

INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO
CAREER
DEVELOPMENT
FOR WORKING
PEOPLE

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ABOUT iCeGS

The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) is a world leading research centre with expertise in career and career development. The Centre conducts research, provides consultancy to the career sector, offers a range of training and delivers several accredited learning programmes up to and including doctoral level.

The Centre employs nine researchers with a range of academic and professional backgrounds and works closely with a network of research associates and partners who contribute specialist knowledge and capacity. iCeGS has a strong ethos which connects our research to policy and practice.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the central importance of working life to adults, in most countries career development support is primarily aimed at those in education or at adults who are outside the labour market. Public policy provision of career development services typically overlook that most people make their most consequential career decisions while employed.

This study has been funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (Gatsby) to explore approaches to career development for working people in nine countries: Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Ireland and South Korea. The research was conducted through consultation with 12 experts in these countries. It is intended to inform the development of new provision in England, where Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service are currently being merged into a new service.

The study draws on research by Hutchinson and Hooley published in 2025, which identified six features of effective adult guidance systems: vision and leadership, collaboration and cooperation, a qualified professional career development workforce, coherent national and local delivery, clearly understood and accessible services, and robust labour market information. The current report uses this framework to examine the programmes, initiatives and delivery approaches available in each of the countries listed above.

In every country examined, career development support for working adults is less developed than that available for those in education or who are unemployed. In most cases provision is fragmented, inconsistently funded and often confined to isolated pilots rather than that delivered through a sustained policy commitment. Strategic visions for adult career development rarely extends to working people. Mechanisms for coordinating the range of services that working adults might require are also often lacking. A consistent finding in all the countries was low public awareness of available services. The services that do exist are sometimes inaccessible because their opening hours conflict with standard working patterns. Funding instability also limits their ability to develop, market themselves and achieve sustainable impact. Nonetheless, in the nine case study countries there is a wealth of good and interesting practice that provides insights into what a better system might be.

Where provision does exist, it tends to be targeted at particular groups.

Key target groups identified include:

- New entrants to the labour market
- Low-skilled and precarious workers
- Migrant workers
- Workers experiencing health difficulties
- Workers dissatisfied with their careers
- Workers in declining and sunset industries
- Midlife career changers

The case studies show different delivery models, including universal access services in Estonia, Norway, the Netherlands, New Zealand and South Korea; technology-supported guidance, such as e-guidance in Denmark and AI-powered tools in Canada and South Korea; guidance linked directly to training access, such as Denmark and the Republic of Ireland; community-based services in the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands; trade union provision, which is particularly prominent in Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway and employer-based provision, which is used everywhere but is particularly successful in Austria and South Korea because of the way employer capacity is pooled. Technology-based approaches show promise in extending reach, but evaluations consistently find their value is greatest when combined with qualified career development practitioners, rather than as stand alone solutions.

Drawing on these findings, the report identifies seven principles to inform the development of careers provision for working people in England:

1. **Awareness preceeds access** – Improving services will have limited effect without sustained public information campaigns.
2. **Access points matter** – Services need visible, recognisable access points that are open outside standard working hours.
3. **Start local but don't end there** – Place-based delivery has real strengths but should be complemented by workplace-based and online provision.
4. **Targeting can drive engagement, but universal provision supports access** – Targeted services can drive engagement with priority groups, while a universal baseline offer supports broader access.
5. **The workplace is critical** – Engagement with employers, trade unions and sectoral bodies is essential to effectively reach working people where they are.
6. **Connecting to education and training** – The interface between guidance and lifelong learning provision is a crucial integration point that must be actively managed.
7. **Technology has a key role to play, but humans need to be at the heart of services** – Digital and AI-powered tools can extend reach and efficiency, but human-centred professional services must remain at the core of any effective system.

This study provides clear evidence that working adults are underserved by career development systems in comparable nations, and that this gap remains broadly consistent regardless of the maturity of the country's guidance systems. Addressing this gap will require sustained policy commitment, cross-sector collaboration and stable funding, alongside a shift in public understanding of who career development services are for. The international examples gathered here demonstrate what is possible and provide a range of examples and insights that could be used as the foundations for developing more effective provision in England.

1.

INTRODUCTION

There is a deep irony in the fact that the provision of career development support in most countries is concentrated firstly in the education system and secondly on adults who are out of work. Although strong evidence supports the importance of provision for both groups, it is notable that in many countries working adults are a forgotten population, despite most people making most of their important career decisions while they are in work. It is therefore very welcome that the Gatsby has turned its focus to the question of how we can best provide career development services for working adults.



In recent years Gatsby have built on their landmark work on career guidance in the education system (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2014) by exploring practice, evidence and possibilities for adult guidance. This has involved looking at current practice in England (Pye Tait, 2022), including a deep dive into the experience of co-locating the National Careers Service in further education colleges (Julings and Wilson, 2024), an exploration of the career development support needs of UK adults (Percy, 2022) and an examination of international approaches to providing adult career development services (Hutchinson and Hooley, 2025).

In this report, we focus on the kinds of provision available to working adults in a range of countries. This work clearly builds on Hutchinson and Hooley's 2025 report and includes examples from many of the same countries. But where the earlier report focused on the system level, this report is focused primarily on interventions and practices. The aim is to highlight examples that could inspire future practice in England either as part of our current system architecture or in a developed or reformed adult guidance system in England.

Drawing inspiration from international comparators is particularly valuable at this time, as England is in the middle of reforming adult guidance and employment support (Department for Work and Pensions et al., 2024). Through this process the UK's public employment service, Jobcentre Plus, will be merged with England's careers service, the National Careers Service, to create a new service provisionally called the Jobs and Careers Service. This offers a moment when new ideas, services and delivery models may usefully inform government's service development. It is also important to highlight the role that local government can play in the provision of careers services alongside, and in integration with, national service provision. This report aims to provide evidence that can be used to stimulate creative thinking in this area.

The report was developed through a series of conversations with 12 experts from nine countries. The research team, with input from the Gatsby, chose the case study countries as examples of countries with strong guidance systems that have strong career development services for adults, including working adults. The countries identified were Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Ireland and South Korea. Experts were invited to discuss (either in writing or during an online interview) their countries' adult career development services and with a focus on policy and practice targeted at working adults. The research team drafted these discussions into case studies, which were shared with the country experts and then amended and further developed. All case studies are presented in the appendix to this report. Data were analysed to identify key cross-cutting issues (presented in Chapter 2) and a typology of interventions (presented in Chapter 3). The authors' reflections on the findings and their conclusions for England are presented in Chapter 4.

2.

ISSUES WITH PROVIDING CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES TO WORKING PEOPLE

In their report on international approaches to adult guidance, Hutchinson and Hooley (2025) identified six key features that comprise effective adult guidance systems:

- **Vision and leadership** – national visions for guidance are clearly articulated in policy, supported by multiple government departments, and aligned to implementation plans.
- **Collaboration and cooperation** – effective guidance may need to connect adults with other services, and this requires different providers to connect both strategically and operationally.
- **Professionals** – career guidance is delivered by a range of professionals all with appropriate training.
- **National and local delivery** – services are delivered by respected providers both nationally and locally to meet the needs of a diverse population.
- **Clearly understood and accessible services** – clear referral systems between services to help people understand and access what they need, including online and in-person.
- **Labour market data** – quality-assured data underpins advice and services to ensure information provided to adults is up to date, and services meet the needs of the economy.

The findings of the current report endorse this picture of what effective provision looks like and will use these headings to discuss the broader issues that emerged from this study.

Vision and leadership

The experts interviewed frequently raised the importance of having a high-level vision for the provision of career development services to adults, but it was rarely seen in the case studies. Such a vision needs to be able to unite a variety of different provision from both the public and private sector into a coherent system. Yet, in most countries achieving this, particularly for working adults, proved difficult. Even where there is clear policy leadership for career development services (as in Estonia, Norway or the Republic of Ireland), limited attention is given to working adults. There is often a range of provision available for working adults, but no unifying narrative in policy documents (Denmark and the Netherlands). In Norway, the identified purpose of delivering career development services to working people is to improve skills alignment and to support engagement with the education and training system (Opinion, 2023). While South Korea does include some key groups of working adults in its national vision for career development services. Groups such as mid-career workers and foreign workers are clear priorities in its strategy.

In Canada, the Future Skills Centre has been funded to undertake research, pilot new ideas and innovate in ways that support Canada’s workforce to prepare for the future. While this does not constitute a vision for career development services in the country as such, it might be usefully seen as a helpful precondition for the development of such a vision. It is also important to highlight that in much of its work on workforce adaptation and development, the Future Skills Centre (2026) has emphasised the importance of career development and employment services.

A lack of long-term funding was raised as an ongoing problem affecting the provision of career development services (Austria, the Netherlands, New Zealand). In many countries, career development services for working people are not consistently funded, making it difficult to build up, market and maintain such services.

Collaboration and cooperation

All experts agreed on the importance of managing disparate services that might be delivered through a range of different mechanisms. But, in many cases there were no clear mechanisms in place to manage this kind of collaboration and cooperation for the services offered to working adults (Canada, Denmark, South Korea, New Zealand). The situation is simpler in countries like Estonia, where adult career development services are primarily provided by a single, government-funded provider. Or, as in Norway, where a national agency exists to support the coordination of the career development system.

In Austria, a nationwide network for adult educational guidance has been developed, providing a coordinating structure for local services and developing a range of projects to improve provision across different sectors and providers, such as common quality standards. While in the Netherlands, the development of regional employment centres has provided local coordination and enabled the rationalisation of a range of services into a single point of contact.

Professionals

Many of the experts interviewed emphasised the importance of professionalisation. Career development was generally understood as a multi-professional activity in which certified or accredited career development professionals played a central role. The experts discussed the work they had undertaken to professionalise the field (Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway) and support the development of robust quality processes for career development services (Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, South Korea). Despite having a relatively professionalised career development system, our expert in South Korea argued that failing to grow the profession quickly enough will probably be the biggest obstacle to the development of provision for working adults.

National and local delivery

A common feature of many of the case studies is a lack of jurisdictional clarity on responsibility for career development services for working people. This leads to issues such as patchy provision in both access and quality across the country (Canada, the Republic of Ireland, South Korea). It also introduces challenges in achieving service recognition because of inconsistent branding and offers. This problem is typically more severe in larger countries.

