

Skills Development Scotland

Delivering Scotland's Career Service

Annual Report 2025/26

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Foreword

Scotland is a country of talent, ambition and potential. Every day, people make decisions about learning, work and their future. Some are taking their first steps on their career journey, others are developing new skills, looking for work, or adapting to change.

Skills Development Scotland delivers Scotland's career service - helping people navigate these decisions with confidence. Through trusted career information, advice, learning and guidance, we support the people of Scotland to recognise their strengths, explore their options, and take practical steps towards their goals at every stage of their lives.

This support matters for individuals, families and communities. It also matters for Scotland's economy. By helping people develop skills, access opportunities, and move into positive learning and work opportunities, career support and guidance help ensure talent is recognised, developed, and utilised across the country.

I truly believe that Scotland's career service is a strategic asset for the country, playing an essential role in connecting people with opportunity. Drawing on skills, planning, labour market evidence and insight from employers, it helps people make informed choices while supporting employers to access the skills and talent they need. In doing so, it contributes to a more productive, inclusive and prosperous Scotland.

This report explains what Scotland's career service offers, what was delivered during 2025/26, and how the service continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of people, employers and the economy.



Dave McCallum,
Head of CIAG Operations



Executive summary

Customer reach

Overall reach

Supported over
311,150
individuals, including

253,731
school pupils

20,489
young people post-school

13,502
adults

21,485
parents and carers

and
1,949
customers supported through PACE redundancy support

Key outcomes

Supporting informed choices



School:
88%
of senior phase pupils agreed their conversations helped them understand how their experience and learning can inform career choices



Next Steps:
96%
of young people aged 16 to 19 agreed their career conversations helped them understand how their experience and learning can inform career choices

Next Steps positive outcomes

Next Steps



Supported

9,695

unemployed young people of whom 68% progressed to learning, training or work and three quarters of these sustained a positive outcome for six months

PACE impact



Through Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE), 8,300 individuals received PACE information packs, with 1,949 PACE customers benefiting from personalised careers support and group interactions. 241 employers were also supported

Customer experience

Overall satisfaction with the career service

8.9/10	8.5/10	9.2/10	6.6/10
Senior phase pupils	Head teachers	Next steps and adult customers	Parents and carers

Next Steps key outcomes by equality characteristic

While we tailor our services to the needs of each individual, we also recognise that evidence shows some groups may need additional support to move into learning or employment. To ensure our services are inclusive and improving outcomes for all, we monitor engagement and experience of our services by equality characteristics. Find out more here.

	Overall	Female	Male	Disability	Minority ethnic group*	Care Experienced
% of Next Steps customers progressing to a positive outcome	68%	68%	68%	70%	71%	61%
% of Next Steps customers sustaining a positive outcome for six months	75%	76%	74%	76%	74%	68%

Why careers support matters to individuals, employers and Scotland's economy

The world of work is changing quickly. Technology and AI, the transition to net zero, demographic change and evolving employer needs are reshaping jobs and the skills people need. At the same time, Scotland is facing skills and labour shortages, economic inactivity and wider economic pressures, while major investment is creating new opportunities across areas such as energy, infrastructure and emerging industries.

These changes are creating new jobs and opportunities, but they are also changing existing roles and making career choices more complex. People increasingly need to understand where opportunities are, the skills employers are looking for, and how their own skills can transfer as the labour market changes.

People make career decisions throughout their lives. A pupil may be choosing subjects at school, a young person may be leaving school or looking for their next step, an adult may be seeking work, changing career, returning after time away, or facing redundancy.

A career is more than a job. It is shaped by our **learning, work, interests, responsibilities, experiences, and ambitions.** Career journeys are rarely straightforward, and the support people need can change at different points in their lives.

Trusted careers support helps people understand their strengths, explore opportunities, make informed choices, and take practical steps towards their goals. This support is particularly important because not everyone has the same access to information, networks, or opportunities. Poverty, personal circumstances, and previous experiences can influence the options people see for themselves and the choices they make.

Good careers support improves outcomes for individuals – helping people participate in learning and work, build skills, increase earning potential and make progress throughout their lives. By supporting access to opportunities and helping people move towards sustainable employment, careers support also contributes to tackling poverty, reducing inequality, and improving social mobility.

Careers support also plays an increasingly important role in Scotland's wider workforce system. It brings together labour market intelligence, skills planning, employer engagement, workforce development, career services, and digital capability. By connecting employers, education providers, partners, and individuals, careers support helps people understand where opportunities exist, while helping employers access the skills and talent they need.

As Scotland faces workforce shortages, rising economic inactivity, and significant investment opportunities, the career service is evolving from a service focused primarily on individual interventions to a strategic national asset. Through its national reach, local delivery, partnerships and digital services, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) helps connect workforce demand with workforce supply – supporting participation, progression, and economic growth while helping people build brighter futures.
The following section explains the three foundations that make this possible: **equality of opportunity, partnership working, and professional practice.**

How we deliver Scotland's career service

Scotland's career service is delivered through three interconnected foundations: **equality of opportunity, partnership working, and professional practice.** Together, these foundations ensure that support is informed by evidence, shaped by local and national partnerships, and delivered by skilled professionals who help people make informed decisions about learning and work.

