Scotland also has a strongly professionalised component to its career's workforce, although there are questions as to whether professionalisation could be further broadened.

In summary, there is good reason to believe that the career development system in Scotland is as good as what exists in any of the countries we reviewed. Nonetheless, there are also a range of findings from the case studies which may help inform future developments in Scotland.



# Potential areas for future development

## Increasing access to career services

Finland defines access to career support services as a core entitlement for citizens. The articulation of this entitlement creates a climate in which politicians seek to ensure access for all and to address uneven access to provision. Such an entitlement draws together diverse services conceptually in the minds of citizens and encourages policy makers to focus on what services are available rather than on what is funded. If Scotland were to develop and publicise a clearer entitlement for citizens to access career services, it may also have a positive longer-term influence on the provision and coherence of career services as it would increase understanding and discussion about what career services are for and what young people are looking for from them.

Linked to this, but more discrete in nature are Estonia and Finland's decisions to formalise and strengthen the position of career education within the school curriculum. This typically involves starting career education early, including it in the national curriculum and ensuring that schools devote substantial amounts of time to it as a subject in its own right.

## Designing and managing integrated policy

Career policy is likely to involve multiple ministries, government agencies and funding sources. Some countries have focused on

creating strong strategic policy co-ordination and alignment. The development of a career strategy designed to identify the different strands and pull them together is one element of this. The identification of a co-ordinating agency (as in Singapore or New Zealand) or the development of a cross-ministerial co-ordination structure (as in Estonia's Education and Youth Board and its National Forum for Career Guidance) provides an important additional element designed to ensure that strategies are implemented and evaluated.

## Building links with social partners

The Austrian case study reminds us of the importance of building broader forms of co-ordination beyond the career development system. The involvement of employers and trade unions, education providers and other relevant bodies in both the governance of and the delivery of career development services is critical. This raises the question as to whether there is a need for career policy makers and practitioners in Scotland to build a more fundamental form of engagement with employers, workers organisations and other key stakeholders as part of rethinking the career ecosystem in Scotland. SDS and many of the other providers are already working closely with employers but this rarely builds employers and other social partners into the governance of the career system as is the case in some other countries.



## Creating institutions for co-operation and co-ordination

Each country manages the co-operation and co-ordination of operational practice differently. But a common feature is the creation of representative stakeholder bodies like Newfoundland and Labrador's Community Employment Collaboration, the Estonian National Forum for Career Guidance or the Finnish National Lifelong Guidance Working Group. Finland has also created regional co-ordinating structures for career services which have some similarities with Scotland's Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs). This raises the question as to whether Scotland needs to both develop national co-ordination structure and develop the existing local structures to improve the functioning of the ecosystem.

## Professionalisation

Historically career development has been a weakly professionalised area. However, there is wide recognition in all case study countries that increasing the professionalisation of the career's workforce is linked to an improvement in quality and an increase in cross-sectoral co-operation. There are a range of initiatives outlined in the different case studies including investing in training, developing quality standards, standardising job titles and building a community of practice.

Scotland already has many of these elements in place and has also been investing in the creation of an apprenticeship pathway for the profession, but professionalism is confined to relatively small segments of the system. There may also be value in

considering issues of professionalism more broadly, as many of the other countries do, and considering how to professionalise the wider roles (e.g. teacher, youth worker) who are involved in the provision of career services. One useful approach would be to adopt the kind of broadly framed community of practice approach that has been developed in Newfoundland and Labrador. This has sought to form the disparate workforce into a single profession through a range of developmental interventions including training, mentoring and information sharing.

## One-stop shops

Finland has developed one-stop guidance centres to support the joining up of local practice and services. In many ways the plan by DWP to create Youth Hubs speaks to a similar ambition to create a coherent experience for young people. However, these are still emerging as an idea in the UK, and it would be valuable to look to Finland where it has been successfully piloted.



# Learnings from international practice

The table below summarises the findings from the international review and draws out both where practice in Scotland aligns with what we have seen in the international case studies and where there are ideas that merit further consideration as the Scottish system moves forward.

Scotland aligns with international practice	Scotland could learn from international practice
Like Scotland, all high functioning career systems are based around publicly funded career services.	Some systems have established more effective permanent structures for managing public funding across multiple government departments.
While none of the international case studies have a fully realised lifelong guidance system, this remains the objective that most, including Scotland, are aiming towards.	Some countries have moved further towards guaranteeing universal access to a broader career service offer than is currently the case in Scotland.
All countries employ a similar set of approaches to delivering career services to Scotland. While there are examples of good practice and innovative ways to combine services, the basic pallet of services is common to all systems.	Some countries have built a more effective set of structures to foster co-operation and collaboration at an operational level. These include both local and national structures.
In many of these countries a key element of the delivery of career services is the engagement of employers in working closely with the education system to inform young people's aspiration and understanding of the labour market.	Some countries have built deeper levels of engagement with employers, engaging them at a strategic level as well as at the level of delivery.
Most countries have made similar investments in the underpinning infrastructure needed for effective career services. These include the provision of digital services, high quality labour market information and a publicly available website.	In addition to the underpinning infrastructure of digital and information services some countries have been able to build stronger public facing infrastructure (such as Finland's one-stop shops) that help to increase the integration and coherence of career services.
Professionalism is important to all countries, with many seeking to achieve the level of professionalisation that exists in SDS and Scotland's HE careers services.	Some countries are engaged in a project to further increase the level of professionalism in their system and to professionalise a greater proportion of their career service workforce. This has often included revising and updating training and increasing the level of understanding of the career professional's role.