Problems of jurisdictional clarity and the potential proliferation of services are often exacerbated by the range of different sectors (education, employment, community) involved in the provision of career development services. In countries like Austria, which has a strong tradition of social partnership, the social partners play a clearly defined and formal role in delivering career development services. This potentially broadens the range of actors involved in the area and increases the need for well demarcated roles and structures to support cooperation and coordination.

Clearly understood and accessible services

Most of the countries discussed issues with awareness and access. In many countries, service provision for working adults is limited and often restricted to a small number of pilots or projects (Canada and New Zealand). Even where services are available, it is often difficult to raise awareness among the general population about what working people are entitled to and how they can access it (Denmark, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand). This can be especially true for lower-skilled and lower-paid workers, who are arguably the group that would benefit the most (Austria).

The issue of raising awareness of career development services was highlighted repeatedly (the Republic of Ireland). It is common for services to not be well used by employed people; specifically it was found that those who most need them often use them least. However, it was also frequently recognised that these groups are not commonly targeted as clients of career development services. One key issue raised in the Republic of Ireland was the opening hours of career development services, which often exclude working people. In Ireland, there have been pilots of evening opening times to address this issue.

In many countries the **public employment services** played a critical role in delivering career development services for adults (Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, South Korea). However, in most cases the public employment services were primarily focused on the unemployed and others disconnected from the labour market. This means that working people are usually a small minority of the users of such services (Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, South Korea) or are largely excluded from using such services (the Republic of Ireland). However, in some countries there was a broader eligibility and working people could use these services and in others there were experiments designed to actively engage with working people.

In some countries, dedicated **career development services** are distinct from the public employment service (Denmark, Norway and New Zealand). Some are youth or education-focused services that also extend to serve working people e.g. study and career guidance in Denmark. Others have bespoke services aimed at adults that include working adults, such as the Danish e-guidance service. Norway has a network of careers centres in each county as well as a national e-guidance service. The regional employment centres in the Netherlands could also be considered part of this category, although in practice they are a collection of services rather than a single career development service.

Services connected to the education system are also an important source of career development services for working people, especially those considering re-engaging with the education and training system. This kind of service is available in the Republic of Ireland, where career development services are offered through local tertiary education providers; however this raises issues about whether the public understands that the remit of these services extends beyond admission to the education system as well as concerns about impartiality.

Some countries highlighted the important role that **community-based services** could play in the delivery of career development services to adults (the Netherlands, Norway [via careers centres], the Republic of Ireland, South Korea). Such services were seen as valuable because they are linked to local people and understand the issues they face. However, such community-based services often struggle with paying and retaining professional staff, in part due to a lack of continuity of funding.

Other key delivery infrastructure was provided by **employers** and by **trade unions**. Trade union-based services were found in Canada but were most evident in Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway. These services include provision funded through member subscription and provision funded through collective bi- or tri-partite agreements. The extent of the provision offered by employers and trade unions has significant implications for the degree to which the state is needed to provide services for working people.

While employer-based services exist in all the countries, the offer varies between firms and can sometimes favour higher-skilled and more established workers (Austria). In Austria, both the Economic Chamber (employers) and the Chamber of Labour (trade unions/employees) provide career development services for working people. While South Korea has collectively funded employee assistance programmes that provide support for employed people. In New Zealand, many larger employers fund employee assistance programmes that cater to their employees, although not all firms offer careers provision as part of this.

Finally, many of the experts talked about the role of **private sector career development provision** as a way for working people to access services. However, in most countries this accounted for a relatively small amount of provision and was typically accessed by more advantaged workers. An important unresolved question remains about how the private sector could be more effectively involved in this area.

Labour market data

The case studies featured relatively little discussion about the role of labour market data in supporting working people’s career development. This may be because it is generally assumed that high-quality labour market information is an integral part of career guidance and other career development services, and because the labour market information needs of working adults are likely to be quite specific.

In many countries, the provision of labour market information is linked to the public employment service. For example, the Dutch public employment service provides labour market data for their own staff, other careers providers and individuals. They also publish annual national and regional labour market forecasts on their website. This information is collected monthly and the data can be analysed by profession, sector and region. The Dutch public employment service has also been working with a range of other partners to develop a new labour market information initiative called *CompetentNL*. This database lists the hard skills and soft skills associated with different professions, so that individuals can better understand specific job requirements. It uses a hybrid AI system that continuously scrapes data from key sources, such as job postings, to keep the database up to date and relevant to the labour market.

South Korea has a national career information portal called *Employment24*. This is supplemented by a new AI system, *JobCare*. Together, these two systems provide a strong information infrastructure available to all citizens. The *Tahatū* Career Navigator site in New Zealand is another example of a national career information portal designed to provide labour market and course information in an accessible way that enables citizens to self-serve (Tertiary Education Commission, n.d.).

Another interesting example came from Canada. *OpportuNext* is a labour market information system designed as a more powerful and dynamic way for individuals to engage with labour market information (withintent, 2025). *OpportuNext* offers a range of matching tools that can provide personalised labour market information that supports citizens in making informed career decisions. Engagement with the tool was strong, although this was closely related to marketing and promotion activities. However, the length and quality of the interactions were often low. When users engaged more deeply with the tool, they typically responded positively to it and reported that it had been useful to their career development. An evaluation recommends more direct promotion of the tool to career development practitioners, who can act as champions for its use.

It is also worth noting that another Canadian report questions whether increasing the availability of labour market information will necessarily result in better career decision-making (Tregebov et al., 2024). It suggests that people are quickly overwhelmed by the amount of information on offer and that, ironically, providing less but more targeted and better supported information is more effective. The report ultimately suggests that embedding labour market information into wider career development services is critical.

3.

APPROACHES TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR WORKING PEOPLE

Through our research, we identified several approaches for delivering services to working adults. In this chapter, we set out the key types of approaches. First, we discuss approaches that target priority groups, and second, the range of different delivery approaches.

Targeting priority groups

Many countries are keen to prioritise specific groups of working people in their career development services provision.

Support for transition into the labour market

Most career development services available to adults focus on unemployed people and those disconnected from the labour market. In many cases support ends once they enter the labour market. This can result in cycles of unemployment and failed transitions. Given this, there is a clear rationale for ensuring ongoing access to career development services once unemployed workers enter the labour market to support transitions and progression. The *Thriving Workplaces* project in Canada is an example of this kind of provision and emphasises the importance of building employers into the provision as key partners. In Austria, women returning to the labour market are identified as a key group to prioritise.

Low-skilled, low-paid and precarious workers

There is a strong rationale for the provision of career development services to low-skilled workers to help them upskill, often by encouraging their engagement with the education and training system. In Denmark, the e-guidance service partners with a range of other actors to deliver services to people with low basic skills. This was also a target group in Austria. In the Republic of Ireland, several interventions were focused on precarious workers, the aim of which was to support their progression to decent work.

Migrant workers

Some countries provided bespoke services for migrant workers to support their labour market integration and progression. Key examples were Norway, where newly arrived migrants have a legal right and obligation to participate in career development services, and South Korea, where a range of services have been developed for this group.

Workers with health and mental health issues

Some public employment services in Denmark offer a range of bespoke services for workers experiencing ill health. This includes help for people seeking workplace support and adaptations, as well as those transitioning to a new job or leaving the labour market. Norway is also developing a project to deliver career development to workers on sick leave that will support them to return to work. This is similar to New Zealand’s well-established government support, which is available through the *Accident Compensation Corporation*.

People who are dissatisfied with their jobs

A common target group for services aimed at workers is those who are dissatisfied with or demotivated by their work. The *Check Your Working Life* service in Denmark and *Restart* in Estonia both target this group, aiming to help people transition to more fulfilling and productive forms of work.

Workers in declining or sunset industries

Some countries were keen to target career development services at workers who are in declining or sunset industries. These workers are supported to move into growth industries. This was central to policy in South Korea.

Mid-life career changers

Many workers experience changes or challenges in their working lives as they move into midlife. There is a strong tradition of experimenting with providing midlife workers additional career support, which has generally reported strong benefits but has rarely been embedded into long-term policy frameworks (Watts, 2019; Barham, 2021). Recent examples in Canada, like the *Mid-Career Transitions Project*, further demonstrate how such support programmes can be organised using both one-to-one counselling and group-based workshop approaches. This was also a strong theme in South Korea, where providing various forms of mid-career review and transition programmes was critical to the delivery of career development services for working people in the country.

Delivery approaches

The case studies also reveal the range of delivery approaches being used to engage working adults.

Universal access guidance services

The discussion above highlights the way many countries target services toward particular groups. However, some countries aim to guarantee universal access to career development services.

Estonia is a strong example of guaranteed universal access to career guidance. Everyone is eligible to access services, although the level of awareness of this entitlement is low (around 30%). The regional guidance centres in the Netherlands are another example of a universal approach. Similarly, Norway provides strong universal access to career guidance services through both its county careers centres – which counties are obliged to offer to citizens over the age of 19 – and the e-guidance service that is available to all.

In Denmark, the Køge Kommune (2025) has trialled offering and publicising access to three free career counselling sessions for all citizens over the age of 25. This includes some targeting of those who have lost their jobs and people who have lost motivation in their current roles. This is similar to the *Direct Career Service* in New Zealand, which has been in place since the Covid-19 pandemic and offers universal careers support from a qualified careers professional. However, uptake of this service has been limited due to a lack of promotion and commitment to the service by the government, as well as reduced availability caused by a declining budget.

Technology supported career development services

A number of countries have been exploring how digital technologies and AI can increase access, support efficiency and improve the quality of career development services. A Norwegian research report indicates some evidence that younger people prefer using digital career development services, while older people prefer the face-to-face services offered by Norway’s careers centres (Berg and Lervik, 2022).

E-guidance services offer an important way to deliver career development services to working adults. The Danish e-guidance service provides a strong and highly professionalised example of this. The recently launched *Check Your Working Life* service is designed to get working people to reflect on their career and is delivered through three sessions with the same adviser. The Norwegian e-guidance service shares many features with the Danish one, although it has not been in operation for as long. In addition to providing access to individual counselling through chat, telephone and email, the Norwegian e-guidance service also offers a range of digital self-help tools that can either complement counselling sessions or be used independently.