These foundations are not separate elements of the service – they work together as part of a connected approach that combines intelligence, relationships, and expertise to help people access opportunities and progress towards their goals and contribute to Scotland's workforce and economy.

Equality of opportunity: The 16+ Participation Portal and shared insight for better outcomes

At the heart of Scotland's career service is a commitment to ensuring that everyone can access the support, information, and opportunities they need to achieve their potential.

We recognise that individuals start from different places and face different circumstances. Through a combination of universal services and focused support, we work to ensure careers support is accessible to all.

A key enabler of this approach is the Participation Portal. The Portal brings together intelligence from schools, local authorities, colleges, training providers and other partners across Scotland to create a shared understanding of participation and progression.

This shared intelligence allows SDS and our partners to identify where additional support may be required, intervene earlier, and coordinate resources more effectively. By providing a common evidence base, the Participation Portal helps organisations work together to support young people into positive destinations and ensure that opportunities reach those who may face additional barriers.

More than a tool, the Participation Portal has become a vital part of Scotland's workforce infrastructure. It connects data, insight, and action – helping partners focus collective effort where it can have the greatest impact and supporting a more equitable approach to opportunity and progression.

Partnership working: turning insight into action

Intelligence alone does not improve outcomes. It is through effective partnership working that insight is translated into co-ordinated support for individuals and communities.

Career development outcomes are influenced by many factors beyond SDS. That is why we work with partners across education, skills, employability, and economic development to ensure people can access joined-up support throughout their career journey.

At a national level, SDS works closely with the Scottish Government and organisations including Education Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions, Association of Directors of Education Scotland, and Developing the Young Workforce to align services with Scotland's education, skills and economic priorities.

At a regional and local level, our partnerships with local authorities, colleges, universities, employability services, employers, community organisations, and schools ensure services are responsive to local needs and labour market opportunities. Through agreements with every state secondary school in Scotland, work across college campuses, and partnerships with organisations such as MCR Pathways and other third sector organisations, SDS connects people to ensure timely support through trusted local networks.

By combining insight, expertise, and resources across organisations, Scotland's career service helps create clearer pathways into learning and work, supports individuals to realise their potential, and helps employers access the skills and talent they need.

Using shared intelligence to improve outcomes for young people in Angus

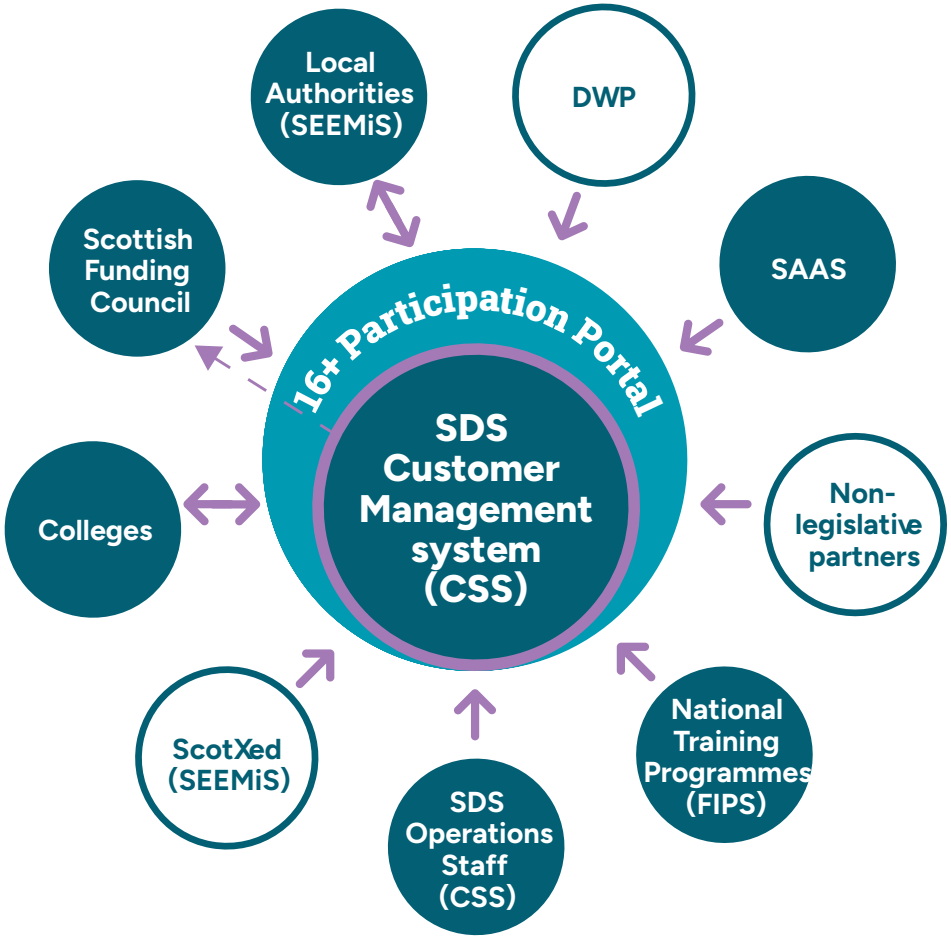
In Angus, SDS works with schools, Angus Council, and employability partners through the Angus Participation and Positive Destinations Framework. By bringing together intelligence from schools, local partners, and the SDS Participation Portal, partners can identify young people who may require additional support, coordinate action, and intervene earlier during key transitions.

