

Two Years of Learning: Emerging Insights from the Global Career Education Network (GCEN)

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The [Global Career Education Network \(GCEN\)](#), launched in 2024, brings together leading practitioners working to strengthen career education and guidance systems around the world.

This document summarizes emerging insights from the network's initial two-year learning journey. Examples throughout this brief draw on GCEN member organizations and peer institutions working at system level across Europe, Asia, and Latin America, including Article 1 (France), Antarang Foundation (India), Fundación Bertelsmann (Spain), the Careers & Enterprise Company (UK), Iochpe Foundation (Brazil), and others. GCEN is facilitated by Teach For All and supported by JPMorgan Chase.

Across this work, several consistent patterns are beginning to emerge from diverse country contexts about what it takes to ensure that young people everywhere have access to quality career education and guidance. In particular, **four enabling approaches** appear critical for strengthening and scaling career education and guidance systems: *partnerships with government, meaningful employer engagement, the use of technology, and stronger approaches to measurement and evidence*. These four enablers anchor the learning synthesized in this document.

Outstanding questions and areas for further exploration will be discussed at the GCEN Forum in April 2026, helping refine these insights and inform the forthcoming GCEN learning paper (June 2026).

Key Emerging Insights:

- **Measurement & Evidence:** Career education systems improve and scale when measurement moves beyond individual student outcomes to track the quality and institutionalization of career guidance, work exposure, and work-based learning within schools and systems.
- **Government Partnerships:** Sustainable scale requires moving from NGO-led pilots to government-owned systems, supported through phased transfer models and long-term institutional partnerships.
- **Employer Engagement:** Employer engagement becomes meaningful and sustainable when it is structured through coordinated frameworks and intermediary organizations, rather than relying on ad hoc volunteering.
- **Technology Integration:** Technology expands access to career guidance and work-based learning most effectively when embedded within hybrid models that combine digital tools with human facilitation, mentoring, and employer engagement.

Systems Change and Scale: Our Overarching Goal

Evidence across GCEN suggests that **sustainable impact in career education and guidance depends less on standalone programs and more on embedding career guidance, work exposure, and work-based learning within public systems**. This means institutionalizing career education by integrating career

guidance, work exposure, and work-based learning into policies, curricula, and educator training so it becomes a standard part of how schools support students.

What this looks like in practice

Several GCEN members are demonstrating how career guidance and work-based learning can be institutionalized within public systems:

- **Formalizing dedicated careers leadership roles within schools.**
In Spain, Empieza Por Educar partnered with the regional government to establish and certify the *Academic and Professional Strategy Coordinator (CEAP)* role, giving teachers formal recognition and credits for leading career guidance.
- **Creating intermediary “backbone” organizations to coordinate systems.**
In Germany, *Phineo’s Zukunftsträger* collective impact initiative demonstrates how a dedicated coordination entity can bridge schools, employers, and public agencies to sustain collaboration.
- **Translating policy ambitions into measurable standards.**
In the UK and Spain, frameworks such as the *Gatsby Benchmarks* and *Xcelence* standards define clear expectations for high-quality career guidance, enabling schools to assess progress and drive improvement.

Conditions that accelerate scale

Across contexts, several enabling conditions appear to accelerate system change. First, organizations that **align their work with government priorities**, such as youth unemployment or national skills strategies, are often able to unlock greater political support and public funding. Second, partnerships with governments tend to be strongest when organizations position themselves not only as advocates, but as **operational partners** capable of implementing policy priorities. Finally, designing **phased transfer models** that move from NGO-led delivery to government ownership helps ensure that career guidance and work-based learning becomes a core institutional responsibility rather than an informal or voluntary activity.

Areas for continued learning

Despite promising progress, system reform remains vulnerable to several structural challenges specific to career education and guidance:

- Fragmented institutional ownership of career readiness, with responsibilities split across education, labour, and economic development actors, and limited coordination structures, shared incentives, or accountability mechanisms to align efforts
- Absence of sustained coordination infrastructure (e.g., intermediaries, platforms, or backbone organizations) to broker and maintain relationships between schools, employers, and training providers at scale
- Limited incentives and enabling structures for employer participation, with engagement often reliant on ad hoc or voluntary contributions
- Lack of scalable models and infrastructure for delivering high-quality work-based learning and workplace exposure

- Policy and administrative constraints slowing the adoption and institutionalization of cross-sector career guidance frameworks

These dynamics highlight that scaling career education, including access to work exposure and work experience, requires both strong technical design and sustained political alignment and institutional anchoring.

Enablers of System Change in Career Education and Guidance

Across GCEN, emerging learning suggests that system-level progress is most likely when **four enabling conditions** are present. The following sections summarize insights related to each enabler.