In Canada, *PathPilot* is an AI-powered tool that provides job searches, resume optimisation, cover letter generation, upskilling recommendations, interview preparation and mock interview features (DARO, 2026). An evaluation found that jobseekers universally found PathPilot to be a helpful additional resource for career exploration. It was effective for jobseekers because it enabled them to complete applications quicker and to complete more applications by quickly tailoring resumes and cover letters using keyword matching and enabling more thorough preparation for specific opportunities. The evaluation also reported that the most promising service model combines the AI tool with human career development professionals because the AI tool increases the time available for guided, time-intensive tasks like mock interviews. *CompetentNL* is a similar tool currently being developed in the Netherlands. While the South Korean AI-powered *JobCare* system has already been rolled out as part of the national provision.

In New Zealand, the recently launched *Tahatū Career Navigator* website provides tools and information for individuals and career practitioners to explore career and study options (Tertiary Education Commission, n.d.).

Linking career development to training

In Estonia, career development serves as a gateway for people to access free training (Eesti Töötukassa, n.d.c.). People need to meet with a career counsellor before they can apply for free training. Career counsellors help analyse what kind of training would be best for the person, determine whether they are eligible, and, if not, identify alternative options that would develop their skills.

The role of education training boards in the Republic of Ireland are another example of career development being closely linked to training and the tertiary education system. In this case, education training boards provide guidance as part of the wider offer of education and training institutions, aiming to facilitate access and better match citizens with training opportunities.

In South Korea, guidance and training services are also well integrated for working people. This is primarily delivered through employer-funded employee assistance programmes but can be found in other aspects of the system.

Community-based services

Locating career development services in local communities, potentially as part of community centres or other multi-professional services, offers a delivery approach that can support engagement with local people. An example of this model was identified in the Republic of Ireland; however, its ability to offer services to working people was largely dependent on access to relevant funding. The Dutch regional employment centres are another example of place-based services that support working people alongside other client groups, as are the career development services offered by South Korean local authorities.

Trade unions

In many countries, trade unions are a key delivery mechanism for career development support (Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands). An example of this is the HK (n.d.) union in Denmark, which offers members telephone and online guidance services where they can discuss issues such as how they can develop in the workplace, access further education and training or change their occupation. Members can also access support with transition skills, like CV and application writing and optimising LinkedIn profiles.

In Canada, the public sector workers union, PIPSC, has developed *Navigar*, a web-based resource that helps members create career plans, highlighting the information they need to obtain their next job or move their career forward through further training (Future Skills Centre, 2025). Users can use the tool’s predictive capabilities to understand the skills required to do the jobs of the future.

Another good example is the Christian National Trade Union Federation in the Netherlands, which has established its own careers service called *James*. The aim of this service is to help workers take control of their careers. The service is available to union members, but also to non-members. One trade union activist (Orie, 2026) argues that the delivery of a careers service aligns well with the wider aims of the union, saying:

“ We are used to fighting for individuals and their specific situation in addition to the collective interest. You notice that in our approach. For us, career development is not an abstract theme, but daily business. And that makes us the right party to guide people from work-to-work. ”

James offers a wide range of services, including one-to-one career guidance, workshops and an e-guidance service. It includes specific services that support people who are facing redundancy or insecurity at work. The union is also developing a new service that it calls *Career Check* (similar to the Danish *Check Your Working Life* service). This offers service users a career review, which particularly focuses on the next three to five years. The union is negotiating with employers to have *Career Check* included in the collective agreement and for it to be funded accordingly. This provides a good example of career guidance services being actively promoted as being of dual benefit (for employers and employees). This is a new development but one which has the potential to improve the funding of and engagement with career development services for working people.

Employers

Informants suggested that some employers in all of the case study countries are involved in the delivery of career development services to their employees. But this provision is often inconsistent and primarily provided by larger companies and for higher-skilled workers. Some of the most effective ways to deliver employer-focused career development services seem to be through collective structures, like the Economic Chamber in Austria, or through policy leadership, such as South Korea’s employee assistance programmes. As previously noted, the culture and extent of provision by employers make a big difference to the role that the state has to play in providing career development services for working people.

4.

CONCLUSION AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

There is extensive evidence to show that many countries are offering a range of career development services to working people. However, in almost all the countries we looked at, there was less support for working people than for those in education or out of work. As argued in the introduction, this is significant, particularly because many people face some of their most challenging career dilemmas during their working lives, and because changing jobs, employers, sectors or direction is common for workers around the world.

This study also suggests that many of the countries we looked at continue to face challenges of leadership, coordination, delivery and quality assurance in the provision of career development services for working people. It is a stretch to describe the provision for working people in most countries as a system; it is more accurate to say it as fragmented and patchy. This is why we continue to argue that the framework set out by Hutchinson and Hooley (2025) for the organisation of adult career development services remains a relevant framework for career development services for working people.

Effective systems are informed by a clear vision of what is needed and why, and they are led by policymakers working in partnership with relevant stakeholders. They are organised in ways that promote collaboration and cooperation, particularly between national and local policies and providers. Taking this strategic approach enables a range of services to be made available to the population and ensures that these services are well understood. Effective systems focus on quality, engaging appropriate professionals and using up-to-date and reliable labour market data. These basic principles remain true as we focus on career development services for working people. However, in this report we have moved a level closer to practice by looking at the programmes, initiatives and approaches that are being used to support working people.

From England's perspective, this document has revealed a range of valuable examples that could inform future developments. *Gatsby* is looking to pilot new initiatives to see what could work in England. We therefore offer the following thoughts to inform the development of those pilots.

- **Awareness precedes access** – A key issue that emerged from this study was the challenge of making working people aware of the career development services that are available to them. Many countries have a range of services available, but almost all admit that most working people are not aware of them. Strengthening access to career development services is important, but only if it goes hand in hand with increased awareness. This means that public information campaigns and marketing are an important part of the picture.
- **Access points matter** – For working people to access career development services, they need to be able to identify a clear access point and be able to use it. This means that services need to be designed to be visible, open and to be available outside normal working hours.
- **Start local, but don't end there** – The evidence presented here suggests that place-based approaches to the delivery of career development services to working people offer genuine benefits. But it is also important to recognise that communities represent just one location in which career development services can be delivered, and that it may be useful to consider other perspectives, notably workplace-based systems and online provision.
- **Targeting can drive engagement, but universal provision supports access** – A key question is to consider who career development services are really aimed at. There are compelling reasons to target services at key groups, like new entrants to the labour market, low-paid and precarious workers, those with health conditions, dissatisfied workers and those looking for a change related to a life stage. Using life-stages (e.g. the midlife career review) to clearly identify intervention targets and to design and market services in a way that meets this need is useful. However, this study also shows that having a wide range of universal adult services with simple access might provide a baseline onto which more targeted services could be built.
- **The workplace is critical** – The research consistently highlights the value of career development services that are delivered in the workplace itself or are closely associated with the workplace. This includes initiatives developed and delivered through trade unions, employers, chambers of commerce and other institutions, such as the Chamber of Labour in Austria. Considering how to connect with workers in this way is critically important.
- **Connecting to education and training** – The connection between career development services and the education and training system is a crucial interface. It is important to consider how accessing career development services can be integrated with discussions about lifelong learning and workplace training.
- **Technology has a key role to play, but humans need to be at the heart of services** – There are a range of exciting approaches to delivering career development services to working people that use a variety of digital, online and AI-powered technologies. Technology can increase the accessibility of information, automate career development services and support new types of interaction. However, most evaluations emphasise the importance of maintaining a connection between technology-driven services and professional, human-centred career development services.

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APPENDIX: INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES

- Austria
- Canada
- Denmark
- Estonia
- The Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- The Republic of Ireland
- South Korea

AUSTRIA

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Introduction

Austria is a central European country with a population of approximately nine million people. It is a federal republic organised into nine federal provinces (Bundesländer), each enjoying considerable devolution of economic and political control. Austria has a strong tradition of social partnership, where employer organisations (particularly the Economic Chamber or Wirtschaftskammer Österreich) and employee organisations (particularly the Chamber of Labour or Arbeiterkammer) play a significant role in shaping labour market and education policy (Statistik Austria, 2024).

Austria has a well-developed system of career and educational guidance services for adults and workers, delivered through a mix of public, social partners and private providers. The public employment service, Arbeitsmarktservice (AMS), operates around 70 career guidance centres nationwide, supplemented by an extensive national network for adult educational counselling (Netzwerk Bildungsberatung Österreich) and guidance services provided by the social partner organisations. Despite the breadth of the available provision, those most in need of guidance, people with lower qualifications and those facing labour market disadvantage, are the least likely to use services (AMS Vienna, 2022). This is a challenge that remains a key concern for the sector (Cedefop, 2025a).

Relatively little systematic research has been conducted specifically on career guidance for workers in Austria. The topic is partially addressed in the broader literature on adult education, but dedicated evidence on the effectiveness and reach of career guidance services for those in employment remains limited.

Services for working people

Austria offers a wide range of career and educational guidance services for working people, delivered through several distinct channels. These include the public employment service, the national adult educational counselling network, social partner organisations and private providers (Erwachsenenbildung, n.d.). In-house guidance in companies also plays a role as part of human resources development. Publicly funded services are generally available to all workers, though some programmes are targeted at specific groups.

Public employment services

The public employment service (AMS) is Austria's primary publicly funded provider of career guidance. It operates approximately 70 career guidance centres across the country, offering face-to-face counselling supplemented by a wide range of online information tools. While its services are primarily aimed at jobseekers and the unemployed, they are available to employees seeking career guidance and advice on further training. Funding comes mainly from social security contributions paid by employers and employees, with additional contributions from tax revenue allocated by relevant ministries and, where applicable, from EU funds for specific projects.

The public employment service also provides in-house guidance within companies. These interventions tend to be funded through a combination of public employment service funds alongside funding from the EU for specific projects. However, HR development (HRD) resources in companies are disproportionately focused on managers, junior managers and specialist experts. Less investment is directed towards the development and job security of lower-skilled workers.

