Country Report

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

Country name

Wales

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?

Don't know yet

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

Stephen Plimmer, Research manager, and David Morgan, Chief executive, Career Development Institute, Sam Evans -Head of Careers Policy, Welsh Government

About you

Q6. What is your name?

Nikki Lawrence

Q7. What organisation do you work for?

Careers Wales

Q8. What is your job title?

Chief Executive

Q9. What is your email address?

Nikki.lawrence@careerswales.gov.wales

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?

Wales

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	X			
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?

NB: For migrants: eligibility is determined by residency in Wales, so is influenced by immigration status. People with settled or pre-settled status are, for these purposes, generally treated the same as a UK national. People with “No Recourse to Public Funds” find themselves in a more ambiguous position. While career services are not ‘welfare’, Career Wales are not explicit in their policy.
Resources are also provided for parents and carers to access e.g. via social media.

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			
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?

Yes, to some extent

About your country

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

Wales's career development system is a nationally coordinated, all-age approach that integrates careers education within the school curriculum alongside universal and targeted careers and employability support. It supports individuals to make informed decisions, aligns skills development with labour market needs, and contributes to wider social and economic objectives.

Careers education is embedded within the **Curriculum for Wales** through **Careers and Work-Related Experiences** (CWRE), a cross-cutting theme for learners aged 3–16. CWRE helps learners understand the relevance of their learning, develop employability skills, and explore a range of education and career pathways. Schools are expected to provide progressive experiences of the world of work, including employer engagement and access to impartial careers guidance.

Careers Wales (CW), a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government, is our impartial all age national careers service. CW supports schools (secondary and special) to deliver CWRE through professional learning, Careers Wales Quality Award, and a dedicated CW team. CW deliver impartial careers information and offer careers guidance to all young people before they leave statutory education. Those with barriers, who are at risk of disengaging are also offered additional targeted support. CW facilitates employer engagement activities, including tailored work experience (TWE) placements. CW also provides group activities for learners, professional learning opportunities, resources and CW Quality Award. Digital resources are also available for primary settings, including the award winning Careerscraft on Minecraft. In Higher Education, career development support is provided by individual institutions.
For those aged 16 and over, **Working Wales** (WW), delivered by Careers Wales, provides careers guidance and employability support, helping individuals access training, apprenticeships and employment, and signposting to wider Welsh Government programmes.
Together, CW and WW provide a coherent system combining early careers learning with ongoing personalised support, supporting progression, reducing NEET levels, addressing skills shortages, and contributing to economic growth.

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]

Careers Wales website About Us – *overview of Careers Wales*

Careers Wales Operational Plan 2025-26 – *Career Wales current plan*

Summary of legislation - Hwb – *Careers and Work Related Experiences in the Curriculum for Wales 2021.*

Evaluation of the Working Wales Service: final report | GOV.WALES

Impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales advisers

Effectiveness of careers guidance in supporting participation in Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) – Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data

Welsh Government (2022). Stronger, fairer, greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills – *document setting out the agenda for labour market challenges under a number of themes, which cascade in the current structure.*

North Wales Business News (2026). Owning the future: how modern career guidance is evolving in Wales - *Interview with Nikki Lawrence, CEO of Careers Wales.*

Cedefop (2023). Inventory of lifelong guidance systems: UK/Wales – *Review of the Welsh all age system. Originally published in 2020 and updated in 2023. (Deidre Hughes was the named contributor)*

Teenage career development in Wales | OECD

Tailored Work Experience in Wales | OECD

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]

Wales's career development system is characterised by strong national coherence, integration across the life course, and a clear focus on equity and long-term outcomes:

