



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Building our communities



Developing work skills for the young

By Katie Macleod

From apprenticeships to workplace visits, initiatives to get young people in the Western Isles ready for the world of work are being implemented in a wide variety of ways.

It's all part of the national policy known as Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), which aims to better prepare children aged 3-18 for their working lives.

"It's a national initiative, but there's a lot going on locally," says Donald Macleod, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Senior Education Officer, adding that the work begins in nursery and progresses through primary into secondary school.

"It's getting children thinking earlier about what careers they want to pursue, and the reason it's skills-based as an approach is that the careers they might go into may not even exist yet. It's more about giving them a whole suite of skills so they can be more equipped for all sorts of professions in the future."

At the primary level, Laxdale Primary School has implemented a school-wide approach to incorporating DYW into the curriculum – and it's been so successful that Principal Teacher Mairi Macleod will be speaking about their strategy at the Scottish Learning Festival in Glasgow later this month.

"We're getting pupils to think about their future, and thinking of the skills that they have," explains Mairi, who initially started the scheme as part of the 'Into Headship' course at the Scottish College for Educational Leadership. "It's something the children really do enjoy. I'll be speaking about our journey at Laxdale, and if it can help anyone else to get started, that'll be great."

It was in 2016 that Mairi began the Into Headship course, and for the module 'Leading A Change,' she took the lead on designing and implementing the DYW programme from nursery to Primary 7, focusing on developing pupils' skills and providing opportunities for them to experience the world of work. After input from pupils and parents, a DYW Launch event was held in the school in May 2017, with a school-wide World of Work Day held the following month.

At the latter, more than 30 different representatives from industries ranging from media to chemistry were in attendance, with stations set up around the school to allow pupils to choose who to speak to. "We had really positive feedback from the children, and from the

people who came in to speak. They commented on how much the children knew, and the sensible questions they asked," says Mairi of the reaction to the event.

But DYW isn't just confined to big annual events; it's part of everyday education in Laxdale. "We've very much done it as a whole school approach, where all the classes have bought into it, and we try to take DYW into projects throughout the year," explains Mairi. In the 2017-18 school session, one of those topics was Stornoway Harbour, and for the DYW aspect of the subject, the aim was to learn about STEM careers in and around the harbour. This was done through speakers visiting the school, pupils visiting the Port Authority, and having a STEM focused-week in school. As Mairi says, "visiting workplaces allows the children to see jobs in real life, jobs in action, rather than just hearing about them, and we try to get all the classes doing that throughout the year."

"We're giving them different experiences and exposing them to different jobs in the local community," she continues. For early years pupils, that might look like visits from people in professions they'll already be aware of, such as medicine and the emergency services, while older pupils will focus more on specific skills in certain roles. "You have to adapt it, and it caters to all ages."

Getting all ages ready for the world of work is a central tenet of the DYW policy, and as pupils move into secondary school, they have options to study for vocational qualifications, and even progress into an apprenticeship when they do leave school.

The Comhairle's apprenticeship programme was launched in 2017 and is run by Apprenticeship Manager Dolina Smith. It offers a mix of Modern Apprenticeships, which are funded by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), and Comhairle-funded apprenticeships run independently from SDS. Some are posts within the Comhairle, while others are in the private sector; the Isle of Harris Distillery, for example, is currently advertising for an Apprentice Distiller.

Within the Comhairle's apprenticeship scheme, Pupil Equity Funding has been used this year to fund a number of posts for Education Attainment and Gaelic Language Assistant Apprentices. The Pupil Equity Fund is part of an overarching national strategy, the Scottish Attainment Challenge, which requires each local authority to implement measures which will address the attainment gap. Money from the Fund is then allocated directly to schools, and can be spent at the discretion of Head Teachers working in partnership

with their local authority.

For the 2017-18 period, the Western Isles received £1200 for every school pupil registered for free school meals in P1 – S3. This year, 22 of the 24 schools in the Western Isles decided to work together and pool their Pupil Equity Funding, and with the help of additional money from the Comhairle, recruited 12 Education Apprentices and six Gaelic Language Assistant Apprentices to work across these schools to help close the attainment gap.

"The Gaelic Language Assistant Apprentices are delivering support for the acquisition and learning of Gaelic language skills within Gaelic Medium Education, while the Education Apprentices are working across schools with targeted groups of pupils to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy, but also to increase their participation and engagement," explains Donald. "For increasing participation, it's about giving them more opportunities to go to after-school clubs, to take them out beyond the school. For engagement it's trying to provide ways to make them more interested and engaged in their learning in class."

Also new this year was an inclusive summer programme run by the Education Attainment Apprentices in collaboration with the Comhairle's Community Learning and Development team. Across the Western Isles, groups of young people who need extra help with attainment and participation were given the opportunity to get involved in a variety of activities for up to four days a week, with lunch included. As Community Learning and Development Manager Fiona Macinnes-Begg previously said, the summer programme "is for those young people who, if they have a break of six weeks, might regress slightly with their learning, so it's about keeping them involved, keeping them active over the holiday period."

Whether tackling career stereotypes in children's play at nursery level, encouraging primary pupils to examine the skills involved in their dream jobs, or helping young people earn qualifications while working and learning on-the-job as apprentices, DYW is being implemented at all levels of education in the Western Isles.

"It all fits together into a wider council strategy about employability and the local economy," says Donald. "We have to fight depopulation, we have young people who want to stay, and we want to make sure that there are avenues for them to do that, and that there's meaningful employment. That's a big focus."