Adult educational counselling network

Over the past 15 to 20 years, a nationwide network for adult educational guidance, the Netzwerk Bildungsberatung Österreich [Network Educational Counselling Austria], has been established. Organised regionally at the level of the nine federal provinces, the network brings together a wide variety of regional and local guidance services to jointly develop and test guidance approaches that are then implemented locally by individual network partners. In the past decade, common quality standards and collaborative development have significantly improved the quality and visibility of guidance for adults and workers, while individual institutions retain their independence and can contribute their respective strengths (Mayerl et al., 2019).

Services offered by the network take a range of forms, including face-to-face and telephone counselling, workshops, video counselling and online chat, depending on the presenting need (Erwachsenenbildung, n.d.). The network is co-financed with funds provided by the Ministry of Science (which has responsibility for adult education), the European Social Fund and regional government contributions.

A notable example of good practice in the network is the work of the WAFF (Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds) in Vienna (WAFF, n.d.), which offers a range of guidance and support services for workers in the capital (Gugitscher and Lachmayr, 2023). It functions as a regional network partner and illustrates how the national network model can be implemented effectively at city level, combining guidance with broader labour market support measures (Schlögl et al., 2019).

Employers and social partners

Austria's social partner organisations, the Economic Chamber [Wirtschaftskammer Österreich] and the Chamber of Labour [Arbeiterkammer], together with the trade unions, play an important role in providing career guidance for workers. Both the Economic Chamber and the Chamber of Labour offer employees guidance in a variety of formats. In the Economic Chamber's career guidance centres, guidance is often provided alongside career assessment and the Chambers often also provide in-house company counselling. The Chamber of Labour's guidance services are funded with membership fees paid by chamber members.

Within the social partner framework, continuing education counselling provided by the major continuing education institutions of the social partners plays a significant role. In Austria, Chamber of Labour, together with the trade unions, and the Economic Chamber each operate their own continuing education institutes, which rank among the largest providers of continuing education in the country. These institutes offer a wide range of continuing education counselling services for employees, which typically go beyond simple course recommendations. The adult guidance services offered by the Austrian Economic Chamber are usually subject to a fee, paid either by the client or by the employer as part of HRD.

Target groups and access

In principle, the main guidance programmes described above are open to all workers. However, several foci exist that target specific groups. These include women and those returning to work (particularly women in technical professions), people with few formal qualifications (with an emphasis on upskilling, further development and job security, which is linked to Austria's skilled worker shortage), people with a migrant background (often through multilingual programmes) and other disadvantaged groups. In-house guidance programmes for high-potential employees are also sometimes offered.

Non-specific guidance services, which are not targeted at a clearly defined group, tend to be used predominantly by higher-skilled individuals seeking reorientation or further development. People with lower qualifications, who often have the greatest need for support, make significantly less use of educational and career guidance and can be difficult for mainstream provision to reach. These groups are most likely to be reached through the public employment service during periods of job-seeking or through programmes specifically tailored to them as the target group, and by using a high proportion of peer group work and the introduction of role models.

Challenges

Several key challenges hinder the effective delivery of career guidance for workers in Austria.

- **Reaching those most in need:** Those who would most urgently benefit from guidance and support – people with low skills and those experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage – are the least likely to access services. Barriers include language difficulties, limited visibility of services, lack of awareness of the importance of professional development, accessibility constraints (including service hours that do not accommodate working schedules), and, in some cases, negative experiences from previous employment.
- **Funding uncertainty:** Public services face increasing uncertainty about their long-term funding. In a time of general austerity, budgets for publicly funded services are under pressure, and the predictability of whether, when and to what extent funds will be available is diminishing. This is compounded by the project-based nature of much of the funding for the adult educational counselling network, which creates recurring challenges for planning and operational continuity.
- **Questions of public responsibility:** There is ongoing debate about the extent to which educational and career guidance for working adults should be publicly provided and supported, or whether it is primarily a matter of personal responsibility for individuals and businesses.
- **Intra-company inequity:** In-house HRD guidance frequently reveals that more energy and resources are invested in the development of management and junior management than in the further development and job security of lower-skilled workers.

Innovative approaches

Over the past 15 to 20 years, a nationwide network for adult educational guidance, Netzwerk Bildungsberatung Österreich, has been established. Organised regionally at the federal province level, it brings together the various regional and local guidance services into regional networks and, among other things, jointly develops and tests guidance services for adults that are then implemented locally by the individual network partners. Common quality standards, joint development and exchange have resulted in high-quality standards and have significantly improved the visibility and perception of guidance for adults and employees over the last decade. At the same time, the individual institutions remain independent and can contribute their respective strengths to the network. This approach allows for greater synergy between services and enables new practices to be developed without forcing providers to adopt a single way of working.

Furthermore, given the challenges of engaging specific target populations, a viable strategy is the provision of personalised, outreach-focused support delivered in workplace settings, enabling seamless integration into employees’ daily routines. This was explored in the Erasmus+ funded TRIAS project from 2015 to 2017 (Götz et al., 2016). The project was formally titled *Guidance in the Workplace: Involving Employers, Reaching Low-Skilled*, and it produced, among other outputs, a structured framework for delivering workplace-based guidance. Using peer networks and internal role models may also represent a valuable complementary mechanism in this context.

CANADA



Drafted with the support of Sareena Hopkins of the Canadian Career Development Foundation, Natalie Conte of Blueprint and Tricia Williams of the Future Skills Centre.

Introduction

Canada is a North American democracy with a mixed economy (Nicholson, 2026). It is the second largest country in the world in terms of area, but is relatively sparsely populated, particularly in its colder northern regions (total population approximately 42 million). Administratively, Canada is organised into 10 provinces and three territories, which enjoy considerable devolution of economic and political control. Historically, career development services have largely been within the purview of provincial government; but, in recent years, the federal government has increasingly sought to lead and influence the provision.

Canada has a well-established lifelong career guidance system with a long history and a wide range of services that are available to different groups (Berry et al., 2019). A report from the OECD (2022) focused on Canada’s adult guidance services. It reported unnecessary complexity in the organisation of Canada’s guidance services and found that its services were not as well used as in some other OECD countries. For example, the public employment services offered by Canadian jurisdictions do not have shared branding or common standards. This means that, for a Canadian, the scope and quality of service they receive, as well as their likelihood of being aware of and able to access these services, vary significantly depending on where they live. The problems with awareness and access have also been noted by the Labour Market Information Council and the Future Skills Centre (2021) in Canada.

In recent years, the federal government has funded the Future Skills Centre to undertake research, pilot new ideas and innovate in ways that support Canada’s workforce to prepare for the future. This has emphasised the key role that career development and employment services can play in supporting the adaptation of the workforce for the future (Future Skills Centre, 2026). Many of the ideas discussed in this case study have been funded or developed by the Future Skills Centre.

Despite these limitations, there are a wide range of services on offer for adults, including working adults. To ensure the quality of these services, the career development sector has established a framework for quality and professionalism (Career Development Professional Centre, n.d.), which supports national certification for careers professionals (Career Certification, 2026). However, adherence to this framework remains entirely optional; as a result the quality of services continues to vary.

Services for working people

The OECD’s (2022) report suggests that most publicly funded adult careers services are focused on unemployed people and other adults who are disconnected from the labour market. However, a range of services are also available for working people.

Public employment services

All Canadian jurisdictions offer access to some kind of public employment service. These services are most used by unemployed and displaced workers; but, some jurisdictions include an entitlement for working people and/or employers to access these services. OECD (2022) research suggests that only around 20% of Canadians who use publicly funded careers and employment services are employed.

An example of innovation in this area is the *Thriving Workplaces* project (Blueprint and Thriving Workplaces, 2025). Recognising that an effective labour market depends on both labour supply and labour demand dynamics, this initiative has integrated a structured dual-client approach into publicly funded careers and employment services to provide parallel services to those seeking work (supporting their job search and career progression) and employers (supporting their recruitment and retention). This effectively shifts the focus of public employment services from helping unemployed individuals find work to helping all labour market actors thrive in their work. The approach was co-created by career development experts and practitioners in the service, which has resulted in high levels of buy-in. The project is now being rolled out across the entire province of Nova Scotia.

Research by Myers and Conte (2026) highlights a substantial gap between the services available to mid-career workers in Canada and the services they actually need. This recognition has prompted a range of initiatives aimed at improving career development support for mid-career workers. For example, the *Mid-career Transitions Project* was developed to support mid-career workers in making career transitions (Blueprint, 2024). The approach developed two distinct models, the first focused on an extended workshop-based intervention, while the second used one-to-one counselling and coaching. Participants in these interventions reported high rates of satisfaction, and they strongly agreed that they had achieved the outcomes they were seeking by participating in the programme.

Wider research on mid-career transitions in Canada identified a number of principles that should underpin initiatives aimed at mid-career workers (Myers and Conte, 2026). These include recognising both the importance and challenges of engaging employers, the need to identify likely transition roles for workers looking to change careers, and recognising that mid-career transitions often take time and require training and support. It was also found that successfully scaling programmes like the *Mid-career Transitions Project* will require developing new infrastructure that does not currently exist.

Technology supported guidance services

Canada has invested in *OpportuNext*, a labour market information system designed as a more powerful and dynamic way for individuals to engage with labour market information (withintent, 2025). *OpportuNext* offers a range of matching tools that can provide personalised labour market information that supports citizens in making informed career decisions. Engagement with the tool was strong, although this was closely related to marketing and promotion activities. However, the length and quality of the interactions

were often low. When users engaged more deeply with the tool, they typically responded positively to it and reported that it had been useful to their career development. An evaluation of recommends more direct promotion of the tool to career development practitioners, who can act as champions for its use.

It is also worth noting that another Canadian report questions whether increasing the availability of labour market information will necessarily result in better career decision-making (Tregebov et al., 2024). It suggests that people are quickly overwhelmed by the amount of information on offer and that, ironically, providing less but more targeted and better supported information is more effective. The report ultimately suggests that embedding labour market information into wider career development services is critical.

The Future Skills Centre has led the pilot of *PathPilot*, an AI-powered tool that provides job searches, resume optimisation, cover letter generation, upskilling recommendations, interview preparation and mock interview features (DARO, 2026). An evaluation found that jobseekers universally found *PathPilot* to be a helpful additional resource for career exploration. It was effective for jobseekers because it enabled them to complete applications quicker and to complete more applications by quickly tailoring resumes and cover letters using keyword matching and enabling more thorough preparation for specific opportunities. The evaluation also reported that the most promising service model combines the AI tool with human career development professionals, because the AI tool increases the time available for guided, time-intensive tasks like mock interviews.

