

# Apprentices for bigger roles in wider world

By **Katie Macleod**

**A**s part of **Scottish Apprenticeship Week** from 5th-9th March, an apprenticeship fair was held in Stornoway Town Hall to advertise the benefits and opportunities of apprenticeships to young people in the Outer Hebrides.

The event was just one of many happening across the country, as part of an annual awareness campaign organised by Skills Development Scotland, which administers funding for apprenticeships on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Apprenticeships at all levels – both during school and post-school – offer work-based learning, and in the islands are part of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's overarching Applied Learning strategy, which offers vocational education opportunities on an equal footing with academic ones, and ensures all courses lead to relevant qualifications.

"Apprenticeships are Applied Learning in every sense of the word," explains the Comhairle's Apprenticeship Manager, Dolina Smith, who works with young people on post-school apprenticeships.

"All our apprenticeships involve learning on the job, and as a local authority we're now supporting apprenticeships from Foundation level right up to Graduate level."

The most commonly known apprenticeship is the Modern Apprenticeship, where on leaving school a young person works and learns on the job, all while earning a qualification. Now, there are also Foundation Apprenticeships, which give school pupils a practical taste of the world of work, and an industry-recognised qualification; and Graduate Apprenticeships, where young people can study up to Masters degree level while working and learning on the job. In the Outer Hebrides, the Comhairle also runs its own post-school apprenticeship scheme, which is funded and run independently from Skills Development Scotland.

For the new 2018 academic year, Education and Children's Services are offering apprenticeships as

a subject choice for pupils in all four secondary schools throughout the islands, in the form of Foundation Apprenticeships. Starting in August, six Foundation Apprenticeships – all at SCQF Level 6, which is equivalent to Higher – will be taught via a harmonized timetable in the Outer Hebrides.

Pupils are currently deliberating over their subject choices for the senior phase of S5 and S6, and are, for the first time, able to choose two-year Foundation Apprenticeships in Childcare, Engineering, Business Skills, Creative Digital Media, IT Hardware, and Health and Social Care.

Those pupils who enrol in a Foundation Apprenticeship will gain industry-standard qualifications that will increase their employability in their chosen field on leaving school, or alternatively, can use it as a stepping stone to a post-school Modern Apprenticeship; three of the four modules that make up a Modern Apprenticeship are completed during a Foundation Apprenticeship.

"Employability is absolutely key," says Iain Stewart, from Education and Children's Services, of the Applied Learning strategy and introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships. "In the last two years, about 40 per cent of our young people who leave school have gone straight into work, so it's incumbent upon us to provide them with the opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills, experiences, and certification required in the local economy."

"Applied Learning is taking what young people can learn in school and applying it to their post-school economic prospects for work," he explains, adding that Applied Learning subjects are all chosen based on economic opportunities and pupil interests.

"These have all been selected not by anonymous bureaucrats, but using labour market intelligence, and the 'personalisation and choice' views of young people. They're designed to meet economic skills requirements and reflect the views of young people, and their economic prospects locally. This gives young people the chance to really get a step up and engage in relevant work-based learning and training."