This joined-up approach has strengthened participation and positive destinations, improved outcomes for young people, and reduced the poverty-related participation gap.

The Participation Portal plays a critical role in enabling partners to share intelligence, understand need, and ensure that support reaches young people who need it most.

Participation Portal in action: West Dunbartonshire

Insight from the Participation Portal helped SDS, Developing the Young Workforce, education and employability partners to take coordinated action, improving transitions and supporting better outcomes for young people in West Dunbartonshire. Using the insight from the Participation Portal, a gap was identified in support for school leavers who were close to entering employment but needed additional experience and confidence. By creating a shared understanding of local challenges and opportunities, partners worked together to develop a new 12-week employability programme, combining career guidance, labour market intelligence, and practical support.



Community partnerships supporting young people and families

In Dundee, SDS works alongside Dundee City Council, Dundee & Angus College, the King's Trust, and community learning partners to deliver a monthly employability drop-in service for young people and their families.

Partners work together to identify young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengagement from education, training, or work, using a co-ordinated approach that includes outreach, family engagement, and introductions to multiple sources of support in a single setting. By combining expertise and local knowledge, partners help young people access learning, employment, wellbeing, and community support through trusted relationships and a joined-up experience.

This collaborative model demonstrates how partnership working can remove barriers to engagement and ensure support is available where and when it is needed.



Partnership insight in action: supporting students to stay on track

Between January and June 2026, SDS and New College Lanarkshire's Student Retention Team worked together to identify students at risk of withdrawing from their course. Drawing on enrolment, attendance, and retention information, the partnership developed an early intervention approach.

54 students were identified for potential support and monitored through a shared process. College staff provided ongoing retention support, while SDS careers advisers offered careers guidance, progression planning, and CV and application support where required. Students were connected quickly to the most appropriate support before issues escalated – ensuring that career and learning decisions could be explored alongside wider personal and educational challenges.

The partnership demonstrates how shared insight can be turned into practical action. By combining data, professional expertise and coordinated support, SDS and New College Lanarkshire strengthened early identification of learners who may require additional support, helping more students remain engaged in learning and make informed decisions about their next steps.



Professional practice

Careers advisers play a vital role in helping people of all ages make informed decisions about learning, training, and work. Drawing on their knowledge of the labour market, education and training pathways, apprenticeships, further and higher education, and employment opportunities, they provide personalised career guidance tailored to individual circumstances and aspirations.

Using professional coaching, communication, and guidance techniques, careers advisers help people identify their strengths, explore opportunities, consider options and make confident decisions about their future. They also work closely with schools, employers, and partner organisations to ensure people receive co-ordinated support that reflects both their individual needs and local opportunities. This work is underpinned by a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity, and evidence-based practice.

Our research shows the difference this personalised support can make. Customers consistently describe the value of having access to a trusted professional who can help them understand their options, navigate change and uncertainty, build confidence, and plan their next steps. Career journeys are rarely linear, and professional career guidance helps people develop the career management skills needed to adapt and progress throughout their lives.

The customer voice examples show how personalised career guidance supports confidence, decision making, and progression.

Customer voices: the difference personalised career guidance makes

(Names have been changed to protect participants' privacy.)

Customer voice	What career guidance enabled
	Careers adviser facilitated work experience **"Without that support, I'd probably still be unsure about what I wanted to do."**

Customer voice	What career guidance enabled
	Careers adviser helped improve confidence **"She helped me get into college and build my confidence. I'm much happier now."**

Customer voice	What career guidance enabled
	Careers adviser helped decision making **"They helped me understand what I actually wanted to do and where my passion lies."**

Where we deliver Scotland's career service

Scotland's career service is delivered by SDS through a blended national model that connects people with support in the places, settings, and channels that work best for them. Combining professional career guidance, digital services, and partnership delivery enables SDS to provide a consistent national service whilst responding to the needs of individuals and communities across Scotland.

SDS's career information, advice and guidance services are available nationally through schools, communities, partner venues, telephone, and digital channels. This enables SDS to maintain national coverage while adapting this access around different people, places and circumstances.

Schools

Universal access for pupils in every secondary school in Scotland, planned with schools around local context and pupil need.