Employers and trade unions

Some career guidance provision is offered by (and funded by) employers and trade unions. Research by the OECD (2022) suggests that of those adults who had accessed career development services in the last five years, 14% had done so through their employer, 8% through a business organisation and 3% through a trade union. However, access through these routes is often patchy and typically focused on higher-skilled employees.

An example of a trade union that has entered this space is the Canadian public sector workers union, PIPSC. The union has developed Navigar, a web-based resource that helps members create career plans, highlighting the information they need to obtain their next job or move their career forward through further training (Future Skills Centre, 2025). Users can use the tool’s predictive capabilities to understand the skills required to do the jobs of the future.

The development of the new sector-based Workforce Alliances opens up new possibilities for social partners to collaborate on skills and career development (Government of Canada, 2026). However, at present, this has not resulted in the development of any major new initiatives that address careers guidance in the workforce.

Private sector provision

Private sector career coaching is well-developed and provides access for people who can afford to pay. These might typically include midlife career changers and people in sunset and disrupted industries. According to the OECD, around 22% of people who have used career development services in Canada have done so through the private sector.

DENMARK

Drafted with the support of Professor Rie Thomsen, Aarhus University



Introduction

Denmark is a European democracy with a mixed economy and a population of around six million people (Anderson, 2026). The country has a long history of guidance provision and a high level of professionalism and quality assurance in the field (Cedefop, 2020a).

Public careers services are primarily located in and around the formal education system, and, to a lesser extent, they also serve unemployed people. Working people more typically access services through their employer, trade union and through Denmark’s e-guidance service. However, there is relatively little coordination between the different elements of Denmark’s lifelong guidance system.

Services for working people

E-guidance service

The main public service available to working adults is the e-guidance service (UddannelsesGuiden, n.d.a). This allows any adults to engage with public careers services through online chat, telephone or using a range of other communication methods e.g. the service uses social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The e-guidance service is funded by the national government and serves as a centre of excellence for adult career guidance in Denmark. An aspect of this is providing some training and support services for other guidance professionals, HR professionals and those working in adult education.

The e-guidance service has developed a new service called Check Your Working Life, which is aimed at working people over the age of 25 (UddannelsesGuiden, n.d.b). It consists of three sessions with the same careers adviser, who supports the individual in a detailed audit of their working life and helps them develop plans for the future. People often use this service to consider whether they might want to change direction in their career or retrain. The service is available free of charge to anyone who wants it.

The e-guidance service has also recently partnered with other public agencies to help raise the skill level of people in Denmark, with a particular focus on maths and Danish (UddannelsesGuiden, n.d.c). This service targets provision to people with low basic skills. However, successfully reaching low and unskilled workers through digital channels can present challenges.

Study and career guidance Denmark

Study and Career Guidance Denmark [Studievalg Denmark] is another guidance service funded by the government and offered as a universal service. It is mainly youth-focused and tends to be organised around decision and transition points between upper secondary and tertiary education, but it can also be accessed by adults considering further education and training in vocational or tertiary programmes. Careers advisers visit all secondary school classes once a year during the three years of upper secondary. They also visit all vocational training schools. It is well used by younger adults who often spend time in work prior to going into tertiary education (which typically happens later in Denmark than in the UK). On average, Danish young people spend two years working, travelling or attending folk high school between completing upper secondary and starting tertiary education. Folk high schools are a kind of developmental and non-assessed education which is common in Denmark and typically taken between high school and post-secondary education. During this period after high school, Study and Career Guidance Denmark targets young adults who are working, as well as their parents.

Public employment services (PES)

The Danish national public employment service was recently closed. Each municipality is now responsible for delivering a public employment service. Some of their approaches are quite innovative and include partnerships with employers or other careers services; but it is difficult to get an overview of the provision because it is still fairly emergent. It is also not clear how commonly such services are accessed by working adults.

A review of the services offered by an example municipality (Kalundborg Kommune, n.d.) suggests that services remain focused on young people, unemployed workers and those who are ill (both employed and unemployed). It includes a range of support and advisory services for people who have become ill and need help with accessing support and adaptations in their workplace or transitioning to a new job or moving out of the labour market. It also includes a range of services for employers, mainly focused on recruitment and onboarding, but also providing some advice and support about retention and managing employee sickness, disabilities, training and absenteeism.

Køge Kommune (2025) conducted an interesting experiment by offering and publicising access to three sessions of free career counselling for all citizens over the age of 25. This includes those who have lost their jobs and people who have lost motivation in their current roles. The pilot has been deemed successful and has engaged over 400 people. The Kommune is currently exploring ways to extend the offer beyond the pilot phase.

Another interesting experiment was the AMIGO project, conducted by Sealand Region (AMIGO, n.d.), which targeted unskilled employed adults and young people. AMIGO focused on opportunities in green transitions and aimed to support unskilled workers by accrediting their prior learning and providing access to vocational courses to help them move from unskilled to skilled. Project evaluation showed high levels of satisfaction with the career guidance but highlighted that it was very difficult to recruit companies and individual participants to the project.

Employers and trade unions

Many workplaces/employers have careers programmes which are offered to their staff. This may include career guidance activities incorporated into the annual staff development dialogue. The provision of an annual staff development review is regulated by law. This is becoming a stronger trend in Danish companies, driven by the desire to deliver decent work, be seen as an attractive employer, increase retention and reduce stress-related sickness.

Unions and work insurance funds in Denmark are increasingly offering career guidance as a member service. This service is becoming increasingly professionalised. Union services are funded through a mix of membership fees and funding from collective agreements. An example is the HK (n.d.) union, which offers members telephone and online guidance services where they can discuss issues such as how they can develop in the workplace, access further education and training or change their occupation. Members can also access support with transition skills, like CV and application writing and optimising LinkedIn profiles. HK has partnered with the Dutch training provider Saxion to develop its career guidance service based on the *Norwegian Quality Framework for Career Guidance*, with particular focus on the career learning model (Bakke et al., 2021).

Other initiatives

Other initiatives and services are available. These include::

- Career development initiatives for older workers, which are typically led by non-governmental organisations rather than by the government.
- One-stop shops that bring together a range of public services in a municipality. They are designed to support access, as well as effective cross-referral and collaboration.

ESTONIA

Drafted with the support of Kristina Orion, Head of Career Services, Eesti Töötukassa [the Estonian public employment service].



Introduction

Estonia is a small northern European country with a parliamentary democracy (Köörna, 2026). Although it was formerly a Soviet republic, the country rapidly and successfully transitioned to a market economy and is now well integrated into the European Union. It has a population of around 1.5 million people.

The country has a well-established career guidance system (Cedefop, 2020b), and its adult guidance system was explored in detail by Hutchinson and Hooley (2025). Its guidance system includes access to universal career guidance services through the public employment service, along with a wide range of services available through the education system. For example, adults considering university admission may be able to access guidance from the university they are applying to. A review of the Estonian guidance system found that the overall user experience was positive, although there was a need to improve services in the workplace (Kallaste et al., 2021).

Eesti Töötukassa [the Estonian public employment service] (n.d.a.) is central to the Estonian guidance system. Although Eesti Töötukassa operates independently from the government, the list of labour market services and benefits is agreed and regulated by the statutory policy of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. Input into service provision and development mostly comes from the organisation’s tri-partite supervisory board, where representatives of the government, employers and employees help steer the direction. The programme of services offered by Eesti Töötukassa is reviewed and updated regularly, approximately once every year or two.

Services for working adults

Most of Estonia’s careers services are primarily targeted at people in education and those who are not working; however the country’s strongly universal system means that most services are also available to working people. These are mainly delivered through the public employment service.

Public employment service

Eesti Töötukassa offers free services to everyone, including working adults. These generally take the form of individual counselling sessions with clients (which may involve several meetings with one client) or career workshops. Each client can choose the activities they need, and their counsellor can also make suggestions. This universal service is funded by Estonia’s unemployment insurance premium, which is payable by all working people and some other citizens (Eesti Töötukassa, n.d.b.).

Anyone in need of career counselling can register and take part in the counselling sessions and workshops. There are currently no restrictions. Services can also be accessed anonymously if the person prefers. Typically, services are accessed by working adults who are at risk of losing a job or who want to change careers because they cannot, or do not want to, remain in the same job. However, working adults are not priority customers and have not been the focus of any major engagement campaigns. Consequently, the number of working people using the service remains relatively low. A study conducted on behalf of the service in 2024 revealed that only 31% of working adults knew that free career counselling was available for them.

Feedback from those using career guidance has been regularly collected since 2019. The service uses the Net Promoter Score to measure client satisfaction. It regularly finds that satisfaction among working adults who use the service is very high (60–70%) and that these clients are more satisfied than unemployed workers and young people. This high level of satisfaction is also found in other data collected by the service.

Eesti Töötukassa offers a four-part workshop series called Restart, which is aimed at adults (working or unemployed) who feel stuck in their working life or who have been unable to find a job. It supports participants in making changes to their working lives. Participants can map their personal resources and skills, compose a personal action plan, build their motivation and take practical steps to move their lives forward.

Career guidance also serves as a gateway for people to access free training (Eesti Töötukassa, n.d.c.). People need to meet with a career counsellor before they can apply for free training. Free training is only available to working adults who meet certain criteria. Career counsellors help analyse what kind of training would be best for the person, determine whether they are eligible, and, if not, identify alternative options that would develop their skills.

Private sector provision

Some private sector organisations (mostly recruitment companies) and independent career counsellors also offer career counselling and career development workshops for a fee.

THE NETHERLANDS

Drafted with the support of Jouke Post, Saxon University.



Introduction

The Netherlands is a European democracy with a liberal mixed economy (Rowen, 2026). The country has a population of around 18 million people. It has a well-established guidance system and was a subject of previous Gatsby research on adult guidance provision (Hutchinson and Hooley, 2025). There have been few changes since that study took place, so the report continues to be a useful source of information about adult guidance provision in the country.

