



National Strategy On Career Guidance

Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship,
Ministry of Labour and Human Resources

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NATIONAL STRATEGY ON CAREER GUIDANCE

**Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship
Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
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FOREWORD

The Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR) is pleased to bring forth the first ever National Strategy on Career Guidance. Career guidance and counseling is found to be an overlooked issue, the lack of which has seriously affected our job seekers in navigating through the labour market. Understanding the gap and realizing the importance of career guidance to better guide our job seekers while entering in the world of work, the Ministry is attaching extra importance to career guidance. This subject has also been recommended in the study commissioned through UNDP funding based on systems approach to youth employment.

Further, the Information and Career Guidance Unit (ICGU) under the Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship (DoEE), administered an online survey, in April 2022, to have a deeper understanding on the need of career guidance and counseling for the job seekers. Analyzing over 2000 respondents, the survey revealed a serious lack of career guidance and counseling among job seekers which has consequently affected the career choices of many.

The strategy is based on the evidence gathered from the administrative records and documents maintained by the Ministry, extensive consultations with all the relevant stakeholders and interactive sessions with students from class 9-12 from schools as far as Trashigang Dzongkhag.

I commend the sincere efforts and commitment made by the DoEE. I would also like to express my appreciation and gratitude to the UNDP-Bhutan for assisting with this task.

I look forward to implementing the strategic actions underlined in this document to realize the vision of our Ministry – to provide gainful employment to every Bhutanese.

Tashi Delek!



Tashi Wangmo
Secretary

Acronyms

BBCC	Bhutan Board for Certified Counselors
CECD	Career Education and Counseling Division
DoEE	Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship
DTE	Department of Technical Education
ESC	Employment Service Centres
ESD	Employment Service Division
ICGU	Information and Career Guidance Unit
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LMIRD	Labour Market Information and Research Division
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLHR	Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RUB	Royal University of Bhutan
SDP	Skills Development Plan
SGC	School Guidance Counselor
TTI	Technical Training Institute
YDF	Youth Development Fund
YELP	Youth Engagement and Livelihood Program

Background

Introduction

Career guidance is defined as ‘services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers’ (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2004). Effective career guidance on career planning can help students set personal goals and decide upon current and future directions by realizing their true potential in life (Guo, 2009). Career guidance helps overcome misunderstandings in choosing careers, in selecting their study paths, and in identifying their potential strengths to enhance their competitiveness for positions.

Furthermore, for universities, career guidance can help promote necessary reforms in teaching and can improve employment rates for their graduates, thus enhancing the reputation of a university (Le & Ye, 2001 cited in Sun & Yuen 2012). It can be helpful at any stage of life, particularly for young people who are just starting out in their careers.

As demand for labour changes rapidly with the advancement of technology, shift in living standards, changes in needs of people, and unpredictable situations like the pandemic, the need for career guidance has become urgent not only for the unemployed but also for those who are looking to move jobs.

Career Counselors and Guides play a critical role in helping youths choose their professional pathways. Findings from the ethnographic research carried out in 2020 showed that youths who had access to mentors/coaches early on, had better chances of overcoming difficulties and challenges in life.

With this understanding, the development of counseling as a profession in Bhutan began in 1996 with a Royal Decree issued by His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck to establish a systematic Youth Guidance and Counseling Program to address the growing youth issues in the country (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2010).

Rationale

Bhutan's youth unemployment continues to be a significant challenge for the country. As per the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2021, the unemployment rate stands at 4.8% with a record youth unemployment rate of 20.9% (National Statistical Bureau, 2021). The COVID-19 Pandemic has especially affected potential employment generating sectors like tourism and hospitality. The Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR) has put in place various interventions to keep the labour market optimistic and bridge the demand and supply for talents and jobs. However, a huge mismatch in the demand and supply of skills persists and could exacerbate with the rapidly changing skill demands.

To address youth unemployment, the Royal Government of Bhutan has been investing in improving basic and technical education, building skills, and providing targeted interventions. It is equally important to invest in long-term career guidance services, starting in schools, continuing through formal and nonformal education and during periods of employment and unemployment, and not finishing until retirement at the end of a person's working life (Dunbar, 2019). The missing link between school and employment opportunities is career guidance. For example, in Czech Republic, public employment service provides career guidance support to schools as a part of national strategy to reduce youth unemployment (OECD, 2004). Career guidance in the form of vocational guidance was provided since 1920s to clients to make proper choice of occupation (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1998). Czech Republic is one of successful countries in European Union with low youth unemployment at 6.4% in July 2019 (epic, 2019).

Therefore, it is critical to strengthen career guidance services to help the youth build their skill sets based on the labour market's evolving needs. In addition, availing career guidance from a young age will increase the opportunity for youths to pursue the profession of their interest.

The lack of career guidance and the critical need of this service was highlighted in the 2019 Organizational Development exercise. As a result, the Information and Career Guidance Unit (ICGU) was instituted under the Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship (DoEE) in the MoLHR towards the end of 2021. An online survey conducted by ICGU in April 2022 with over 2,400 youths revealed a great demand for career counseling and guidance (Wangmo, Choki, Choki & Yangki, 2022).

Although the importance of career guidance and counseling is well recognized in Bhutan, at present, the concept of guidance and counseling in the country is strongly inclined towards developmental issues, addressing and resolving specific problems, developing decision-making skills, assisting people to cope with a crisis, enhancing personal insight, teaching conflict resolution, resolving social issues, and improving general relationship skills. The mentorship and counseling programs that focus on career planning is limited within the country. Furthermore, certain sections of the society either are not aware of the already limited services in place, or they hesitate to access counseling services. Moreover, youths find it challenging and difficult to confide in counsellors fearing confidentiality breach.

