Country Report

10th International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, Auckland, New Zealand, November 2026

Country name

Scotland

This country report has been prepared for discussion and information purposes in connection with the 10th International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy. It draws on an online questionnaire on the Symposium themes, which national teams were invited to complete in advance.

ICCDPP: Navigating new horizons - Country perspectives survey

Introduction

Q1. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

Yes

Q2. I confirm that I am providing a response on behalf of my country.

Yes

Q3. I confirm that I am happy for the responses to this survey to be shared publicly.

Yes

Q4. Is your country going to participate in the 2026 ICCDPP symposium in New Zealand?

Yes

Q5. Who have you consulted with before completing this survey?

Sarah Cartwright & Elspeth Hough, Scottish Government (Skills Division, Employability Division, Advanced Learning Analytical Services Unit)

James Russell* & Elma Murray (Co-Chairs of Scottish Career Service Collaborative)

Sandra Cheyne*
* Skills Development Scotland.

About you

Q6. What is your name?

Peter Robertson

Q7. What organisation do you work for?

Edinburgh Napier University

Q8. What is your job title?

Professor

Q9. What is your email address?

p.robertson@napier.ac.uk

Q10. Are you happy for your contact details to be published on the ICCDPP website/ relevant documents as part of the publication of this data?

Yes

About your country

Q11. What is the name of your country?

Scotland
(One of the four home nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

Q12. Which groups can access career development services in your country?

	Accessible and free to everyone	Accessible and free to some groups	Accessible to those who can pay	Not accessible
Indigenous people				
Young people in schools	X			
Young people in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)	X			
Young people in university or higher education	X			
Young people not in education or work (e.g. NEETs)	X			
Adults in education	X			
Adults in work	X			
Adults not in education or work (e.g. unemployed workers and the economic inactive)	X			
Migrants	X			
People in the criminal justice system	X			
Employers/businesses		X		

Q13. Are there any other groups in your country, not listed in Question 12 above, that can access career development services?

Parents (or carers) of school pupils are considered to be service users, and can access information resources designed specifically for them through online services, and receive in person advice.

Note services to adults in the workplace are free to all, but in practice accessible only to targeted groups, such as those receiving redundancy support through the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) service.

About your country

Q14. How far do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The career development policies, programmes and services in my country are meeting the career needs of the population.		X			
School leavers in my country are well prepared for successful transitions to work or further learning.		X			
There is a strong evidence base to support the provision of career development services in my country.		X			
AI is having a major impact on the education system in my country.		X			
AI is having a major impact on labour market in my country.		X (Note there is joint working between SDS and employers' bodies on this topic.)			
AI is having a major impact on the provision of career development services in my country.		X			

Q15. Are indigenous groups involved in the design of career development services in your country?

Not relevant

About your country

Q16. Please provide a short summary of your country's career development system. [Up to 300 words]

Ensuring the provision of good career support for individuals of all ages and improving the quality and range of existing provision is a priority for the current Scottish Government. The Government is working with members of the Scottish Careers Collaborative (see section 18) to drive improvement and ensure that learners in Scotland can access the information they need to make informed choices of pathway. The Scottish Careers Collaborative was established in 2023 following the Career Review. The Scottish Government has indicated that it intends to publish a Careers Ambition Framework in autumn 2026 for all to work to.

Scotland has a public all-age career service, delivered by a non-departmental public body, Skills Development Scotland (SDS). This provides a well-resourced free all-age career information, advice and guidance service. It encompasses a substantial digital resource / web-based service ("My World of Work") supporting universal access to information, and in-person appointments with qualified professional advisers. Currently, approximately three quarters of the resources of this service are focused on young people in the school system. Young adults (15-19) who are unemployed (or in colleges of further education) are also an important focus for the service. Within these age groups services are both universally available to everyone and involve targeted support for specific communities. Services to adults are primarily reactive with some targeted proactive work, for example with those at imminent risk of redundancy (the nationwide PACE service) and adults within the welfare system seeking employment, through Job Centres (as described below).

Q16. Please provide a short summary of your country's career development system. [Up to 300 words]

Colleges across Scotland also provide a careers service either directly themselves or through college level partnership agreements with SDS.

Career education and guidance provision in higher education institutions is broadly similar to the rest of the UK, with a strong focus on graduate employability. Each university has autonomous control of its provision. Generally speaking, the quality of service is good with variations depending on the size and resourcing of the institution.

Whilst most relevant policy and provision is devolved to the Scottish Government, the provision of the public employment service (PES) remains a UK wide arrangement. This takes the form of the Job Centre service delivered by the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). There are referral arrangements between SDS and DWP, and some delivery of career guidance by SDS staff on Job Centre premises or within shared community premises.