1. **Single integrated national delivery body:** operating under a Welsh Government remit. This ensures consistency of provision across Wales while enabling responsiveness to local labour market needs. The system is further strengthened by an all-age model, creating a coherent, lifelong guidance offer that reduces fragmentation.
2. **Statutory curriculum integration**: Careers education is fully embedded within the Curriculum for Wales (2022) through Careers and Work-Related Experiences (CWRE), ensuring early and progressive exposure to careers learning.
3. **Universal adviser model**: with dedicated CW advisers, Business Education Advisers and CWRE coordinators supporting every secondary and special school, providing a consistent national baseline.
4. A defining feature is the emphasis on **prevention and inclusion**, with targeted support for those at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), alongside universal services. For adults, Working Wales integrates careers guidance with **skills provision and financial support** (e.g. ReAct+ and Personal Learning Accounts), supporting transitions and reskilling.
5. The system operates within **a legislative, values-driven framework**, notably the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which embeds a long-term, holistic focus on wellbeing, sustainability and inclusive growth. Delivery is fully **bilingual (Welsh and English)**, ensuring accessibility and cultural relevance.
6. Wales also benefits from a strong **partnership-based ecosystem**, including Medr, Regional Skills Partnerships and employer networks, which help align careers guidance with economic priorities and labour market intelligence. Quality is maintained through recognised frameworks and professional standards.

Overall, the system is distinguished by **integration, prevention, and public value**, supported by a collaborative network of national and regional partners.

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				

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]

Policies and practices for career development services in Wales support productivity by improving the alignment between education, skills and labour market demand, while enabling individuals to progress and adapt throughout their working lives.

A central feature is the alignment of careers provision with national economic priorities. Careers Wales operates to a Welsh Government remit derived from wider economic and social policy, ensuring that guidance raises awareness of pathways into priority sectors and addresses skills shortages. This is reinforced through collaboration with Regional Skills Partnerships, embedding local labour market intelligence in careers information and supporting matching skills to jobs.

The Curriculum for Wales plays a critical role by embedding CWRE as a statutory, cross-cutting element for all learners aged 3–16, CWRE is not a separate subject but is woven throughout the curriculum. This ensures early and sustained development of employability skills, career management capabilities and awareness of pathways. The use of a Career Check assessment and structured engagement through secondary education, including employer engagement, careers coaching, universal and targeted support for learners, supports smoother transitions and reduces disengagement, contributing to a more work-ready population.

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]

Careers Wales supports schools in delivering CWRE through:

• Consultancy support for school leaders
• Professional learning programmes for teachers to build CWRE capacity.
• A CW Quality Award recognising excellence in schools
• Resources on the Hwb platform (Wales's national digital learning platform)

Beyond this, Personal Learning Accounts are a Welsh Government-funded mechanism allowing eligible adults to access funded training courses. They are promoted and accessed through Working Wales/Careers Wales and represent an important funding stream for adult reskilling that is specific to Wales, creating skills to serve areas of the economy earmarked as being a priority.

Overall, Wales's approach supports productivity through early intervention, targeted reskilling, and strong alignment between policy, education and labour market needs.

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]

Policies and practices for career development services in Wales play a significant role in supporting an inclusive economy by ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds can access opportunities to develop skills, progress in learning and employment, and contribute to economic growth.

A key feature is the system's universal and targeted approach. CW provides impartial guidance to all learners, alongside enhanced support for those at greater risk of disadvantage, including young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), individuals with Additional Learning Needs and those facing socio-economic barriers. Early identification and intervention help prevent disengagement and improve long-term outcomes.

The embedding of CWRE within the Curriculum for Wales ensures all learners, regardless of background, benefit from structured careers education. Progressive support through secondary education, including employer engagement, careers coaching and tailored interventions, helps to raise aspirations, broaden horizons and promote equitable access to pathways.

The Careers Wales website offers a comprehensive suite of career planning tools. This includes access to course and training searches, job opportunities, apprenticeship information, and labour market intelligence specific to Wales. CW has also demonstrated innovation in its use of digital technology, introducing gamified elements within careers education to broaden engagement and help reduce barriers to participation.

For adults, WW provides a single, accessible entry point to careers advice, employability support and training opportunities. It offers access to funded provision such as Personal Learning Accounts and ReAct+ , helping to reduce financial barriers to reskilling and supporting individuals affected by redundancy, low pay or economic inactivity.