Therefore, enhancing the quality, reach, and accessibility of career counseling in Bhutan has become an urgent need to support the youth in helping them think through in planning their career and providing an enabling environment in realizing their potential strengths.

Given, career guidance is fundamental to human resource development, which is an integral part of overall national socio-economic development. Thus, this strategy is a crucial strategic document.

Objectives

To address these challenges, this strategy aims to provide a strategic direction to (i) enhance the capacity, outreach and effectiveness of all relevant stakeholders in the career counseling and guidance space and (ii) increase accessibility for availing career guidance, especially for youths in Bhutan; considering the need to adapt to the changing labour market dynamics, economy, and ecosystem.

This strategy is expected to provide a clear direction for career counseling and mentorship program in Bhutan in a wholesome and inclusive manner with an enhanced understanding of the importance of career guidance. This is important to provide better opportunities and being professionally relevant to the changing socio-economic environment.

To achieve these, the following strategic actions are proposed:

- i. Increase visibility of and focus on career guidance services;

- ii. Improve coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies;
- iii. Enhance data and information on the changing labour markets;
- iv. Strengthen implementation and human resource capacities; and
- v. Increase awareness on career guidance and various career opportunities.

Approach and preparation process

This strategy has been developed under the leadership of the ICGU, DoEE of MoLHR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) .

The strategy has been developed based on (i) desk review of existing relevant documents in Bhutan, (ii) literature review of relevant papers published internationally, (iii) group consultations with sample target groups of students and counselors of Jampheling Higher Secondary School in Trashigang, Samdrupjongkhar Higher Secondary School, Phuentsholing Middle Secondary School, and Gelephu Higher Secondary School, and (iv) detailed discussions with the offices of MoLHR, MoE, Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), Youth Development Fund (YDF), and Ability Bhutan Society (ABS).

The approach taken to draft this strategy was to first better understand the situation of providing and seeking career guidance in Bhutan. This was further validated through group consultations in select schools and discussions with relevant offices. To bring in global best practices, a brief literature review was done to understand how career guidance was operationalized in other countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Singapore, India, etc. Based on the findings through this process, the recommendations have been provided to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the ongoing initiatives in this field and to enhance the quality and outreach of career guidance in the near future.

Status of career guidance services and resources

Existing institutional arrangements, implementation, and capacity

Institutional arrangements

The main agencies which focus on providing career guidance are the (i) ICGU and Employment Service Division (ESD) of DoEE, and Labour Market Information and Research Division (LMIRD) of Department of National Human Resources Development, under MoLHR (ii) Career Education and Counseling Division (CECD) of the Department of Youth and Sports under the MoE. (iii) RUB, and (iv) Bhutan Board for Certified Counseling (BBCC).

The ICGU, MoLHR was established towards the end of 2021, with the mandate to develop career guidance materials through well researched market information and conduct awareness programs on employment and training opportunities. The division is also expected to work closely with relevant agencies, especially the CECD to deliver coordinated career guidance services.

The ESD, MoLHR is mandated to provide services to employers, agents, employees, and job seekers to promote decent jobs that ensure productive work, wellbeing, and job satisfaction as per the National Employment Policy 2013. The division aims to create better employment opportunities through conducting career counseling and providing job-search assistance and job placements for all the citizens and facilitate the development of human resources that lead to sustainable livelihoods and economic prosperity.

The CECD, MoE was established in 1996 with the mandate to facilitate equitable and quality access to guidance and counseling support in all secondary schools. This is expected to be achieved through designing and development of intervention programs and activities that will support students to develop academic/career and personal/social skills, behaviour, values, and attitudes.

The LMIRD conducts research on national employment and labour issues and trends, develops labour market information on existing supply and demand of human resources and carries out projection to support

human resource planning and forecasting. It also conducts labour force thematic studies on an annual basis and manages and coordinates Bhutan Labour Market Information System to ensure timely and reliable data and information on Technical Vocational Education Training, foreign workers, employment, unemployment, and other aspects of labour market information.

The RUB provides counseling and guidance to university students through the College Happiness and Well-being Centers in colleges, which were established in 2019. In addition, Samtse College of Education provides training on Post Graduate Diploma in Contemplative Counseling Psychology. However, the counseling is general in nature and does not specifically focus on career guidance.

The BBCC is the national level body for certifying counseling professionals in Bhutan. It was established in 2015. The BBCC, presently, operates under the umbrella of the RENEW (Respect Educate Nurture and Empower Women) Secretariat. It is supported by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), USA, the Royal Civil Service Commission, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the MoLHR, Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency, Royal Bhutan Police, National Commission for Women and Children, RUB, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences, Bhutan Medical and Health Council, and UNICEF-Bhutan.

In terms of guidance documents, the key documents used as fundamental guides are the following:

- i. In 2012, the MoLHR formulated the Career and Employment Counseling Guidebook and Career and Occupational Dictionary. A Labour Market Information Guidebook and a Bulletin are released annually since 2011.
- ii. In 2018, the CECD, MoE formulated the (i) Career Education and Guidance Handbook for Schools, (ii) Career Education and Guidance Toolkits for Counsellors, and (iii) Dissemination Strategy of Technical Vocational Education. CECD has also provided training to the School Guidance Counselors (SGC) virtually. These documents were updated from the Light on My Career Path - Volumes 1 to 3 developed by the CECD in 1998 which were used till end of 2021. With significant changes in the socio-economic development of the country over the years, these set of documents were reviewed in 2021 with the

help of experts from the United Kingdom. The career portfolio document is expected to be updated in 2023.