Communities

Face-to-face support delivered in the community across 246* local community venues, helping people access support close to where they live. Along with joined-up delivery with colleges, DWP, employability partnerships and specialist services across Scotland.*

National customer engagement team and helpline

Career information, advice and guidance provided through telephone, email and webchat, offering immediate access to support across Scotland.

My World of Work and digital services

Scotland's career website, My World of Work, provides information, labour market insight, self-service tools, and digital resources that complement professional careers support.

* this is not a static list, where we deliver services changes to meet local need.

Skye's story

Skye's journey demonstrates how support can evolve around the individual. Following a referral from partner organisation Fife Voluntary Action, Skye was supported by an SDS careers adviser at a community venue where she felt comfortable, rather than being expected to attend an unfamiliar setting. Through regular coaching, confidence-building support, and ongoing guidance, Skye gradually became ready to engage with college-based learning.

As her confidence grew, support transitioned into the college environment, helping her progress into further learning, volunteering opportunities, and recognised qualifications.

The combination of community-based delivery, personalised guidance, and strong partnership working enabled support to be provided at the right pace and in the right place, helping Skye move towards a positive future.

Read Skye's story in more detail here



Careers support helps Alex build a bright future in forestry

When Alex Upton left school, he was unsure about his future and struggled to identify a career path that suited him. Support from SDS careers advisers helped him explore his options, build confidence and develop key employability skills.

After studying at Ayrshire College and later seeking work, Alex was referred to SDS by Jobcentre Plus. Through personalised coaching, CV support and a development programme with Beith Trust, he gained a clearer understanding of his strengths and career opportunities.

In February 2025, Alex secured a two-week work placement with Genesis Forestry. His commitment and strong work ethic impressed the team, leading to a permanent role as an Apprentice Forestry Technician just a month later.

Now thriving in a job he loves, Alex has gained additional qualifications, taken on new responsibilities and been nominated for a North Ayrshire Council Employability Award.

His success highlights how careers support can help people build confidence, discover their potential and secure rewarding careers.



Read Alex's story in more detail here

Our delivery in schools

Every secondary school pupil in Scotland has the right to access high-quality careers support.

During 2025/26, delivery continued to combine one-to-one guidance, facilitated group interactions, transition support, and partnership planning with schools.

Pupils can also access further information and advice through our digital channels My World of Work and apprenticeships.scot

Broad General Education (BGE)



We delivered career information, advice and guidance to

148,485 86%

school pupils in S1 to S3

52,305 of pupils transitioning from P7 to S1 received a group interaction (93%)

49,631 of S2 pupils received individual or group support (86%)

46,549 of S3 pupils received individual or group support (79%)

Senior phase S4 to S6



We delivered career information, advice and guidance to

105,246 79%

school pupils in S4 to S6

46,894 of S4 pupils received individual or group support (81%)

31,718 of S5 pupils received individual or group support (72%)

26,634 of S6 pupils received individual or group support (84%)

91% of S4 to S6 pupils who received career guidance were supported to identify and develop their career management skills

Senior phase pupils who received one-to-one careers support, who rated the extent to which their careers conversations helped them understand how their experience and learning can inform career choices gave an average result of 8.5/10

Senior phase S4 to S6 customer feedback



Overall satisfaction of one-to-one careers support **8.9/10**

Effectiveness of one-to-one careers support **8.4/10**

Likelihood to recommend one-to-one careers support **8.5/10**

Key outcomes by equality characteristics

While we tailor our services to the needs of each individual, we also recognise that evidence shows some groups may need additional support to move into learning or employment.

To ensure our services are inclusive and improving outcomes for all, we monitor engagement and experience of our services by equality characteristics. Find out more here.

	Overall	Female	Male	Disability	Minority ethnic group*	Care Experienced
% of senior phase pupils (S4 to S6) who received group or individual career support	79%	78%	79%	77%	80%	78%
% of senior phase pupils (S4 to S6) who were supported to identify and develop their career management skills	91%	91%	91%	91%	90%	90%

*includes customers who identify as mixed or multiple, Asian, African, Caribbean or black, and other ethnic group

Quotes from Pupil Voice survey 2025:

"Helped me get an interview and job I wanted."

— Care Experienced young person

"It made me feel more confident with my decision."

– young person

"Helped me with seeing what courses I could do and what would be better for me."

– young person

"I was so stressed about my future ambition because I don't have the right grades but with the help of my careers adviser we were able to work out other ways to achieve my goals."

- young person from a minority ethnic group

SDS's education team supports teachers, other practitioners, parents and carers, and a wide range of partners across Scotland to play their complementary roles in delivering young people's entitlement to a meaningful career education. This equips them with the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed to make informed choices and take control of their future learning and careers.



The use of the meta-skills toolkit has continued to grow in Scotland with **93,034** downloads in 2025/26



The overall satisfaction rate with the professional learning delivered was **8.2/10**



In 2025/26 we delivered **116** workshops face-to-face and online to **5,087** people

Head teachers said

Overall satisfaction with SDS support in school

8.5/10

"We receive fantastic support from our SDS careers advisers and cannot praise the service highly enough."