In the Netherlands, responsibility for career guidance is divided among three main ministries: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy; and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. A longstanding foundation of Dutch legislation is that it supports the provision of career guidance. This includes legislation focused on the unemployed, such as the Unemployment Insurance Act, the Work and Income According to Labour Capacity Act, and the Work and Care Act. There is also legislation aimed at engaging those outside the labour market, including those with disabilities, in the workforce. In 2022, the government focused on strategy and policy measures that brought the various strands of legislation together to improve lifelong learning and career guidance in both the education and public employment sectors (Cedefop, 2023).

Professional standards are set by the profession itself (Hutchinson and Hooley, 2025). The country does not have specific bachelor's or master's programmes in career guidance, nor does it have any recognised training at higher levels. Given the limited regulatory framework for professionalism, the Dutch Association for Career Counsellors and Job Coaches (NOLOC) took the lead in professionalising the sector and developed a professional register with professional standards and ethics. So far, around 3,600 practitioners have been certified by and registered with NOLOC. Members who want to apply for certification by NOLOC must have at least a diploma from a university of applied science in human development, education, sociology or psychology, and compile a portfolio of training and work demonstrating at least 100 hours of career guidance training and 1,400 hours of experience all gained in the last three years. Decisions about certification are made by a separate organisation with a panel of career guidance counsellors who assess the applicant and decide whether they meet the conditions and qualifications set by NOLOC.

The most significant change since the publication of the Hutchinson and Hooley (2025) report is the development of new regional employment centres that bring together a range of career and employment support services into a single access point in each locality (Post, 2024; Werkcentrum, n.d.). These centres are public-private partnerships that involve a range of partners from the state, the private sector and civil society e.g. trade unions.

Services for working people

As in most countries, the majority of the guidance and career development services in the Netherlands are targeted at people in education and unemployed workers. However, the Netherlands does have a strong tradition of providing guidance for working people, with the trade unions playing a particularly critical role in the delivery of these services.

Public employment services (PES)

The Dutch public employment service, although principally targeted at unemployed people, also provides some services for working people (Hutchinson and Hooley, 2025). It is also the main supplier of valid and reliable labour market information in the Netherlands, providing labour market data for its own staff, other careers providers and individuals. They also publish annual national and regional labour market forecasts on their website. This information is collected monthly, and the data can be analysed by profession, sector and region.

In the Netherlands, the public employment service is working with a range of partners to develop a new labour market information initiative called CompetentNL, based on the Flemish system, Competent. The database lists the hard skills and soft skills associated with different professions, so that individuals can better understand specific job requirements. It uses a hybrid AI system that continuously scrapes data from key sources, such as job postings, to keep this database up to date and relevant to the labour market.

Regional employment centres

The development of the regional employment centres has improved the coordination of guidance services and increased access. The regional centres offer a universal service, open to everyone. Different services are available for different client groups. While many are targeted at groups disconnected from the labour market, anyone who wants to talk about their career can go to a regional centre and speak to a careers professional for free.

The development of the regional employment centres has also resulted in some new funding for career guidance specifically for working people, delivered through the trade unions. However, since this innovation is still in its early stages, it will be important to monitor it and see whether it can become embedded into the system and public consciousness. The government has indicated plans to reduce this funding in the future and has challenged the trade unions to replace it with sectoral funding. It remains unclear whether this experiment will be successful (Orie, 2026).

Trade unions and employers

In the Netherlands, trade unions are established as providers of career guidance services that equip workers to navigate a more flexible labour market. Their services relate to the sector/occupation(s) from which the union draws its membership. Trade union services include career coaching for individuals, career courses alongside other services all of which are typically available online and in-person.

The Christian National Trade Union Federation has established its own careers service which is called *James*. The aim of this service is to help workers take control of their careers. The service is available to union members, but also to non-members. One trade union activist (Orie, 2026) argues that the delivery of a careers service aligns well with the wider aims of the union, saying,

“ *In addition, we are used to fighting for individuals and their specific situation in addition to the collective interest. You notice that in our approach. For us, career development is not an abstract theme, but daily business. And that makes us the right party to guide people from work-to-work.* ”

James offers a wide range of services, including one-to-one career guidance, workshops and an e-guidance service. It includes specific services that support people who are facing redundancy or insecurity at work. The union is also developing a new service that it calls *Career Check*. This offer service users a career review, which particularly focuses on the next three to five years. The union is negotiating with employers to have *Career Check* included in the collective agreement and for it to be funded accordingly. This provides a good example of career guidance services being actively promoted as being of dual benefit (for employers and employees). This is a new development but one which has the potential to improve the funding of and engagement with career guidance for working people.

In addition to including career development in the collective agreement, many Dutch companies also invest in their employees’ career development in a range of other ways. Employers, particularly larger organisations and government departments, often employ a career coach or provide other internal career development services for their employees. The core rationale has been to support upskilling and improve the quality of the workforce. However, some employers remain sceptical about the value of career guidance and fear that it will lead to retention problems.

NEW ZEALAND

Drafted with the support of Jennie Miller of the Career Development Association of New Zealand (CDANZ).



Introduction

New Zealand is a Pacific island democracy with a small, open economy. The country has a population of around five million people spread across two main islands. The major population centres are in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. New Zealand has a tradition of strong public services and a mixed economy, with close trading relationships with Australia, China and other Asia-Pacific nations.

Historically, New Zealand has maintained a well-regarded national careers service. A review by Watts (2007) identified New Zealand as potentially having one of the best national careers strategies and programmes in the world at that time. This was embodied in Careers New Zealand, a dedicated national organisation with offices across the country, staff working directly with adults and communities, and teams deployed to support schools.

However, in 2017, the government amalgamated Careers New Zealand with the Tertiary Education Commission. Cabinet decided that Tertiary Education Commission would not continue Careers New Zealand’s provision of direct career services to adults, and that responsibility for career advisers in schools would be moved to the Ministry of Education. These decisions proved to have consequences. By 2019, after a series of restructures, well over 100 careers professionals who had been employed by Careers New Zealand – most of whom were members of CDANZ – had either been made redundant or had left. The subsequent government did not reverse course, and the specialist careers infrastructure that had previously existed was effectively dismantled. Careers New Zealand was essentially disestablished.

The Tertiary Education Commission has two core legislative functions that it is required to deliver in the careers space. The first is to provide a publicly available careers information service that includes a database of information about occupations and tertiary education and training. To date, the new website, *Tahatū Career Navigator*, has focused on young people in the secondary education system. The scope has recently been broadened to include other audiences, including a hub for career practitioners. The second function is to facilitate and strengthen the connections between schools, employers and tertiary education organisations to ensure students are better prepared for employment and further education and training or both.

Since 2018, the Tertiary Education Commission has led the development of a National Careers System Strategy (released in 2023), collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders across the careers system. This approach reflects the significant intersections in careers, education, employment and social development systems, as well as the broad range of stakeholders involved in the careers system in New Zealand. It is a long-term strategy with three key focus areas: to strengthen connections, grow quality careers support and ensure equitable access. An action plan was released alongside the strategy.

Progress has been slow and incremental, and the strategy is widely viewed by the professional careers community as falling short of what a robust national system would require. The adult careers space as typically gained little policy attention in New Zealand, with the focus usually being on the education sector.

A further structural challenge is the declining availability of professional education for career practitioners. New Zealand previously offered several sub- and degree-level programmes, along with a master's qualification in career development. These have largely disappeared, meaning the qualification route is now a single diploma. However, the diploma is not seen as aligning sufficiently with the CDANZ Competency Framework, which ensures the competency of career practitioners. This has created a significant workforce pipeline problem for the entire careers sector.

Despite these challenges, New Zealand does have some provision for adults, which we describe in the sections below.

Services for working people

Public employment services

The primary vehicle for publicly funded adult careers and employment support is the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), which administers New Zealand's benefit system, including the Jobseeker Support payment. MSD operates a network of Work and Income offices and funds a wide range of employment-focused programmes nationally and regionally. However, these services predominantly target unemployed and benefit-dependent individuals rather than working adults. Access for the employed is severely limited. Current funding is focused on supporting NEETs (those not in employment, education or training) who receive the jobseeker benefit into work.

The most notable exception is the Direct Career Service (DCS), which was established during the Covid-19 pandemic as a rapid response to widespread job losses. The DCS was co-developed by CDANZ, MSD, and the Tertiary Education Commission. Crucially, at the instigation of CDANZ, the service was designed to employ qualified career practitioners as contractors, rather than routing funding through a single large provider – an arrangement that, in the New Zealand context, would typically result in practitioners receiving significantly lower income. At its peak, this model meant that approximately 100 CDANZ members were engaged as contractors, delivering services online, by telephone and from MSD Work and Income offices and libraries.

The DCS was originally open to any member of the public, not just those who were unemployed or receiving a benefit. However, the new focus for the service is on the unemployed, particularly younger NEETs, and those at risk of losing their jobs. There is no cap on the number of sessions a client may receive: if someone needs help, the service is available to them. The original model was intentionally universal in design and this universal approach has been strongly advocated for by CDANZ.

A formal evaluation of the DCS was completed approximately a year after its launch. The evaluation was both qualitative and quantitative and was conducted by an independent company. The results were sufficiently positive for the service to be retained beyond the pandemic period, despite successive budget reductions. At the time of writing, around 35 practitioners continue to deliver the DCS nationally, mainly online, with some also maintaining a presence in MSD offices.

The DCS can be accessed through MSD's Connected website and a dedicated freephone number, but both routes suffer from visibility issues. The service is poorly promoted and remains largely unknown to the public. Practitioners originally contracted were expected to do their own marketing, but this has not generally occurred. The low profile of the telephone service is at odds with its universal access policy.

There are also concerns within the professional community about the direction of the DCS. Increasing data collection requirements – intended to enable MSD to track client journeys through the system – raise ethical questions about confidentiality and informed consent. CDANZ joined the contractors in raising these concerns directly with MSD, noting the tension between the need to demonstrate impact to secure funding and the profession's commitment to client confidentiality.

MSD also funds an early intervention service for workers affected by large-scale redundancies and business closures. However, this service does not employ qualified career practitioners and is largely limited to basic job search support, such as CV writing. It has been criticised for failing to meet the scale and depth of need experienced by workers facing significant career disruption.

A new initiative has recently been launched, involving chambers of commerce partnering with MSD to match job seekers with employers. This active labour market intervention focuses primarily on those who are unemployed rather than those in work.