WW works in close collaboration with a range of partners to strengthen responsiveness and reach, including the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus (non-devolved services), alongside education and training providers, employers, Medr and third-sector organisations.

The system is also underpinned by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which places a statutory duty on public bodies to promote equality, long-term wellbeing and inclusive growth. Delivery is fully bilingual (Welsh and English), ensuring accessibility and cultural inclusion.

Overall, Wales's careers system supports an inclusive economy by reducing barriers, targeting support, and enabling equitable access to skills and employment opportunities across the population.

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]

Wales demonstrates a strong and evolving alignment between career development policy and wider objectives on productivity and an inclusive economy. Key insights include:

- **Whole-system alignment with economic strategy:** Career development is embedded within broader economic priorities, including the Welsh Government, Economic Mission, which links skills, employability and business growth to achieving a more prosperous, fair and green economy with higher wages and improved living standards.

- **Inclusion and lifelong learning:** focus on supporting those furthest from the labour market while promoting lifelong upskilling, helping reduce inequalities, improve participation and enable a more productive workforce; Stronger, fairer, greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills

- **Alignment with new government priorities (May 2026):**
  Plaid Cymru's First 100 days has a clear emphasis on identifying future skills needs and strengthening alignment between education, careers and labour market demand. This signals continued prioritisation of careers and skills policy as central to improving productivity and supporting an inclusive, future-ready economy.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations documents

ReAct Plus | Working Wales

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 support the uptake of TVET pathways	X				
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

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?

Aged 14: More structured vocational options are open within school. Under the Learning Pathways 14-19 framework, pupils can start to take vocational subjects alongside GCSEs. Work-related education increases in prominence through the curriculum.

The new curriculum for Wales (2022) embeds careers and work-related experiences as a mandatory part of the curriculum, which serves to generally increase exposure to vocational and technical work.

Age 16 is a major transition point to TVET pathways: This is where young people can start to enter the Welsh apprenticeship programme, coinciding with the end of compulsory secondary education. Apprenticeships are not formally available pre-16.

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

Yes

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

It could narrow their options later on , if they changed their minds and wanted to do an academic route later.

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]

A number of policies and frameworks over the past decade have shaped a more integrated and coherent TVET system in Wales, with career development services playing a central enabling role.

The Stronger Fairer Greener Wales Plan for Employability and Skills, provides the overarching framework linking careers, employability and skills, with a clear emphasis on apprenticeships and vocational routes as key to economic recovery and tackling labour market inequality. Complementing this, **Job Growth Wales+ (JGW+)** offers supported employment and training for 16–24-year-olds alongside apprenticeships.

The Young Persons Guarantee, introduced in 2021, ensures under-25s can access education, training, employment or self-employment opportunities, with **Working Wales** acting as a gateway to support and progression pathways.

The **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (2013)** established a whole-system approach to identifying and supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET, positioning Careers Wales at the centre of tracking and supporting transitions into education, training and employment.

Wider system alignment is reinforced through **apprenticeship and employer engagement policies**, with career development services linking individuals to employers and providers, ensuring provision reflects labour market demand. **Qualifications Wales** (established through the 2015 Act) supports a more coherent and streamlined vocational qualifications system aligned to Welsh economic needs.

The **Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022** established **Medr**, bringing together oversight of further education, higher education, apprenticeships and work-based learning—representing a significant step towards a more joined-up post-16 system. This is complemented by a Strategic vocational education and training direction in Wales, which sets a long-term vision focused on participation, skills and economic growth, including support for Cymraeg 2050.

Early engagement is supported through **Junior Apprenticeships**, which provide 14–16-year-olds with vocational training, work experience and Level 2 qualifications alongside core subjects.

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]

Collectively, these policies have driven a more aligned, demand-led TVET system in Wales, with career development services acting as the connective infrastructure supporting access, progression and responsiveness to economic need.