Employability support for those furthest from the labour market is partially devolved to the Scottish Government, and delivered through a partnership approach with local government. This sees local employability partnerships given responsibility for the design and delivery of services within a set of nationally set parameters. It represents a culture shift towards a more supportive approach to welfare-to-work compared to historic provision in the UK. Local authorities, third sector, SDS and DWP, amongst others, are key partners within the LEPs.

In addition, there are some career and employment support services which are provided by charities or local authorities through other funds. These are difficult to summarise. They will be agile in responding to diverse funding sources, and address specific needs arising from disability, or local geographies of social disadvantage.

Q17. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide insights into your country's career development policies and systems. [Up to 300 words]

Delivering Scotland's Career Service 2024-25 (SDS Annual Report)

The Career Review 2023: Report on career development provision for young people

Scottish Government. (2020). Scotland's career strategy: Moving forward.

Stewart, M. (Ed.) (2023). A history of career services in the UK from 1999. National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC). [Contains chapters on Scotland, addressing services to young people; services in higher education; services for adults].

Employability in Scotland

We expect a Careers Ambition Framework to be published by Scottish Government in autumn 2026.

Q18. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make about the way in which your country organises its career development services? [Up to 300 words]

As recognised within the Career Review (2023), broadly speaking the policy landscape within which career services operate is complex for a country the size of Scotland. A very wide range of public policy initiatives relating to education, training, employment, youth, and equalities have implications for (or place duties on) career services. This reflects a concern from policymakers to ensure that all agencies are working in a co-ordinated way towards delivery of government objectives. These include growing the economy, tackling child poverty, ensuring that young people transition successfully from education to work, addressing youth inactivity and ensuring that Scotland and its population are well positioned to meet the challenges of the future, as set out in the Withers Review. The Scottish Government has also set out

Q18. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make about the way in which your country organises its career development services? [Up to 300 words]

its commitment to reforming post-school education; improving career support also contributes directly to this ambition.

As a result of recommendations made by the independent Career Review, Scotland has created a forum for cross-sectoral co-ordination of career development policy and provision: The Scottish Career Service Collaborative. It recognises the career development ecosystem and all partners and contributors in the delivery of careers support. This is not a discrete organisation; it is a voluntary grouping with a formal remit which reports to the Scottish Government. It provides both a space for sharing best practice and a mechanism to enable key partners with an interest in improving the system to come together to collaborate more closely to drive improvement. This approach is consistent with the recommendations of the ICCDPP 2019 symposium communique. The Collaborative is ambitious to improve and harmonise provision across the career development eco-system.

Productivity and the inclusive economy

Q19. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services contribute to economic growth.		X			
Career development services contribute to workforce productivity.		X			
Career development services deliver a positive return on investment on public spending.		X			
Career development services support entrepreneurialism.		X			
Career development services help to address employers' skills and labour needs.		X			
Career development services can be accessed by small and medium sized businesses (SMEs).				X	
Career development services improve levels of job satisfaction.		X			
Career development services contribute to decent work (jobs with access to training, a living wage and other benefits).	X				
Career development services support equality of access to learning and work opportunities.		X			
Career development services contribute to the green transition.	X (There are a number of new initiatives on this topic)				

Productivity and the inclusive economy

Q20. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support productivity. [Up to 300 words]

This is most obvious in the goals of Skills Development Scotland, described as Scotland's national skills agency. It is responsible for supporting economic growth through promoting skills in the labour force. Support for employers, funding for apprenticeships and the national career service all support this effort.

A number of government initiatives have focused on addressing both youth unemployment/disadvantage and ensuring a supply of new entrants to the labour market who are well prepared for the workforce. These initiatives focus on the contribution that all institutions can make – not just career services but also schools, further and higher education institutions and structures for apprenticeships.

The Scottish Government has indicated that it is keen to ensure that career support is improved to ensure that Scotland is "fit for the future" in line with the aspirations set out in the Withers report.

Q21. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support an inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

Promoting social equity is an important and consistent priority for the Scottish Government, and it is evident as a driver shaping policymaking across education training and employment. Most policy initiatives, even where primarily focused on economic development, have explicit goals around equity, diversity and inclusion. Nonetheless, substantial inequalities persist.

The Scottish Government and its agencies also actively promote decent work. The preferred term in Scotland is 'Fair Work'.

Q22. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the relationship in your country between policies for career development, and policies for productivity and the inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

Scottish Government: Fair and inclusive workplaces

Skills Development Scotland: What we do

Career Review - Skills Development Scotland

Developing the Young Workforce

Education Scotland: Curriculum Improvement Cycle

Post-school education, research and skills: Purpose and principles

Enhancing skills and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Q23. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services support people to develop skills	X				
Career development services support people to access training	X				
Career development services	X				

Q23. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services support people to develop skills	X				
support the uptake of TVET pathways					
Career development services support lifelong learning	X				

Q24. What are the biggest challenges for participation in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system in your country? [Please tick all that apply.]