1. Measurement & Evidence

Across GCEN, monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) is shifting from a narrow focus on individual student outcomes toward building **system-level evidence architectures** that assess the quality, coherence, and institutionalization of career readiness education. Strong approaches combine tracking transitions into education, training, or employment with measures of intermediate outcomes such as career clarity, agency, and preparedness for workplace engagement, as well as indicators of institutional provision within schools. This reflects a broader shift toward measurement frameworks that generate insights useful for both practitioners and policymakers.

What this looks like in practice

Several GCEN members are demonstrating how more system-oriented measurement approaches can support improvement and scale:

- **Benchmarking institutional quality through shared standards.**

Digital self-assessment tools such as the *Xcelence framework* developed by Fundación Bertelsmann in Spain and the *Compass+* platform used by the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) in the UK allow schools to assess their career guidance provision against national standards. These tools shift measurement from individual outcomes toward evaluating the quality of system provision.

- **Tracking post-school transitions as a core outcome.**

Organizations such as Antarang (India) track students' transitions into education, training, or employment following program participation, reporting outcomes that exceed national averages. Similarly, the Lochpe Foundation (Brazil) follows alumni for up to six years to understand long-term employment trajectories and income progression.

- **Measuring intermediate shifts in readiness and agency.**

Recognizing that employment outcomes often take time to materialize, several organizations track intermediate outcomes that precede these transitions. Antarang measures changes in students' career clarity and agency through pre- and post-assessments, while Article 1 (France) tracks confidence and the discovery of new training pathways among programme participants.

Conditions that accelerate scale

Several conditions appear to strengthen the use of evidence in supporting system change. First, measurement frameworks are most influential when they **align with national quality standards**, enabling data to inform policy and system improvement. Second, **digital benchmarking tools** can aggregate data across institutions, generating insights that are useful for both schools and policymakers. Finally, organizations that **combine student-level outcomes with institutional indicators** are better able to demonstrate how interventions contribute to broader system reform.

Areas for continued learning

As organizations work to embed career education within systems, several considerations for measurement and evidence are emerging:

- Ensuring measurement approaches remain feasible within large-scale public systems
- Developing sustainable models for long-term alumni tracking
- Aligning evidence frameworks with policy decision-making timelines
- Strengthening the capacity of public systems and their partners to capture institutional and system-level change

These challenges highlight that strengthening measurement and evidence systems requires not only improved tools but also stronger data infrastructure and institutional capacity within systems.

2. Partnering with Governments to Expand Access to Career Education and Guidance

Across GCEN, learning on partnering with government highlights that scaling career education and guidance, including access to work exposure and work experience, is fundamentally a relational and political process as much as a technical one. Successful organizations invest in **sustained engagement** with public institutions, **aligning their work with national priorities** while positioning themselves as **trusted implementation partners**. Over time, these partnerships create pathways for reforms to move from pilot initiatives toward institutionalized policies embedded within public education systems.

What this looks like in practice

Examples from GCEN members highlight several strategies for strengthening government partnerships:

- **Designing phased transfer models for system ownership.**
The Antarang uses an “*I Do, We Do, You Do*” approach, initially piloting programs, then co-delivering with government teachers before transferring full ownership to the state education system. Similarly, the China Development Research Foundation (CDRF) pilots interventions and then uses evaluation results to inform government policy recommendations.
- **Aligning interventions with national policy priorities.**

Organizations that position their work as solutions to pressing government challenges can scale rapidly. For example, Article 1 aligned its mentoring platform with the national “*1 Jeune 1 Mentor*” initiative, expanding from supporting 2,000 youth to over 30,000 participants. Teach First (UK) similarly aligns its work with national skills strategies to secure government support for careers leader training.

- **Building trust through evidence and multi-stakeholder coalitions.**

Partnerships are strengthened when NGOs provide robust data to de-risk public investment and bring together coalitions of schools, municipalities, and employers. In Brazil, the Lochpe Foundation works closely with the Paula Souza Center, a public institution that manages the state network of technical schools, to coordinate planning and align programs with state priorities.

Conditions that accelerate scale

Government partnerships tend to be strongest when organizations **align with national policy agendas**, **provide credible evidence of impact**, and invest in **long-term relationship building** with both technical and political leadership. Structured pilot programs that generate policy-relevant evidence can help governments adopt and fund reforms at scale.

Areas for continued learning

Despite promising partnerships, several challenges remain:

- Alignment with national priorities can accelerate scale, but it also creates dependency on public funding. Shifts in political leadership or budget allocations can disrupt career guidance and work-based learning strategies and undermine continuity.
- Education systems evolve slowly, while labour markets shift rapidly. As a result, career guidance curricula and frameworks risk becoming outdated before they are fully implemented at scale.
- Transferring ownership to governments often stalls at the “last mile,” as school leaders and teachers may lack the time, resources, or specialized capacity to independently deliver high-quality career guidance.
- Governments require robust evidence to sustain investment, yet measuring institutional and system-level change remains underdeveloped. This is compounded by tensions between demands for rigorous evaluation and the practical and ethical constraints of system-wide implementation.
- Rigid school schedules, limited instructional time, and misaligned incentives often constrain sustained employer engagement and access to workplace-based learning opportunities.