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]

Young Person's Guarantee – *Important pillar on the Government agenda, targeting under 25s to pursue work or education and training.*

Welsh Government, Recruit an apprentice: guidance for employers: Funding and eligibility – *website offering advice and funding information for employers.*

Welsh Government (2017). Apprenticeship Skills Policy Plan -

Medr, Apprenticeships – *article about apprenticeships from the Commission of Tertiary Education and Research. Page includes information about the Apprenticeship Framework*

Medr (2018). Guidance for Schools on Apprenticeships in Wales. – *Overview of how apprenticeships work in Wales following the publication of an Apprenticeship skills policy in 2017.*

A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn,

A strategic direction for vocational education and training in Wales | GOV.WALES

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	

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				
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		X
Women and girls		
Men and boys		
Ethnic minorities		X
Religious minorities		
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people		
People from low-socio-economic backgrounds		X
People with low skill levels		
Migrants		
People with disabilities	X	X
People with health and mental health challenges		
Younger people	X	
Older people	X	
Other		

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]

Analysis by ADR for Career Wales shows that there is already resource allocation towards supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable groups:

Analysis by Huxley and Davies (2023) for ADR shows that pupils in secondary school are more likely to access career services if from a lower socio-economic band. At each level of educational attainment, pupils entitled to free school meals are more likely to receive an interview: “KS4 pupils who have low levels of attainment and who are eligible for free school meals are most likely to receive guidance irrespective of the responses that they provide via Career Check.”

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]

Analysis by Bannerjee et al (2025) was conducted to understand who used the career services beyond compulsory education. The results indicated that there was already a skew of career provision towards people with characteristics that suggested disadvantage e.g. those who were eligible for Free School Meals during KS4

Wales's Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act 2018 reformed provision for learners with additional needs. Careers Wales has a specialist team working in all special schools in Wales, providing careers guidance and expert advice to young people, teachers, and parents.

Careers Wales has a specific focus on young people identified as at risk of becoming NEET.

A distinctive feature of the Welsh system noted in Brighter Futures is the allocation of a Working Wales careers adviser to every prison in Wales, working with HMPPS and key agencies to support prisoners prior to, at, and after release.

Career Wales explicitly commits to tackle rural areas in partnership with local providers.

ReAct+ (described above) provides the primary mechanism for supporting workers facing redundancy, administered through Working Wales.

In addition to these, there are a range of wider policies (e.g. the Equalities Act) that are embedded in organisational policies and ways of working, which translate to the way that services are offered and delivered. (There are on a separate spreadsheet).

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]

Bannerjee, U. et al (2025). Moving on: Who receives careers advice and guidance following compulsory education? ADR Wales – *Analysis of the use of career services beyond 16. Results showed a higher uptake amongst lower socio-economic groups, those who had previously received support from Career Wales, and had lower levels of education attainment (amongst other variables).*

Teenage career development in Wales | OECD included the following evidence:

- career ambition of disadvantaged learners are higher for learners in Wales compared to OECD average
- 'provision in Wales goes against the OECD trend. Significantly from an equity perspective, the most socially disadvantaged students are considerably more likely than their most advantaged peers to have spoken with a career advisor on at least one occasion by the age of 15'
- Overwhelmingly, school principals report that career guidance is formally scheduled into students' time in school, making it a mandatory requirement for 96% of students, much higher than the OECD average of 58%' to other answers

Poole, J. et al (2026a). Validating measures of Welsh language use. ADR Wales – *Contextual research showing the nature and volume of uptake of the Welsh language.*

Poole, J. et al (2026b). Does it pay to speak Welsh. ADR Wales – *Contextual research showing the effect of speaking Welsh on early career outcomes.*

ReAct Plus | Working Wales website showing the react+ support for those facing redundancy.

Welsh Government Identifying young people at risk of becoming NEET or homeless – *website with reports showing the ways that the government are approaching NEET and those at risk of homelessness.*


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Ngā Kaitohutohu Rapuara Aotearoa
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