"We have an excellent working partnership with our SDS colleagues. They work flexibly to support our young people and work to the ever-changing context of the school."

"SDS are a highly impactful partner and an essential part of both our school's strong culture of supporting young people into positive and sustained post-school destinations and also equipping them with the skills and knowledge to be successful in whatever comes next in life."

SDS Results Helpline 2025

In August 2025, SDS delivered its Results Helpline over four days, with expert advisers across Scotland supporting 954 calls from learners and their parents or carers. Advice covered college and university vacancies, UCAS Confirmation and Clearing, staying on at school, apprenticeships, jobs, training and other post-school options. Careers support was also provided through our advisers in schools and local communities. Find out more about the help one young person received when they called the Results Helpline.





Scottish Careers Week 2025

Scottish Careers Week 2025 showcased the breadth of career opportunities across Scotland and the support available to help people of all ages realise their potential. More than 320 events took place in schools, colleges, communities and businesses, supported by SDS colleagues, partners, employers and learning providers. Activity ranged from parent and carer sessions in Shetland to STEM workshops in Stranraer, demonstrating strong national reach.

The week also highlighted SDS's collective impact through customer stories, employer engagement, social media content and a Scottish Parliamentary Reception, reinforcing the value of Scotland's career service during a period of organisational, economic and societal change.

Understanding Young People's Career Ambitions

SDS's research with young people explores career choices and preferred pathways, influence on career choices and pathways, and experience of career information, advice and guidance support.

In 2025/26 we carried out our Pupil Voice: Senior Phase research with 8,956 S4 to S6 pupils and our Young People's Career Ambitions research with 2,859 school leavers.

You can find out more about our career research programme here.



Next Steps: supporting successful transitions

SDS's Next Steps offer provides tailored support for young people up to their 20th birthday who need help to move into learning, training or work, or to sustain a positive destination. Support is shaped around individual circumstances and can range from careers support at key transition points, through to ongoing coaching support for those facing more complex barriers.

This approach recognises that young people are at different stages in their journey. While some are ready to apply for jobs, training opportunities or further learning, others may need support to build confidence, develop plans, navigate transitions, access local opportunities, or connect with specialist services and wider support networks.

By helping young people understand and access the opportunities available to them, Next Steps plays an important role in reducing the impact that barriers such as poverty, disadvantage, and unequal access to networks and information can have on career progression. Those who need additional help receive flexible, personalised support designed to help them progress towards and sustain positive outcomes. This ensures support is proportionate to need, while maintaining a universal offer available to all.

In 2025/26, the Next Steps service supported:

Young people aged 16 to 19

SDS supported

20,489

young people post-school in 2025/26

48,765

career conversations and group sessions

this included supporting

9,695

unemployed young people

68%

who progressed to learning, training or work, three quarters of these sustained a positive outcome for six months or longer

96%

agreed their career conversations helped them understand how their experiences and learning can inform career choices

Next Steps customers who received one-to-one careers support rated the extent to which their career conversations helped them understand how their experiences and learning can inform career choices gave an average result of



Next Steps key outcomes by equality characteristic

While we tailor our services to the needs of each individual, we also recognise that evidence shows some groups may need additional support to move into learning or employment. To ensure our services are inclusive and improving outcomes for all, we monitor engagement and experience of our services by equality characteristics. Find out more here.

	Overall	Female	Male	Disability	Minority ethnic group*	Care Experienced
% of Next Steps customers progressing to a positive outcome	68%	68%	68%	70%	71%	61%
% of Next Steps customers sustaining a positive outcome for six months	75%	76%	74%	76%	74%	68%

*includes customers who identify as mixed or multiple, Asian, African, Caribbean or black, and other ethnic group





Delivering careers support for adults

Career development is not a one-off decision made at school. Throughout life, people may need support to respond to changing circumstances, labour market opportunities, and personal aspirations. Scotland's career service provides accessible support at every stage, helping people develop the skills, confidence and knowledge to progress and thrive.

Support is tailored to individual circumstances and can include:

- information, advice and guidance on career choices
- advice on the routes into careers including jobs, apprenticeships, training, and learning
- help with CVs, application forms, and interviews
- insight into the local labour market
- redundancy support through the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE).

The adult service offer recognises that people experience different opportunities and challenges throughout their working lives. By helping adults understand the choices available to them, develop their skills, and access learning and employment opportunities, careers support contributes to social mobility, economic participation, and financial wellbeing.