- iii. In 2022, Paro College of Education developed (i) Royal University of Bhutan: Happiness and Wellbeing Centre Training Manual (Centre Resource Pack) and (ii) Royal University of Bhutan: Happiness and Wellbeing Centre Framework.

Implementation and Capacity

The MoLHR initiated several skilling and engagement programs including (i) Skills Development Plan (SDP); (ii) Basic Entrepreneurship Courses; (iii) Build Bhutan Project; and (iv) Youth Engagement and Livelihood Program (YELP) amongst others. The Ministry has also strengthened post-skilling support whereby all SDP graduates undergo the Basic Entrepreneurship Course, and the startup entrepreneurs receive end-to-end support. Also, the Employment Service Centres (ESCs) of Thimphu, Phuentsholing, Samdrupjongkhar, Gelephu and Trashigang under MoLHR provide support to job seekers in finding the right jobs as per their skills, apply for jobs, aggregate job vacancies from employers on the MoLHR's job portal, and help employers to find the right candidates and also engage youths through YELP program.

In addition, the GOWA platform initiated by the ministry provide awareness to jobseekers, employers and parents on employment and skilling programs. The GOWA awareness event is followed by Mini Job Fairs, where on-the-spot recruitment takes place. So far, the GOWA program has proved to be very effective resulting in at least a third of the candidates being employed/engaged immediately. The ministry also keeps close track of jobseekers who have availed its skilling and engagement programs to provide any further services and support that may be required.

All the four regional offices located in Trashigang, Samdrupjongkhar, Sarpang and Chukha emulated the GOWA event successfully in their regions with an exceptional turnover rate showing a high receptive assertiveness from the target audience. Through the GOWA platform, labour market information was successfully relayed to the Local Government level taking information sharing to the next level.

Recognizing the need to build capacity to guide job seekers, for the first time, 10 officers from the DoEE and the regional offices have undergone a three month certification course on career guidance and counselling. The course equipped the officers with the right skills to deal with young jobseekers transitioning from school into the world of work. The training was conducted by BBCC in collaboration with the Paro College of Education.

The SGCs from the MoE provide pre-vocational orientation for classes 7 and 8 (lower secondary), career education general orientation for classes 9 and 10 (middle secondary), and career education effective counseling for classes 11 and 12 (higher secondary secondary). The SGCs hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Contemplative Counseling Psychology from the Samtse College of Education. Usually, there is one SGC in each school. Based on consultations in the schools, one period (approximately 40 minutes) in a week of five working days is allocated to the SGCs during which they must cover all aspects of counseling including psychoeducation, counseling on social issues, and career education.

The services under the Happiness and Wellbeing Centre in colleges of RUB is informed by five major themes related with empowerment of the self and working with life challenges. The five themes are (i) leadership of self, (ii) working with life challenges, (iii) mindfulness and awareness, (iv) emotional and social intelligence, and (v) being Bhutanese.

All the counsellors are certified by the BBCC.

Gaps and challenges

Visibility and focus on career guidance

- i. Diluted focus and in some cases, absence of career guidance services in institutions* – At present, counseling services are provided in secondary schools under the MoE and colleges under RUB. However, in these institutes, career guidance is not recognized as a service that requires specialized skill and competency. It is merged as a part of general counseling that looks at all aspects including counseling on social issues and psychoeducation. Furthermore, there is no career guidance

services in the Technical Training Institutes (TTIs) under the MoLHR. Although dual training programme are provided in all TTIs and on-job training is provided for Institute of Zorig Chusum graduates, it is done so based on the need of the employers and not as a career guidance service.

ii. Available career guidance initiatives are not fully inclusive–

Career guidance services provided in schools aim to be inclusive by ensuring that children with special needs are fully engaged in the career guidance sessions. However, these sessions are the general ones provided for other students and not customized to the needs of children with special needs. Furthermore, institutes such as Draktsho Vocational Institute, Disability Peoples Organization and Ability Bhutan Society do not provide career guidance services for youth with special needs. The instructors in these institutions directly provide training related to independent living skills training and vocational training.

iii. No measurement of the usefulness and effectiveness of providing and seeking career guidance –

Although career guidance in schools was initiated since 1998, there has been no evaluation of the usefulness and effectiveness of this service. Therefore, there is no evidence-based results to showcase the importance of providing career guidance which is critical in gaining attention of policy makers, students, parents, and other relevant stakeholders.

Coordination and collaboration

i. Coordination and collaboration between MoLHR, MoE and RUB –

The main players in the government working directly on career guidance are the MoE, MoLHR and RUB. As per the consultations, while there is some degree of coordination, there still needs to be closer collaboration and better coordination amongst the relevant divisions of these agencies. Although the agencies have been investing in enhancing career guidance, most activities seem to be taken up in silos, which limits the benefits of leveraging upon each other's strengths and expertise and making the optimal use of

resources, especially at the ground.