Parents do not see TVET pathways as attractive for their children
School staff do not know enough about TVET pathways and the occupations they lead to
High rates of drop-out from TVET
The influence of gender stereotyping on TVET choices

Enhancing skills and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Q25. At what age do young people generally move onto a TVET pathway if that is the path they take?

Often age 15 – 16 years. Sometimes age 17-18 years or older.

This includes in-school pathways (notably Foundation Apprenticeships) and post-school pathways.

Q26. Does the age of pathway selection cause challenges for your TVET system?

No

Q27. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the age of pathway selection? [Up to 300 words]

Major reforms in education in Scotland are underway. Strengthening access to vocational qualifications within schools is one among many priorities in this process. Another priority is strengthening experiential career learning and work-based projects in schools at senior phase, supported by business. Career learning as a cross-curricula theme is currently being reviewed by Education Scotland.

Q28. Provide further information on the ways in which policies for career development services in your country enhance policies for skills development, TVET, and lifelong learning. [Up to 300 words]

Currently Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the government agency that is responsible for both the funding and organisation of vocational training and the provision of public career services. This arrangement was to facilitate close alignment between skills development, TVET and guidance. The Scottish Government has recently passed legislation which will separate these functions. Responsibility for government funded training (notably apprenticeships) will be moving from SDS to the agency responsible for the funding of higher and further education. This change is intended to reduce the division between academic and vocational education and to streamline resourcing.

No decision has been communicated about the future of the public careers service. The configuration of the post-school education and skills landscape will be affected by public service reforms.

Q29. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights about how career development services can enhance skills and support TVET. [Up to 300 words]

Fit for the future: Developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation (The Withers Report)

[This report emphasises breaking down the structures and culture that separate academic and vocational pathways post-school].

Ensuring disadvantaged and vulnerable groups can thrive

Q30. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services help vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to thrive.		X			
Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups can access career development services.		X			
Career development services support vulnerable groups to access decent work.		X			
Career development services support vulnerable groups to access the education and training system.		X			
There is adequate funding for career development services targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.		X			
Policies for social inclusion intersect with policies for education, training, and employment.		X			

Q31. Which disadvantaged and vulnerable groups does your government have policies to support and which are provided with bespoke or targeted career development services. [Tick all that apply]

	Government has policies to support	Provided with bespoke or targeted career development services
Indigenous people		
Women and girls	X	X
Men and boys	X	
Ethnic minorities	X	X
Religious minorities	X	
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people	X	

Q31. Which disadvantaged and vulnerable groups does your government have policies to support and which are provided with bespoke or targeted career development services. [Tick all that apply]

	Government has policies to support	Provided with bespoke or targeted career development services
Indigenous people		
People from low-socio-economic backgrounds	X	X
People with low skill levels	X	X
Migrants	X	X
People with disabilities	X	X
People with health and mental health challenges	X	X
Younger people	X	X
Older people		
Other	X	X

If Other, please specify:
Skills Development Scotland, working closely with education staff, has a sophisticated approach to identifying and prioritising school students who require additional support, whilst ensuring the young person has choice and agency within the service offered. This considers a wide range of social, health and educational factors. Some other groups who receive focused attention include:
- 'Care experienced' school students and young adults. i.e. those who have been looked after by someone other than their parents.
- Armed Forces Community under the UK Armed Forces Covenant
- Prisoners/those engaged with the criminal justice system.

Post-COVID, school non-attendance has grown, and this is to some extent associated with mental health conditions. Continuing to reach this group is a growing focus for concern. Other agencies (including charities) provide employability support to unemployed adults. This includes provision to support those with disabilities, facing social challenges or poverty. In line with Scottish Government commitments to eradicate Child Poverty, devolved employability services have a significant focus on providing support to parents on low-income to increase their earnings through employment.

Note the term 'indigenous people' is not meaningful in Scotland.

Ensuring disadvantaged and vulnerable groups can thrive

Q32. Can you provide any further information about the way in which policies for career development in your country support vulnerable and disadvantaged people? [Up to 300 words]

In general, promoting social equity is a major policy driver in Scotland. This manifests across a very wide range of policies relating to education, training and employment.

Strategic work incorporates planning to achieve equality targets. Equality audits are a feature of quality assurance processes. Accountability is achieved through public reporting.

Q33. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the way that your country's career development system supports vulnerable and disadvantaged people. [Up to 300 words]

SDS Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report Outcomes 2025-2029


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THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR
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