In 2025/26, SDS supported:

13,502
adults (20+)

26,052
one-to-one careers support and group interactions

Our customers are positive about the support they receive. Our Next Steps and adult customers gave high ratings for our services

9.2/10
Overall satisfaction of one-to-one support

9.1/10
Overall effectiveness of one-to-one support

9.3/10
Likelihood to recommend one-to-one support

Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE)

8,300
individuals received PACE information packs

1,949
PACE customers supported through personalised careers support and group interactions

3,241
PACE engagements delivered to customers

241 employers
received PACE support

Transition Training Fund

The Transition Training Fund, delivered by SDS on behalf of the Scottish and UK governments, helps people with experience in the oil and gas industry access new opportunities in Scotland's growing sectors. Building on a successful pilot in 2025 that supported more than 400 individuals, the Fund combines training funding with professional career guidance to help individuals build on their existing skills and move into sectors such as clean energy, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and defence.

Backed by £6 million of government funding in 2026, the latest phase of the programme is helping workers navigate career change, develop new skills and access emerging opportunities across Scotland. More information about the Fund, including eligibility criteria and how to apply, is available on the Transition Training Fund webpage.

Training Fund gives Pearl wind in her sails with new career

After 15 years working offshore in the oil and gas industry, Pearl Stephen from Fraserburgh has successfully transitioned into the renewables sector thanks to support from the Oil and Gas Transition Training Fund.

When redundancy left her searching for new opportunities, Pearl recognised the growing demand in offshore wind but lacked the mandatory Global Wind Organisation (GWO) qualification needed to apply for roles. Encouraged by a colleague, she applied to the fund, which helps current and former oil and gas workers in Scotland access industry-recognised training for emerging sectors.

With funding approved, Pearl completed her GWO training and soon secured a role as a site co-ordinator on an offshore windfarm vessel. She says the fund helped remove a significant financial barrier and encourages others considering a move into renewables to explore the support available.

Read Pearl's story in more detail here



Parents and carers

Parents and carers are influential in helping young people explore options, make informed decisions and move forward with confidence. SDS supports them with trusted information, advice, and resources on education, training, and employment routes.

As such, we seek regular feedback from this important group through our research on how they talk to their young people about careers and their awareness and use of our services.

Read the findings from our parents and carers research on our CIAG Research webpage.

In 2025/26, SDS supported 21,485 parents and carers through more than 32,500 engagements, including:



joining their young person's career appointments



working with careers advisers to help their young person access post-school opportunities



attending parent and carer evenings and other school events



joining webinars on career topics



taking part in community events

SDS engagement is underpinned by our digital offer, providing parent and carer-focused content on **My World of Work**.

Parents and carers' satisfaction with the level of service they receive from SDS:

7.7/10	careers appointments
7.2/10	My World of Work
7.5/10	apprenticeships.scot
7.4/10	parent and carer webinars
8.5/10	Results Helpline
6.6/10	overall satisfaction with SDS services
6.6/10	likelihood to recommend SDS services
6.4/10	overall effectiveness of SDS services

We recognise that satisfaction is not consistently at the level we aspire to, particularly for parents and carers, and have identified this as a key area for continuous improvement to strengthen their experience of our services.

Evolving to meet changing needs

Scotland's labour market continues to evolve. New industries and technologies are emerging, career journeys are becoming less linear, and people are experiencing more frequent transitions between learning, work, and training throughout their lives.

At the same time, the routes into opportunity have become more complex. Young people and adults increasingly need support to understand changing labour market demands, navigate growing career choices, and connect with the learning, training, and employment opportunities available to them.

To respond, SDS is continuing to evolve Scotland's career service into a more flexible, connected, and outcomes-focused service. This evolution builds on the strengths of professional career guidance while creating greater scope to respond to local economic priorities, workforce needs, and individual circumstances.

Our direction of travel is clear: to ensure Scotland's career service remains accessible, relevant, and effective for all individuals, regardless of their age or stage, while making an increasingly important contribution to Scotland's economy and workforce.

Designing services around people and impact

As our services evolve, we are looking beyond the volume of activity delivered, to understand the difference careers support makes. Customer feedback, lived experience, participation data, research, labour market intelligence, partner knowledge, and local delivery evidence help us understand how people experience the service, what works, and where improvement is needed.

This means designing support around different needs and routes into the service, and focusing on whether people can:

- access support when they need it
- make informed decisions about learning and work
- overcome barriers to participation
- develop the skills and confidence to progress
- achieve positive outcomes and successful transitions.

Using this evidence creates a continuous cycle of listening, co-design, learning and improvement. It helps us recognise barriers, adapt communication and delivery, strengthen successful approaches, and maintain local relevance.

The focus is not simply on what we deliver, but on ensuring support is accessible, relevant and effective, and that it improves outcomes for individuals, communities, and employers across Scotland.

Service evolution in action: the i-Sgoil partnership

The development of the i-Sgoil partnership demonstrates what this evolution looks like in practice.

Working alongside learners, parents, carers, and education partners, SDS has co-designed a new national career education programme for young people whose learning has been interrupted and who may not be able to access mainstream education.

The programme provides a structured, year-long career offer embedded within the school timetable, combining weekly digital career learning, career management skills development, personalised support, and dedicated resources for parents and carers. Currently there are 92 senior phase pupils participating in the pilot.