- ii. ***Clarity on roles of relevant agencies in providing education and training opportunities*** – At present, career guidance is seen as one activity which is focused on building the skill of children in decision making, awareness of opportunities, and self-motivation at a theoretical level. The MoLHR provides basic information on job markets. Individuals are challenged when it comes to information on post school courses and skills relevant to labour market and such platforms and channels are missing. To consolidate efforts, important players including the RUB with a mandate to develop and design higher studies courses, the Department of Adult and Higher Education which looks after the scholarships for higher studies, DTE who looks after TTIs, and DoEE need to be closely work together to inform and enable students to make relevant career decisions after their 12th standard. However, at present the coordination among these agencies are negligible.

Data and information on the labour markets

- i. ***Limited information on the labour market*** – The annual labour market information bulletin provides information mainly on employment rate, top major occupations, top industry establishments, registration of job seekers, mapped job opportunities, approved number of foreign workers, and number of people sent overseas for employment. For this information to be useful for informing career guidance efforts in a dynamic manner, the information needs to be more detail. For example, when it says these many areas employed in the education sector, it is important to know as what in the education sector. Similarly, when mentioning about other professionals, detailed information on what kind of professions is in higher or lower demand must be informed
- ii. ***Information available is only looking at the job market within the country which limits the possible opportunities to explore and prepare for jobs outside*** – Being a small economy, providing 100 percent employment remains a herculean task. Furthermore, one of the main challenges identified in Bhutan

is mismatch of skills. Therefore, information of job markets and emerging opportunities should not be limited to what is available within the country but also include information about other countries to increase opportunities to apply for professional jobs outside the country.

Implementation and human resource capacities

- i. **Insufficient number of SGCs*** - The main challenge in providing career guidance is the shortage of SGCs to provide quality guidance with adequate time slots for all the students in a school. For example, the Gelephu Higher Secondary School (Class 9 - 12) has 24 sections which means the SGC has to take 24 classes in a week, approximately 5 classes a day. In addition, the SGCs have to allocate time for private counseling for students in need.
- ii. **Limited time allocated for career guidance*** - Due to the limited time of only one class per week allocated for each section for counseling as a whole, it is a huge challenge for the SGCs to thoroughly cover the guidebooks provided by the MoE on career guidance. Furthermore, the SGCs are expected to cover all aspects of counseling during this allocated time including psychoeducation, counseling on social issues, and career education, which dilutes the focus on career guidance. Although it is not spelt out, the minimal importance given to career guidance could be due to the strong focus on academics.
- iii. **Limited capacity of SGCs and career guidance service providers in Employment Service Centers and in the country*** - The SGCs are trained counsellors but not specialized in career development. Therefore, knowledge that SGCs impart to students are mainly based on the guidance book that is developed and circulated by the MoE. Similarly, service providers in the ESCs are also not specialized and their role is limited to sharing information, referrals and facilitating job placements. Furthermore, familiarization training provided by the MoE on updated guidance documents are limited and mainly relies on the SGCs to self-learn. This requires the

SGCs to invest a lot of time in familiarizing themselves with new guidelines which is a challenge as their time is already stretched. Additionally, there is limitation in terms of the SGCs' capacity to link the evolution of job markets and career development and opportunities in real world within Bhutan and globally. Furthermore, there are no specialized career guidance service providers certified by the BBCC.

Awareness on career guidance and various career opportunities

- i. *Limited awareness on different professions*** – At school level, especially in rural areas, there is inadequate awareness on various career paths students can choose to pursue mainly because of limited interaction between the students and people with different jobs. For example, in one of the classes in the Taba Damtoe Lower Secondary School in Samtse, only three students wanted to become doctor, no one wanted to become an engineer, and 70 percent of the students wanted to become a teacher which clearly indicates that they are not aware of the different professions one can pursue.
- ii. *Limited awareness on career guidance among parents*** – During the group discussions in the selected schools for this assignment, it was found that parents played a key role in determining their children's career choices. In other words, students are heavily influenced by their parents on career choices. Family values are a decisive influence, especially in poor countries with limited opportunities, and economic interdependence among family and community members is essential (ILO, 2006). Considering that most of the parents may not be familiar with the subject of career guidance, there is a risk of parents not recognizing the skills, interest and aptitude of their children which would have bearing on their future.
- iii. *Limited awareness of information available among students and counsellors*** – It was highlighted during the consultations in schools that sometimes SGCs and students are not aware of the information that is available on the MoLHR website. Although specific reasons are not mentioned, it could be due

to limited awareness on the materials posted on website and communication gaps in terms of understanding the purpose of these documents and information.

Recommendations

In summary, some of the main challenges in providing adequate and efficient career guidance include the following:

- Inadequate human resource, which hinders the ability to provide adequate amount of time to ensure sufficient focus on career counseling. At present career guidance is delivered as a part of general counseling.
- Career guidance providers are trained counsellors in contemplative counseling and are not specialized in career counseling.
- There is limited coordination and collaboration among the important players in providing effective and efficient career guidance.
- There is insufficient and updated data on job markets and lack of dynamic research to inform career guidance which is critical to gauge the value of career guidance.
- These shortcomings have resulted in absence of a mechanism and platform for individual students to discuss their career development in a focused manner.

To address these issues, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to improve Bhutan's career guidance space allowing youths to gain a full understanding of the range of opportunities available to them, the kind of skill sets required, and skill sets they should focus on building, and potentially what kind of careers may be suitable to the kind of skills and knowledge that they have.