Employers and employee assistance programmes

Employee assistance programmes represent a significant, though inequitably distributed, source of career guidance for working adults in New Zealand. Employee assistance programmes are employer-funded support services provided through specialist third-party companies. Employees of subscribing organisations can access free counselling sessions – typically between three and six – as a workplace benefit. Depending on the employee assistance programme provider, this support may include career counselling. A number of CDANZ members work primarily or partly in the employee assistance programme sector.

Employee assistance programme provision in New Zealand has existed for many years and has developed organically through employer purchasing decisions rather than as a result of government policy. Subscribing organisations tend to be larger employers, such as universities, councils, and larger companies and organisations. Smaller employers, including small and medium-sized enterprises, are generally unable or unwilling to fund employee assistance programmes, meaning that the working adults most likely to access career guidance through this route are those in better-resourced workplaces.

This creates a significant equity gap. As with many career guidance systems internationally, those best able to afford private career support independently are often the same individuals whose employers offer subsidised access through employee assistance programmes. Workers in lower-income sectors and smaller organisations have considerably less access to career guidance while they are in employment.

A related source of provision is outplacement support, offered by some employers when planning workforce reductions. Outplacement services support workers facing redundancy to navigate career transitions and secure new employment. However, there is no statutory requirement for employers to provide outplacement support in New Zealand, and access is therefore highly variable. Some workers facing redundancy receive no careers support whatsoever.

The Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) funds another distinct stream of career-related support. ACC is New Zealand’s national accident compensation scheme. When an accident prevents someone from returning to their previous role, ACC may fund vocational rehabilitation services, including work with career practitioners to identify and support alternative employment pathways. Approximately a third of CDANZ members work in the ACC-funded vocational rehabilitation sector, which is described as a relatively well-resourced and professionalised area of practice. The sector underwent significant restructuring around 2012 and now operates through a smaller number of large specialist providers who employ related services to collaborate on contracts, such as physiotherapists, psychologists and occupational therapists, alongside career practitioners.

Private sector provision

A private sector market for career coaching and counselling exists in New Zealand, providing access for those who can afford to self-fund. This provision tends to attract clients who are engaged in significant career transitions, including mid-career changers and those affected by disruption in declining sectors. As with other countries, private sector provision is limited by its cost and is unlikely to be accessible to low- and middle-income workers without subsidy.

NORWAY

Drafted with the support of Ingjerd Espolin Gaarder and Tonje Gravås of the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills.



Introduction

Norway is a European country with a population of slightly over five million people (Nordic Co-operation, n.d.). It has a stable democratic system and a strong welfare state with a well-developed education system and public employment service delivered through NAV – the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration.

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, a directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research, is responsible for the development of a lifelong national careers guidance system and for providing digital guidance services. Delivery of the services within the national career guidance system is the responsibility of a range of actors including schools, universities and the public employment service.

The country has invested in its career guidance system over a prolonged period, going back to at least the early 2000s (Bakke and Hooley, 2024). It is designed as lifelong; with services available to young people and adults at every stage of life. At the heart of the career guidance system is the *National Quality Framework for Career Guidance* (Bakke et al., 2021; Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2023), which provides national-level guidance on the professional skills of careers practitioners, ethical standards and practice, and a quality assurance model. The framework also includes a model for career competence, which is about using the career guidance system to develop competence in the population so they can better manage their own careers, even during change and transitions.

The directorate has also developed a Career Guidance Quality Lab (<https://kik.hkdir.no/en>), which provides practitioners with tools, reflection exercises and resources to help them to engage systematically with the country’s quality framework.

Services for working people

Norway provides a range of services for working people. These services are delivered through regional public careers centres; a digital career guidance service that delivers guidance through chat, email and telephone; some services are also available through employers or trade unions. Some evidence suggests that younger people prefer using digital guidance services, while older people prefer the face-to-face services offered by the careers centres (Berg and Lervik, 2022). The rationale for delivering guidance to working people is to improve skills alignment and to support engagement with the education and training system (Opinion, 2023).

Careers centres

The primary method for delivering career guidance to working people in Norway is through the counties’ network of public careers centres. There is at least one career centre in every county of Norway, and they offer a range of universal services (Bettum, 2020; Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2026). Overall, there are 28 career centres, spread over 59 geographical locations.

The duty to provide universal careers services is enshrined in law, and one of the primary ways this duty is implemented is through careers centres (Lervik and Hatlem, 2023). The careers centres are jointly funded by national and local government. This includes the provision of on-demand one-to-one career guidance services delivered by professional counsellors, as well as short workshops and courses.

The careers centres often offer more targeted services, such as those focusing on refugees and migrants, people with disabilities and young people disconnected from the labour market. The focus on refugees has increased in recent years after a legal change that specifies career guidance as part of the introduction programme, making it a right and an obligation for newly arrived migrants to participate in career guidance. It is an important part of their integration into the Norwegian labour market and society (Flatø et al., 2023). Fostering cooperation between relevant local stakeholders has been key to the effectiveness of career guidance for refugees (Proba samfunnsanalyse, 2025).

The careers centres often function as a hub for guidance services in each county and typically employ some of the most expert practitioners. In some cases, they deliver training and development activities for the wider local guidance community. This includes collaborating with the education system, NAV and a range of other bodies (Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, 2026).

A regular survey of careers centre users is conducted, and from this an annual report is produced providing headline usage figures and sometimes more detail on key issues. The 2019 survey of users found that use of the centres was increasing, that users tended to come from sections of the population with lower skills and qualifications, and that levels of satisfaction for services were high and have remained so (Bettum, 2020; Birkeland et al., 2021). Users highlighted that the careers centres have improved their confidence and increased their engagement with new opportunities (Lervik and Hatlem, 2023).

Even though the volume of usage of the centres has continued to increase (Lervik and Hatlem, 2024) and user surveys highlight the value of career centres to employers, the local economy and individuals (Lervik and Hatlem, 2024), public awareness of the careers centres remains low, with only around 10% of the population aware that they can access these services (Opinion, 2023).

Digital career development services

Norway also offers free digital career guidance services (<https://karriereveiledning.no/>) provided by the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The digital career guidance service provides one-to-one guidance mostly through chat, but also by telephone and email. It also delivers a range of webinars and wider career and transition support services (Lervik and Hatlem, 2024). These include targeted services for groups such as young people in transition, the parents of young people who are trying to support their children and migrants, alongside the universal offer available to all citizens.

Usage of the e-guidance service has continued to increase, with over 23,500 enquiries recorded in 2025 (Sønnesyn et al., 2025). The user base is predominantly under 30 (Berg and Lervik, 2022). Public awareness of digital career guidance services is low, with only around 6% of people aware that they can access these services (Opinion, 2023). However, the numbers are increasing and the most recent report shows that young people’s awareness of these services is much higher (Sønnesyn et al., 2025).

Trade unions and employers

In addition to the public careers services set out above, working people can also access career guidance through their employer or through membership of a trade union.

An example is the City of Oslo, which offers a range of support services for employees, including stress management, counselling and life support, and career guidance and employability support (Spir*Oslo, n.d.). The career guidance offered is designed to support workers understand their strengths and interests and develop strategies to either stay in their current job or explore new opportunities.

The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills has recently been investigating the role of career guidance in trade unions. They have featured a series of articles on their online magazine (<https://veilednerforum.no>) that highlight the breadth of career guidance practice in Norwegian trade unions. One example is the natural scientists’ trade union, Naturviterne, which provides career guidance to its members as part of the membership fee (Skjelde, 2026). This service is available either at the union’s premises in Oslo or online. The union also runs online career courses and webinars and helps members connect with each other to build networks.

NAV (Public employment service)

NAV (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) brings together the public employment service with broader welfare and benefit functions. The aim is to create an integrated service which supports citizens in engaging with the state and the economy. Although NAV provides a range of careers and employment advice services, many are focused on groups that are not part of the labour market and are therefore not directly relevant to this study. However, it does engage with working people in some important areas.

Firstly, a project is being developed that provides career guidance for people on sick leave to help them return to work, work more sustainably or consider career changes to support positive health. This aligns with wider efforts by NAV to support workers during periods of disruption and transition.

Secondly, NAV is a key partner in a wider range of programmes designed to support the career development of citizens in Norway (Svanæs et al., 2025). We have already discussed the collaboration between NAV and the careers centres above, and evaluations of this and other partnerships involving NAV in career support suggest that it is a valuable partner.

THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Drafted with the support of Dr Nuala Whelan, Maynooth University.



Introduction

The Republic of Ireland is a European parliamentary country and part of the British Isles (O’Beirne Ranelagh, 2026). It has a mixed market economy and a population of around 5.6 million people. The country has a well-developed guidance system that provides guidance within both the education system and the employment system (Cedefop, 2025b). At the end of 2023, the Government of Ireland published the *National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024-2030)* (Government of Ireland, 2023), which continues to provide strategic direction for the country’s lifelong guidance system. The framework has been an important development because it has fostered inter-ministerial collaboration and supported the development of a genuinely lifelong approach to guidance provision in the country.

Services for working people

Despite the broader strengths of the *National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024-2030)*, it barely mentions services for working people. This means that while the country has a strong vision for its overall lifelong guidance provision, it does not truly extend to working people. There are a range of services that working people can access, but there is a major question about the level of awareness within the system about these services. Most working people do not access guidance when they are employed.

A key issue for working people is the opening hours of most guidance services. Some guidance services have conducted interesting experiments by offering late-night opening hours and promoting their services as accessible after work, but these experiments remain limited. In general, a lack of marketing for guidance services results in a lack of public awareness of their existence.

Public employment service

In the past, the Irish public employment service, Intreo, was a universal service available to both working people and unemployed workers (Department of Social Protection, 2025). However, since the financial crisis, Intreo has largely stopped seeing working people. It still sees part-time workers, particularly those who are receiving benefits, but no longer attempts to offer a universal service. Some targeted services may be available to workers if they belong to a wider priority group e.g. single parents.

Education and training boards

The education and training boards are responsible for local tertiary-level vocational colleges and training providers. They include a guidance function focused on educational guidance for those considering entering tertiary-level provision, but they also see other people with different guidance needs.

While the education and training boards technically offer a universal guidance service, it is not something that is widely known. Most of the population would see them as being linked to tertiary-level training. There are also concerns about their impartiality because they are so strongly linked to the colleges and training providers they are based in. However, it is important to note that the education and training boards are staffed by highly qualified guidance professionals.