Designed around the needs of learners, it helps young people build confidence, understand their strengths, explore future opportunities, and make informed decisions about learning and work.

By taking career support directly to where young people are learning and using digital channels to overcome barriers to access, the pilot demonstrates how Scotland's career service is evolving and redesigning support around the realities of how people learn, engage, and access opportunity today.



Listening to customers through partnership

Understanding the needs of Scotland's diverse communities cannot be achieved by SDS alone.

We work closely with a wide range of partners who have deep knowledge of the communities they support. These partnerships help us better understand customer experiences, identify barriers to participation, and ensure services remain accessible, relevant, and inclusive.

One of the ways we do this is through our Focal Point Groups, which bring together more than 50 third-sector organisations representing people with lived experience across four key areas:

Focal Point Group	Focus
Care Experience	**Supporting the needs and experiences of Care Experienced people**
Disability	**Improving accessibility and inclusion for disabled people**
Race	**Understanding and addressing barriers experienced by minority ethnic communities**
Women and girls	**Promoting equality of opportunity and addressing gender-related barriers**

These partnerships provide valuable insight that helps shape both our customer services and our wider approach as an employer. By listening to organisations working directly with individuals and communities, we gain a richer understanding of customer needs and can use that insight to improve service design, communication, accessibility, and delivery.

Through ongoing consultation and collaboration, these partnerships help ensure different perspectives are reflected in the development of Scotland's career service.

The Career Services Collaborative: working together for better outcomes

No single organisation can address Scotland's workforce challenges alone.

Led by the Scottish Government, the Career Services Collaborative is the mechanism to drive the change, innovation, and improvement required to deliver better outcomes for the people of Scotland. We work closely with the Scottish Government and the Collaborative to ensure current and future services align to education and economic policy, including the Scottish Government's Career Strategy and Programme for Government priorities.

Careers as part of Scotland's workforce infrastructure

As Scotland looks ahead, career services are becoming increasingly important as part of the country's workforce infrastructure.

Scotland faces the dual challenge of workforce shortages at the same time as increasing economic inactivity, while major investment programmes are creating greater demand for co-ordinated workforce planning and support.

In this context, SDS is combining insight about future workforce demand with personalised support, helping people make informed decisions, while supporting employers and sectors to access the talent they need.

SDS's role is increasingly visible through national and regional initiatives such as Workforce North, which represents a new frontier for career services, where supporting individual career journeys and supporting regional workforce transformation are increasingly viewed as complementary objectives.

Workforce North: connecting people to future opportunity

Workforce North was established in 2025 in response to the scale of economic opportunity emerging across the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Workforce North is a regional partnership created to connect people, employers and partners with opportunities emerging from the major investment in renewables, construction and infrastructure over the next 10 years.

By providing clear routes into jobs, apprenticeships and training, Workforce North helps people build careers close to home and attract talent from outwith the region. For employers, it offers insight into workforce needs and access to talent.

For partners and policy makers, it supports a coordinated approach to turning investment into long-term economic growth.

Find out more on the Workforce North webpage. Or watch the short film – 'Workforce North: Real Jobs, Real Opportunity about the story of investment and opportunity shaping the Highlands and Islands – and what this means for people, employers and communities across the region.