Strategic Action 1 - Increase visibility and focus on career guidance services

Activity 1 – Increase visibility of career guidance at all levels by making the subject practically relevant to evolving job market and helping youth make informed decisions – Based on the resources and time allocated for career guidance in schools, it is evident that career guidance is seen as less urgent and therefore, not considered as important as it should be. Similarly, career guidance provided by the SGCs are more theoretical with minimal reference to its practical application in the real labour market. Therefore, to address this issue, the career guidance services should be made impactful through supplement initiatives such as seminars and guest lectures by experts that links the changing job market and required skills and qualifications to what the SGCs teach. Further, initiatives such as specific career guidance classes that can be availed on need should be instituted to provide customized services. These services will help recognize the potential advantages of career guidance having closer links to the labour market, increase the likelihood that career guidance will have a clear identity and separate from other forms of guidance (OECD, 2004).

Activity 2 - Enhance programs on preparing graduates for employment – Career Guidance provider service teams have a huge role as a bridge between the employers and graduates. With the need for different skill sets, employers increasingly look beyond academic achievements internship experiences, and co-curricular activities when it comes to selection and recruitment of graduates. Emerging approaches to selecting the best-fit graduates include involving undergraduates and graduates in organization presentations, company visits, hackathons, as well as case competitions where undergraduates present solutions on business cases posed by the companies. Consequently, career services teams also shoulder the responsibility of preparing undergraduates to participate, perform, impress, and ultimately, be considered for employment opportunities (Kong-ho, et.al., 2019). There should be short training to equip youth with communication and analytical skills to increase their capacities.

Activity 3 - Provide targeted and specialized career guidance and support for disadvantaged youth – Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to continue to higher education (Greenbank, 2009). Therefore, there should be focused programs to facilitate children

from disadvantaged families, who are usually socially more vulnerable, to be able to access equal opportunities, especially for children who excel in academics and have excellent aptitude skill sets.

Activity 4 - Provide targeted and specialized career guidance for youth with special needs – Careers advice for young people with special educational needs and disabilities can often be poor and lacking in aspiration (OFSTED, 2016). It is important to cater to the specific needs of these groups of youths which should be aspirational, personalized and well informed. This may require professional development for careers professionals working with these young people such as the Special Education Needs (SEN) teachers, who can communicate better with them. This will require a close collaboration of the SEN teachers, agencies working on supporting people with special needs, and the national level agencies in the government to develop and provide professional career guidance.

Activity 5 - The audience of career guidance should be open - Working ages are extending and new jobs are emerging that require new skills. This means that support for adults seeking to improve their skills and change roles is vital (Department of Education, 2017). Similar to the National Careers Service in Britain, which is targeted for adults, although young people also use, it will be important to establish a similar service for adults to provide guidance and direction to harness opportunities for skill building and finding the right jobs. However, such services should be aligned to the ongoing services to have a single service provider. This is also highly relevant to the national level institutional transformation in Bhutan to facilitate skill building (skilling, reskilling, and upskilling) depending on the needs of a job description and staying relevant to the changing job market.

Activity 6 - Institute a mechanism to evaluate impact of career guidance services – It is important to understand the impact of career guidance services to be able to provide evidence on the need for this. This is highly important in gaining visibility for garnering funds and ownership by relevant agencies, which is key to enhancing this program. An evaluation will also help to identify areas of improvement institutionally as well as for individual career guidance providers. Furthermore, evidence-based results when presented to policy makers, will garner support for this program.

Strategic Action 2 - Improve coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies

Activity 7 - Enhance coordination and collaboration between MoLHR, MoE, RUB and Department of Technical Education (DTE) – The MoE is the main career guidance provider in the secondary schools and the MoLHR leads initiatives to provide career guidance and facilitate employment at the national level. RUB provides counseling services to colleges. Considering the importance of career guidance for youth in the secondary schools, colleges, and TTIs, and youth in the job market, both employed and unemployed, close coordination and collaboration among these agencies are recommended. Especially in sharing information, establishing peer to peer learning of counsellors, and most importantly utilizing data and information to facilitate decision making for youth.

Activity 8 - Increase engagement of employers in career guidance programs – Employers usually have the best understanding of the job world. Increasing interaction between employers and the youth will allow youth to access useful experiences which are powerful learning opportunities. Employers are also the best sources to provide projections of how their workplaces and occupational skill requirements are changing which will directly affect the job market (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), European Training Foundation (ETF) and & European Commission, 2021). Therefore, it is important to increase the engagement of employers in career guidance programs through programs such as career talks both in-person and virtual, workplace visits, and if possible, avail internship opportunities.

Strategic Action 3 - Enhance data and information on the changing labour markets

Activity 9 - Establish a single stable digital route to career information – At present, the Employment Service Centers under the MoLHR connect job seekers and employers, facilitate job seekers in jobs application and provide basic skill building short training. This service should be upscaled and enhanced, and made accessible to the digital generation, harnessing technology, and using online tools and activities to engage people of all ages in learning about different skills and career paths (Department of Education, 2017). This platform should be developed to

provide all kinds of information related to career guidance, job markets, and skill building as a single route to career information including up-to-date labour market information, information on local opportunities, who to contact for help, an online booking system and so on. One example of similar information is the myskillsfuture.gov.sg portal of Singapore. In addition, face-to-face services should continue to ensure that digitally challenged people are not left behind.