These dynamics underscore that institutionalizing career education requires sustained political alignment and long-term engagement with government actors.

3. Fostering Meaningful Engagement with Employers

Across GCEN, experience shows that meaningful employer engagement and access to work exposure and experience requires moving beyond ad hoc interactions toward structured partnerships embedded within education systems. The strongest approaches create developmentally **sequenced pathways** through which students progressively build awareness of careers, professional networks, and workplace skills. These models increasingly rely on **clear frameworks for employer participation** and **intermediary coordination structures** that help sustain collaboration between schools and industry.

What this looks like in practice

Several GCEN members demonstrate how employer engagement can be structured more effectively:

- **Equipping employers with clear engagement frameworks.**

Organizations increasingly provide structured guidance and training for employers. For example, Article 1's *DEMA1N.org mentoring platform* includes training for corporate volunteers, while the Lochpe Foundation's *Action Plan for Inspiring Companies* helps employers structure their engagement with schools by outlining practical activities, timelines, and expectations for meaningful workplace-based learning experiences.

- **Using data and standards to strengthen employer participation.**

Digital benchmarking tools such as the *CEC Employer Standards framework* allow companies to evaluate and improve the quality of their engagement with schools. These tools help shift employer participation from philanthropic volunteering to strategic investment in future talent pipelines.

- **Creating intermediary roles to coordinate partnerships.**

Effective models recognize that schools and employers often operate with different incentives and timelines. Dedicated intermediary organizations or roles can help bridge this gap. Examples include Phineo's *Zukunftsträger alliances* in Germany and the Careers Manager role piloted by IHK Berlin, which coordinate collaboration between schools and industry.

- **Embedding workplace experiences within education.**

More immersive models move beyond workplace visits toward deeper engagement. The Lochpe Foundation's *Formare* program allows students to study within company facilities, while initiatives such as *East Sussex Careers Hub's Open Doors* program enable extended workplace exposure.

Conditions that accelerate scale

Employer engagement and access to work exposure and experience is most sustainable when companies see clear value in participation and when engagement is structured through coordinated platforms and materials rather than relying on individual volunteers. Dedicated intermediary organizations, shared standards, and clear engagement frameworks all strengthen the ability of systems to scale quality employer participation.

Areas for continued learning

Despite growing interest from employers, several challenges remain:

- Misalignment between school schedules and business operations
- Administrative burdens that discourage employer participation
- Reliance on overworked teachers to coordinate partnerships
- Uneven engagement across sectors and regions

These challenges highlight the importance of coordination structures that make employer engagement easier and more sustainable within education systems.

4. Integrating Technology into Career Education

Across GCEN, technology is emerging as an important tool for expanding access to career education and guidance while strengthening coordination across actors within the system. Digital platforms can support **personalized guidance**, **connect students with mentors and employers**, and enable educators to **share resources and collaborate** across institutions. Evidence across contexts suggests, however, that technology is most effective when integrated within **hybrid models** that combine digital infrastructure with human facilitation, mentoring, and workplace engagement.

What this looks like in practice

Several GCEN members are demonstrating innovative uses of technology:

- **Scaling personalized guidance through digital platforms.**
Technology can automate labour-intensive matching and information processes. Examples include Article 1's *INSPIRE algorithm* for study pathway guidance, *DEMA1N.org* for mentoring matches, and Antarang's *24/7 WhatsApp career chatbot* providing guidance to students.
- **Connecting educators through digital professional communities.**
Platforms such as Empieza Por Educar's *La Básica* allow vocational educators to share resources and collaborate, helping reduce professional isolation.
- **Interactive skill development tools.**
New technologies are expanding beyond information delivery toward simulation and skills certification. Examples include Article 1's *JobReady platform* for soft-skills badging and CDRF's AI-supported teacher training tools.

Conditions that accelerate scale

Technology initiatives are most successful when digital tools are embedded within existing institutional processes and supported by educator training. Hybrid delivery models that combine online tools with mentoring, facilitation, and employer interaction tend to generate stronger engagement and learning outcomes.

Areas for continued learning

Despite widespread interest in digital solutions, several challenges remain:

- Technology adoption requires sustained training and change management
- Organizations at times experiment with digital tools without a clear strategic framework
- Confidence in digital capabilities remains moderate despite widespread adoption
- Digital tools introduced without system integration often fail to sustain engagement

These insights highlight that technology can expand access and coordination, but only when accompanied by deliberate implementation strategies and system alignment.

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