From career guidance to partnership – an example of Workforce North activity



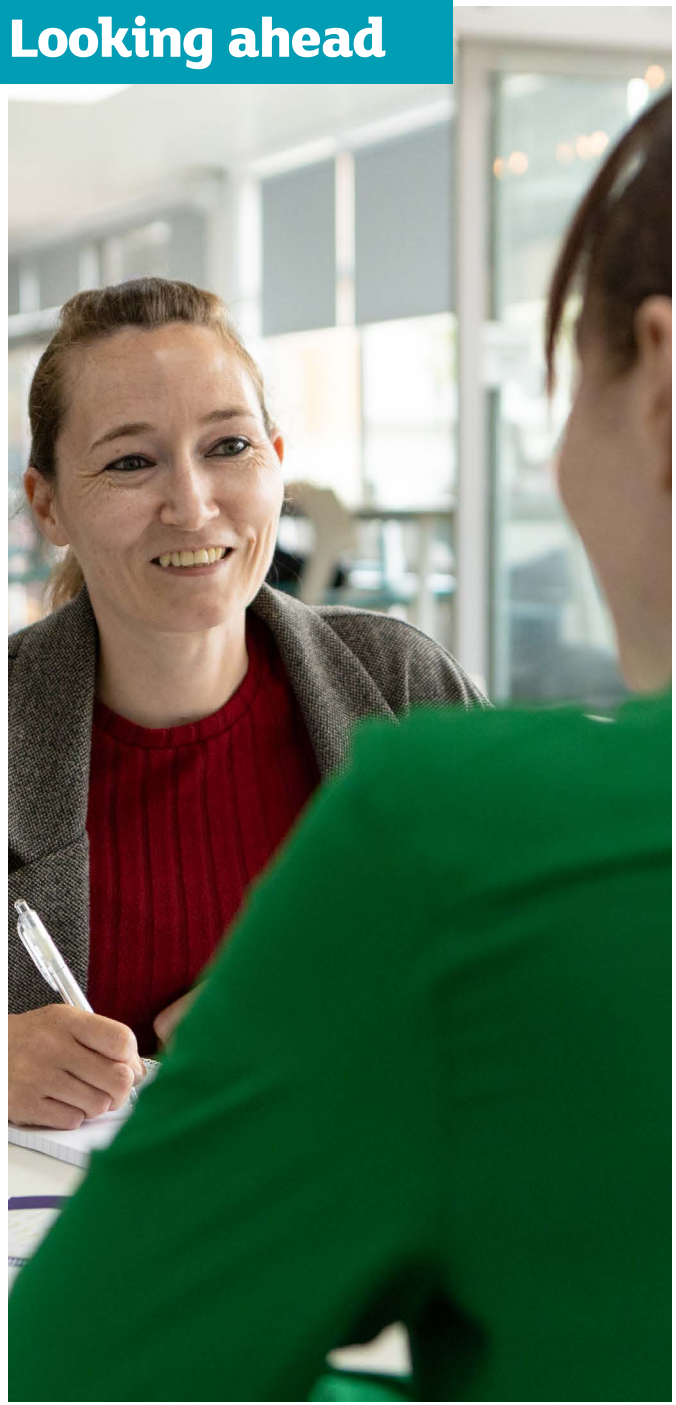
Delivered through a partnership involving SDS, Highland Council, Developing the Young Workforce, MCR Pathways, youth work services and local employers, the pilot aims to strengthen young people's transition from education into employment, apprenticeships and training.

Initially focused on schools across Ross-shire and Inverness, the pilot combines aspiration data, workforce readiness assessments, employer engagement and mentoring to identify young people who may benefit from additional support. Rather than responding after young people leave school, the approach intervenes earlier to help participants build confidence, develop employability skills, understand local opportunities and make informed decisions about their future.

A key feature of the pilot is its partnership approach. Careers advisers, schools, employers, youth workers and community organisations work together to create personalised pathways that combine career planning, employer encounters, mentoring and coordinated support. The ambition is to improve young people's outcomes while helping employers develop future talent pipelines. It demonstrates an evolving careers services approach which utilises workforce intelligence, regional workforce planning, economic development, talent pipeline development, partnership leadership and place-based delivery.

Over time, the pilot has the potential to reshape how partners support young people across the region, creating a more coordinated and preventative system that aligns individual aspirations with labour market demand. The learning will help inform future service design, investment decisions and workforce planning activity across the Highlands and Islands, positioning career services as a catalyst for both social mobility and regional prosperity.

Looking ahead



Looking ahead, Scotland's career service must continue to evolve so it remains relevant, responsive and focused on the needs of people, employers and the economy. As customer expectations change and the labour market becomes more complex, SDS's strength lies in bringing together four connected capabilities: data and intelligence, employer engagement, careers expertise, and digital and AI.

Through data and intelligence, we provide the labour market insight, workforce evidence and skills planning that support better decision making across Scotland. **During 2026/27, we are strengthening how data, research and customer insight are brought together to better understand transitions, identify emerging needs and inform both delivery and wider policy.** This includes a growing focus on understanding not simply the volume of activity, but the difference our services make for customers and communities.

Our work with employers helps businesses plan for workforce development, growth and future skills needs, while our national all-age career service supports people across schools, and communities to build confidence, make informed choices and progress. **We will continue to develop a simpler, more consistent national offer for employers and individuals by strengthening digital access and enhancing our support services. We are reimagining career services to be easier to access, more personalised and empowering, helping people make informed career decisions through meaningful work experiences, tailored support and expert advice, while enabling businesses to plan for workforce development, growth and future skills needs.**

Digital and AI will increasingly strengthen this system. **Our focus is moving beyond individual digital tools towards how technology and AI can support the wider customer journey, improve access, make better use of professional time and help us deliver more responsive and consistent services.** Current work is already exploring these opportunities alongside the safeguards, professional practice and colleague capability needed to use AI responsibly.

What matters most, however, is how these areas work together. Rather than operating as separate activities, they form one connected system that brings together professional expertise, customer insight, partnership working, labour market intelligence and digital innovation. **That connection will become increasingly important as SDS contributes to wider public-service reform and works with partners to make best use of Scotland's collective skills, employability and careers resources.**

In doing so, careers support can contribute not only to individual success, but also to Scotland's wider ambitions for workforce participation, inclusive economic growth and reducing poverty. Through our national reach, local partnerships and growing role in workforce planning, SDS will continue to connect people, skills and opportunity across Scotland.

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SDS is the national skills body, as we deliver Scotland's career service in schools, in community venues, through our freephone helpline, and online at My World of Work.

Find out more about our career services at:
myworldofwork.co.uk