Activity 10 - Improve labour market information on job markets in the private sector and outside Bhutan, including online digital jobs

– Bhutan being a small economy does not have enough variety and quantity of jobs to provide full employment to its youth. Therefore, when considering a career discussion, it should not limit to working in Bhutan. It is equally important to raise awareness on the job opportunities in and outside Bhutan in different professional sectors. The current labour market information is highly limited. This information should be detailed in terms of what kind of job opportunities are increasing and what kind of professionals with what kind of skill sets are required for these jobs. It is also important to have projections of these job opportunities for the next few years considering the rapid changes in technologies and socio-economic parameters that will affect these opportunities. Having more detailed and broader data and information on job markets will also widen the horizon of the youth in their thinking of employment opportunities, both within and outside the country. This is also important from the aspect of job placements of youth in other countries in skilled jobs and not just manual jobs.

Strategic Action 4 - Strengthen implementation and human resource capacities

Activity 11 - Increase human resources of career counsellors to allow adequate time for providing services with balanced workloads and enhance their capacity

– Based on the consultations, one SGC per school having to take five classes per day seems to be a heavy workload. This results in not having adequate time for targeted counseling of students as required. Therefore, there is a need to increase the number of SGCs, if possible, a male and a female in each school depending on the number of students in the schools. Furthermore, career counsellors should be up-to date with information on evolving labour markets and

organize events to increase awareness and exposure of the students on different professions. Developing a network of career counsellors and advisors which allows exchange of information would also enable peer-to-peer learning for the counsellors. These should be well supported by the school management and leaders including the head quarter offices.

Activity 12 - Integrate entrepreneurship education as a part of career guidance - With more people than ever running their own business, entrepreneurship education is an important component of high-quality careers provision. They could include encounters with people who are self-employed and working for themselves, reflecting the growing number of freelancers in the workforce (Department of Education, 2017). Furthermore, revisit the career guidance resources and integrate entrepreneurship education as a part of the resource materials as needed.

Activity 13 - Identify effective internship programs - Internships provide the best opportunities for students to observe firsthand and practice the jobs in which they may be interested (Sun & Yuen, 2012). However, with increasing number of students, providing internships to every student going to university or fresh graduates may be a challenge. Furthermore, internships can be effective only if the employers provide conducive environment for an intern to contribute and learn at work which requires some amount of time of the employees. Therefore, internship programs should be designed to ensure that interns are engaged productively.

Activity 14 - Provide specialized services to apply the improved labour market information in assisting to devise career paths - For the labour market information to be practically useful, it has to provide up to date labour market information which is dynamically used to provide career information and options. This will guide students and parents to build awareness of job opportunities within the country and beyond. The current resources from the MoLHR are largely confined to information dissemination (e.g., providing facts on current job market, employment vacancies, etc.) rather than any real attempts to provide career planning strategies or assisting individuals in devising study paths according to developmental needs (Chui, 2007). Therefore, in addition to general career guidance sessions, there should be regular specialized sessions on the dynamic changes in the job markets within country and outside

and the required skills for these jobs. If this requires specialized skills, there should be a certification process to certify specialized counselors for career guidance which will encourage individuals to specialize in this subject.

Strategic Action 5 - Increase awareness on career guidance and various career opportunities

Activity 15 - Conduct awareness programs on available information on career guidance and job markets for students, out of school youth, and counselors – The MoLHR should maintain a list of career counselors across the country and establish a network through emails and chat groups. In addition, create a corner in library room of schools, colleges and youth centres and MoLHR could share materials like LMI report, Bhutan Workforce Futures: Stepping Stones to Industrial Strategic Proposition for Agriculture, Creative and Digital Sector, Career and Occupation Dictionary, etc. This way, the MoLHR can provide time to time awareness programs on updated information.

Activity 16 - Conduct exposure and awareness programs for students, out of school youth, and teachers on evolving job markets and different professions – A majority of the SGCs and career guidance counsellors may lack first-hand experience in any other occupational fields because of which they will not have detailed knowledge of various lines of work to adequately advise students (Yuen, Chan, & Lee, 2014). This limitation also implies that they are unable to take a leading role as trainers of prospective career guidance teachers (Wong, 2018). It was found that children who meet employers from a young age can find out about a wide range of jobs and understand how the subjects they learn at school connect with their future. This is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who may lack a diversity of role models with experiences of different jobs and careers. This could result in children (and their parents) to have fixed views about what kind of jobs might be suitable for them, which shuts away a lot of opportunities. Therefore, it is important to organize field visits to physically see what different jobs entail and have guest lecturers from different professions to better understand what a day in a certain profession means and from employers to understand what employers look for. Similarly, career fairs, seminars and panel discussions on the changing job market once in

every few months would sustain interest of the beneficiaries on this subject. This should be mainly focused on rural schools where the exposure is minimum.

Activity 17 - Increase awareness on career guidance among parents

- Parents play an important role in subject choice and career choice of youths. Therefore, it is essential to provide awareness to the parents, especially in rural areas on the changing job markets. Meetings between parents and career guidance providers, inviting parents to attend GoWA and having targeted discussion sometimes are effective ways of doing this. Besides these initiatives, media platforms such as radios and television can be effective means for reaching people with low levels of literacy. Radio, in particular, has proved to be a simple, established and comparatively inexpensive communication medium in many poor countries (ILO, 2006). Bhutan is no exception with more than 60% of Bhutanese people residing in rural areas (NSB, 2017) and radio is the only source of news and information (Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation Limited (BBSCL), 2020).