Community-based services

There is a well-developed network of community-based support services. These are often based on multi-professional approaches but usually include employment and career support among their key functions. The careers and employment staff in these services are not normally fully qualified guidance professionals.

The community-based services are typically highly localised. They usually operate on a mixed funding model, drawing funding from the government, the European Union and other funders e.g. employers and charities. These local community-based services might also receive contracts from the public employment service to deliver services to a range of groups, but these are not typically focused on working people. The complexity and lack of consistency of the funding for community-based services mean that there is considerable variety in what is offered across the country.

Ballymun Job Centre, a local community provider, developed a project, with funding from a private trust, to deliver careers and employment support to precarious workers (Ballymun Job Centre, n.d.). However, the funding was temporary, and the project has now ended. Ballymun Job Centre has also been involved in a range of other projects targeting working people in the community, particularly those in low-paying and low-skill occupations. One, called *Choosing My Future*, which was also funded through a private trust, has been evaluated and found to be effective in supporting employability and personal development. It is estimated that it generated six euros of social value for every one euro invested (Fitzpatrick, 2025).

Employers and trade unions

Employers, particularly larger employers, often offer a range of career development services. These might include learning and development, coaching, performance review and wider support through HR. There is a national training fund that employers pay into, which can fund training for people in employment, but it does not include guidance provision.

There is little consistency in the provision. In general, trade unions are not really involved in the delivery of guidance.

Private sector provision

Private sector career guidance is available. Many guidance practitioners are keen to work in private sector provision, but it is unclear how big this market really is. People might pay around 500 euros for three to five sessions of private sector guidance. Consequently, this kind of service is mainly used by professional people who can afford the fees.

SOUTH KOREA

Drafted with the support of Professor Ji-Yeon Lee, Graduate School of Education, Career Development, Guidance and Education, Ajou University.



Introduction

South Korea, a liberal democracy in East Asia with a population of about 51 million, ranks among the world’s most industrialised nations (Lee, 2026). Its economic development is driven by semiconductor innovation, advanced manufacturing, and information and communication technologies, positioning the country as a pivotal actor in the global economy. As a member of the OECD, South Korea is seen as exemplifying an industrial state that leads international markets through sustained innovation and technological advancement.

South Korea has rapidly developed its career guidance services since the 1990s (Yoon and Pyun, 2018). It now offers a range of career development services through schools, colleges, universities and both public and private employment services. Eligibility for career counselling services in South Korea is inclusive, covering students, unemployed job seekers, employed workers and those preparing for occupational transitions.

The South Korean career guidance system is relatively professionalised. Assessments by the OECD and the World Bank recognise South Korea’s lifelong guidance and career development system as relatively strong in comparison with other OECD countries (OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

Career counselling services in Korea have a mixed-delivery governance model, involving central ministries, public agencies, local governments, private contractors and employers. The Ministry of Employment and Labour has principal responsibility for policy design, funding allocation, service standards and also oversight of public employment centres and national employment support programmes. The Ministry of Education supports lifelong career development policy and research-based infrastructure. Public agencies such as the Korea Employment Information Service operate national digital systems, while the Human Resources Development Service of Korea (HRD Korea) links career counselling to vocational training and skill development (Human Resources Development Korea, n.d.). The Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training provides research, standards and assessment frameworks.

Although coverage is broad, institutional fragmentation across ministries and administrative levels complicates the delivery of career services. The OECD has noted that this fragmentation reduces the efficiency of the system.

Career counselling activities in South Korea are financed through a mixed public-private funding structure, centred on government expenditure and social insurance mechanisms. The central government budget administered by the Ministry of Employment and Labour funds public employment centres, national programmes and payments to outsourced service providers (Ministry of Employment and Labour, n.d.). The Employment Insurance Fund, financed by employers, employees and government contributions, supports counselling linked to reemployment, job transition and training. Local governments provide supplementary funding for region-specific initiatives, while employers and individuals finance parallel employee assistance programmes and private career services.

Services for working people

South Korea provides a multilayered system of career counselling services for working professionals, delivered through national government programmes, digital platforms, local government initiatives, employer-based services and private providers. These services aim to support career development, job transition, reemployment and sustainable employability throughout the life course (Korea Employment Information Service, n.d.a.).

Korea’s career counselling system explicitly prioritises workers according to labour market risk rather than career stage or income level. Highest priority is given to at-risk workers, including unemployed individuals, non-regular and platform workers, and those affected by industrial restructuring. Mid-career workers aged approximately 40–60 are a strategic policy priority because of the risks associated with early retirement and age-based employment barriers. Highly stable, high-income professionals and executives are not excluded from services, but they are not the focus of public provision, as they are expected to rely primarily on employer or private support.

Public employment services (PES)

Public employment centres operated by the Ministry of Employment and Labour (n.d.) are the central infrastructure for delivering services to working people. They provide free or subsidised individual career counselling, competency and aptitude assessments, job-transition guidance and referrals to vocational training for both the unemployed and employed workers preparing for career change.

In practice, the most frequent users of these services are the unemployed, displaced workers and those experiencing job instability, since counselling is often linked to income support or reemployment programmes. The national employment support programme integrates intensive career counselling, individualised employment plans, vocational training and income support for vulnerable workers.

The government has evaluated the career development support provided through the public employment service and found that approaches that integrate professional career guidance result in higher employment stability and programme completion compared to job-matching-only approaches (Korea Employment Information Service, n.d.b). However, high counsellor caseloads and performance pressures can limit the depth of individualised guidance, particularly for complex mid-career cases.

Services for foreign workers

South Korea also offers a range of career development support services for foreign workers through HRD Korea (Quannykim, 2025). This includes the provision of services that induct foreign workers into the Korean economy, educating them on their labour rights, supporting vocational training, job matching and re-certification processes.

Local government

Local governments, particularly metropolitan ones such as Seoul, operate specialised mid- and late-career counselling programmes addressing second careers, retirement transition and extended working lives. Local governments also co-finance region-specific services and frequently outsource their delivery to private and non-profit providers under government contracts. These services are well used by mid-career professionals experiencing stagnation, burnout or forced transitions. These kinds of professionals are often keen to move into expanding fields like IT or healthcare.

Digital career development services

Digital career services are delivered through the Employment24 portal and the AI-powered JobCare system, both operated by the Korea Employment Information Service (n.d.a). Employment24 provides a comprehensive careers information portal, although its delivery is somewhat complicated by the fact that the opportunities it describes are from multiple ministries.

JobCare offers individualised labour market diagnostics, skills-gap analysis and career pathway recommendations that support both counsellors and users, particularly employed and mid-career professionals. These systems demonstrate how AI-powered diagnostics can enhance counselling quality and accessibility when integrated with professional guidance. JobCare is explicitly described as decision support, not as a self-service replacement for existing counselling services, in part to acknowledge the risks of digital inequality.

Blended delivery models that combine digital diagnostics with face-to-face counselling remain essential for ensuring equity and effectiveness.

Employers and trade unions

Employer-funded employee assistance programmes and private career consulting firms supplement the public system, especially for stable and senior professionals (Chang-Gyu, 2026). The career development professionals working in these programmes are typically well-qualified and hold vocational counsellor certification. The services provided by employers tend to be used by continuously employed professionals in stable positions.

A key programme delivered through the employee assistance programmes is the Seoul 50 Plus Foundation, which offers a comprehensive mid-career transition model that combines counselling with experiential learning, reskilling and second-career pathways. The integration of training with guidance is a critical feature of many of South Korea’s best career development programmes.

Reflections

Overall, Korea’s career counselling system effectively functions as a labour market stabilisation mechanism for at-risk and mid-career workers. However, the system remains more focused on employment maintenance than on long-term career aspirations or upward mobility. Future development will depend on redefining success metrics, strengthening counsellor professionalisation and further integrating lifelong career development principles. The following reflections from Professor Lee may help guide other systems seeking to learn from South Korea’s example.

South Korea’s system is strong on stability, weaker on aspiration. South Korea’s career counselling system is fundamentally designed as a labour market stabilisation tool, not a personal growth or aspiration driven service. This means that it works well for at risk workers, those in fear of mid career displacement and during times of economic shocks. But it does not serve those with high-potential, strategic reskilling outside of crises or non linear or ‘portfolio’ career paths. In other words, South Korea prevents workers from falling out of employment more effectively than it helps them move upward or laterally in ambitious ways.

Career counselling is still too closely bound to job placement. Despite policy rhetoric

about ‘lifelong career development’, many services are still judged primarily by the speed of re employment or short term placement outcomes. This creates a tension between what workers need and what the system incentivises. More could be achieved if career counselling was decoupled from short-term employment metrics.

Digital innovation is advanced, but risks becoming a ceiling. Tools like JobCare are internationally impressive, but there is a risk that digital tools become the default intervention and that human counsellors are reserved only for the most ‘severe’ cases, with employed professionals pushed toward self service models. Digital tools are very effective for diagnosis and orientation, but less so for deeper issues like identity reconstruction, loss of professional confidence and complex emotional transitions. The hybrid model works best when digital tools expand the depth of counselling, rather than replace it.

Mid career policy is the system’s most promising area. If one had to point to where South Korea is genuinely ahead of many OECD countries, it is in explicit mid career policy design. These include dedicated age based programmes (40s–60s), municipal innovation (e.g., Seoul 50 Plus) and recognition that ‘early retirement’ does not necessarily equal the end of working life. Mid career policy works best when it treats transition as normal, not a failure, combines counselling with experimentation (internships, bridge roles) and is delivered locally, close to labour market realities.

Counsellor professionalisation is becoming a bottleneck. Korea invested heavily in systems, platforms and programmes, but less consistently in the professionalisation of the career development field. This is particularly an issue in relation to working adults, as relatively few career development professionals specialise in working with working adults. The long term quality ceiling of the system will be set not by technology or budgets, but by who the counsellors are allowed and trained to become.

Transferability warning. Korea’s model is **not plug and play** for every country. It assumes strong central government capacity, broad acceptance of public intervention, a highly digitised population and a culture of programme compliance. There are also some risks involved in transferring it, including over administration, under personalisation and treating counselling as a bureaucratic process.





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