Implementation plan

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Strategic Action 1 - Increase visibility and focus on career guidance services			
Activity 1 - Increase visibility of career guidance at all levels by making the subject practically relevant to the evolving job market and helping youth make informed decisions	Provide supplementary initiatives such as seminars and guest lectures by experts that link the changing job market and required skills and qualifications to what the SGCs teach in classes.	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB, Regional Office	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	DoEE Officials to visit schools and provide session on career guidance in collaboration with SGCs.		
	Introduce initiatives such as specific career guidance classes that can be availed on need to provide customized services.	Lead: DoEE	July 2023 to June 2028
Activity 2 - Enhance programs on preparing graduates for employment	Design short training to equip youth with communication and analytical skills	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: RUB	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Explore opportunities for company visits	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: RUB	January, 2023 to June, 2028
	Design and organize hackathons and school to work transition programmes	Lead: RUB & DoEE Collaborating: MoEA	January, 2023 to June, 2028

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Activity 3 - Provide targeted and specialized career guidance and support for disadvantaged youth (income wise, single parent)	Identify disadvantaged youth with high potential to drop out even if capable	Lead: MoE (School management), RUB (College management)	January, 2023 to June, 2028
	Explore and design support systems to enable disadvantaged youth to pursue higher education and access career guidance and skill building programs	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: MoE (School management), RUB (College management)	February, 2024 to January, 2029
Activity 4 - Provide targeted and specialized career guidance for youth with special needs	Conduct: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a market survey on the opportunities of employment and professional development and (ii) a study on how to create enabling environments for youth with special needs in the job markets 	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: Relevant CSOs, MoE	February, 2024 to January, 2029
	Provide professional development opportunities for SEN teachers, relevant social workers, and relevant officers working on this specific program	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: Relevant CSOs, MoE	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Develop specific career guidance materials and programs	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: Relevant CSOs, MoE	July, 2023 to June, 2028

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Activity 5 - The audience of career guidance should be open	Conduct a survey (online considering time and resources) to better understand the shifts in careers of adults	Lead: DoEE	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Provide general career counseling sessions on need basis for individuals	Lead: DoEE	Continue with initiatives such as
	Encourage private sector and Civil Society Organizations to provide specialized career counseling packages which should be evaluated, certified by BBCC, and monitored by the DoEE	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: Civil Society Organizations, BBCC, DoS	January, 2023
Activity 6 - Institute a mechanism to evaluate impact of career guidance services	Understand the impact of career guidance initiatives through assessment study/ evaluation	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: CECD, RUB, TTI	June, 2025 (Mid Term Evaluation) & June, 2028 (End Term Evaluation)
	Institute a feedback loop for better understanding the usefulness, challenges, issues, and needs of this service. This should be designed to understand the effectiveness of delivery modes, information sharing channels and accessibility.	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: CECD, RUB, DTE	June, 2025

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Strategic Action 2 - Improve coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies			
Activity 7 - Enhance coordination and collaboration between MoLHR, MoE, RUB and DTE	Institute a collaborating mechanism such as Working Group to share information, work together in developing and delivering programs, etc.	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: CECD, RUB, DTE	January, 2023 to June, 2028
	Establish a network of career guidance counsellors to encourage peer to peer learning and information sharing	Lead: DoEE, CECD Collaborating: RUB	January, 2023 to June, 2028
Activity 8 - Increase engagement of employers in career guidance programs	Conduct career talks regularly at schools and colleges and at the national level. Some of the talks can also be broadcasted on media which will also help in raising awareness.	Lead: DoEE, CECD Collaborating: District Administration	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Organize workplace visits and if possible, avail internship opportunities	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB	July, 2023 to June, 2028
Strategic Action 3 - Enhance data and information on the changing labour markets			
Activity 9 - Establish a single stable digital route to career information	Develop a single stable digital route through a web-based interactive platform with adequate backup services	Lead: DoEE	July, 2023 to June, 2028

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Activity 10 - Improve labour market information on job markets in the private sector and outside Bhutan, including online digital jobs	Improve labour market information through more detailed surveys and studies for both in-country and ex-country opportunities	Lead: LMIRD Collaborating: DoEE	January, 2023 to June, 2028
Strategic Action 4 - Strengthen implementation and human resource capacities			
Activity 11 - Increase human resources of career counsellors to allow adequate time for providing services with balanced workloads and enhance their capacity	Encourage team approach between subject teachers and career guidance providers to devise ways of integrating career guidance and skill building activities as a part of regular education programs	Lead: CECD, RUB, DoEE	July, 2023
	Conduct an assessment to determine the number of guidance counselors in schools, colleges and for youth outside these institutions. Based on the finding, recruit or repost adequate number of career counsellors and provide necessary training	Lead: CECD, RUB, DoEE	July, 2023
	Discuss and institute adequate time slots for career guidance sessions	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB	January, 2023

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Activity 12 - Integrate entrepreneurship education as a part of career guidance	Revisit the career guidance resources and integrate entrepreneurship education as a part of the resource	Lead: CECD, DoEE	July, 2023
	Build on ongoing initiatives of entrepreneurship related courses and programs including increasing engagement with self-employed people	Lead: DoEE	July, 2023
Activity 13 - Identify effective internship programs	Collaborate with public, private, CSOs and other agencies, and identify internship programs. These internship programs should have clear targets and TORs to ensure that the time is used effectively by both the employer and the intern.	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: Employing agencies	July, 2023
Activity 14 - Provide specialized services to apply the improved labour market information in assisting to devise career paths	Certify specialized career guidance professionals at DoEE	Lead: BBCC	July, 2023
	Conduct targeted studies on changing job markets with information available	Lead: DoEE	July, 2023
	Invite these professionals to deliver sessions on the real-world job markets, interpretation of the information provided by MoLHR in the context of how these should inform career decisions.	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB	January, 2023

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Strategic Action 5 - Increase awareness on career guidance and various career opportunities			
Activity 15 - Conduct awareness programs on available information on career guidance and job markets for students, out of school children and counsellors	Conduct awareness programs through media including radios, institution visits, networks, engage social media influencers, civil society organizations and youth volunteers to communicate the programs. (Update and review occupational dictionary)	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB Collaborating: YDF, Nazhoen Lamten and LMIRD	January, 2023
	Create a career resource centre corner in library room of schools, colleges and youth centres. Provide updated career and occupation dictionary, videos on career guidance, labour market information, Bhutan workforce futures: Steppingstones to industrial strategic proposition for agriculture, creative and digital sector, etc.	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB	July, 2023
Activity 16 - Conduct exposure and awareness programs for students, out of school children and teachers on evolving job markets and different professions	Develop an annual program list to invite guest speakers, conduct career fairs, seminars, and panel discussions and reach out to potential guest speakers.	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB	July, 2023
	Organize career fairs, seminars, and panel discussions	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: CECD, RUB, Nazhoen Lamten, YDF	January, 2024

Activity	Sub-activity	Responsible Agency	Timeline
Activity 17 - Increase awareness on career guidance among parents	Invite parents to the career guidance related activities such as the guest lectures, career fairs, seminars, and panel discussions.	Lead: DoEE, CECD, RUB Collaborating: Regional Offices	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Create awareness to Local Government officials and Member of Parliaments to disseminate information on career guidance to rural areas. Provide career guidance related materials to community information centres in rural areas and ensure dissemination of these.	Lead: DoEE Collaborating: Department of Local Government, National Assembly, National Council, Officials of Local Government, and Department of Information and Technology	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Build on the GOWA program for parents, especially in rural areas and integrate career guidance as part of GOWA programme.	Lead: DoEE Collab: Regional Offices	July, 2023 to June, 2028
	Provide career guidance awareness programs on radio and television, especially for rural audience	Lead: DoEE	February, 2024 to January, 2029

Monitoring and impact evaluation

The successful implementation of this strategy will require close monitoring and impact evaluation of the implemented activities. Based on the recommended activities under the strategy actions, the designated responsible agency(s) should put in place a monitoring schedule. As the custodian of this strategy, the DoEE should provide overall supervision of the progress of activities and facilitate to address the hindrances.

The following institutional set up should be put in place to have an efficient monitoring and evaluation process:

- i. Form a working group with focal officials from the responsible agencies, officially endorsed by the Heads of all the agencies;
- ii. Develop a TOR for the monitoring and evaluation of this strategy with clear roles and responsibilities of responsible agencies;
- iii. Develop a workplan with indication of funding resources (committed, exploring); and
- iv. DoEE to institute a reporting system to track the progress of the activities.

During the monitoring, the following aspects should be looked into closely:

- i. Identify challenges and issues during the implementation;
- ii. Institute a feedback loop at all stages from relevant stakeholders including the youth; and
- iii. Review the workplan and action plan based on the feedback received and challenges/issues identified.

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Annex 1 – List of persons met

Organization	Name	Designation
Career Education and Counseling Division, Department of Youths and Sports, Ministry of Education	Ms. Reena Thapa	Chief Counselor
	Mr. Nidup Gyeltshen	Principal Counselor
Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan	Mr. Sangay Dorji	Lecturer
Youth Development Fund	Ms. Roma Pradhan	Sr. Program Coordinator
Ability Bhutan Society	Mr. Kuenzang N Tshering	Executive Director
	Ms. Pema Yuden	Social Worker
Department of Technical Education, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources	Ms. Dechen Tshomo	
Employment Service Centre, Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources	Ms. Deki	
Phuentsholing Middle Secondary School, Phuentsholing Thromde	Ms. Sonam Tshomo	School Guidance Counselor

Organization	Name	Designation
Phuenstholing Lower Secondary, Phuentsholing Thromde	Ms. Rinzin Wangmo	School Guidance Counselor
Phuentsholing Higher Secondary School, Phuentsholing Thromde	Ms. Pema Choden	School Guidance Counselor
Sonamgang Middle Secondary School, Phuentsholing Thromde	Ms. Yangchen Lhamo	School Guidance Counselor
Jampeling Central School, Trashigang	Mr. Sangay Tenzin K	School Guidance Counselor
Samdrup Jongkhar Middle Secondary School, Samdrup Jongkhar	Mr. Sonam Tobgay	School Guidance Counselor
Gelephu Higher Secondary School, Gelephu Thromde	Ms. Karma Chezom	School Guidance Counselor
Information and Career Guidance Unit, Department of Employment and Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources	Ms. Tshering Choki	Sr. Program Officer
	Ms. Tshering Yangki	Assistant Program Officer
Regional Office, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Phuentsholing	Ms. Choki Dukpa	Deputy Chief Employment Officer

Organization	Name	Designation
Regional Officer, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, Gelephu	Ms. Chumo Wangmo	Deputy Chief Employment Officer
United Nations Development Programme	Ms. Kunzang Wangmo	Head of Experimentation
Phuentsholing Middle Secondary School, Phuentsholing Thromde	30 Students	Class IX and X
Jampeling Central School, Trashigang	30 Students	Class IX, X, XI and XII
Samdrup Jongkhar Middle Secondary School, Samdrup Jongkhar	30 Students	Class IX and X
Gelephu Higher Secondary School, Gelephu Thromde	28 Students	Class IX and XI



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