

East Renfrewshire on Foundation Apprenticeships

Foundation Apprenticeships are increasing opportunities for young people and fundamentally changing the way schools, learning providers and employers are developing the young workforce.

Why Foundation Apprenticeships?

We have always welcomed opportunities to develop the breadth and choice available to our young people via our vocational programme.

There was already a strong vocational portfolio on offer, which had been built over the years, so we embraced the opportunity to add to this through introducing Foundation Apprenticeships.

Foundation Apprenticeships were introduced, following the publication of the Wood Report and as part of the actions set out in our local DYW Implementation Plan. At the same time, we were also reviewing our vocational pathways and so it was a natural step to include FAs as part of our senior phase offer for young people.

Encouraging schools to provide Foundation Apprenticeships

East Renfrewshire Schools have a reputation for having high attainment levels and providing high quality learning and experiences. Introducing FAs meant there needed to be parity of esteem to ensure they were thought of as a credible option for young people to pursue.

The Council was already delivering HNCs with colleges so there was existing awareness that we were looking beyond traditional routes to progress learning.

East Renfrewshire schools embraced the opportunity. Head teachers, deputy head teachers and pastoral staff were already working closely with the Education Department's Employability team and with SDS and appreciated the breadth of choice offered through the vocational portfolio.

Gaining support from teachers and senior school leadership

Whilst there have been some hurdles in terms of managing the operation of FAs, the experience of working with school staff to promote and implement FAs has been very positive.

Teachers have understood that what is being provided is yet another choice for pupils, ensuring there are options for a wide range of needs.

We have always included senior teaching staff in the development of the vocational programme, along with analysis from the data hub and labour market information. This clearly demonstrated the need for alternative learning experiences such as FAs.

Negotiations with Colleges start in October for the following August so we speak to schools in advance of that to gather their views in terms of the needs of cohorts of young people entering the Senior Phase. This way, the portfolio remains reflective of demand both nationally and at local level. This includes the range of FA frameworks available.

Building capacity in schools to support Foundation Apprenticeships

Our focus with the vocational programme can be summed up by getting the right pupils on the right courses at the right levels.

The introduction of FAs wasn't primarily driven by targets but by making sure the opportunities young people have are appropriate for them.

The Council's vocational programme runs from Level 1 – 7, with a focus on individualised curricula, to ensure each young person gets the learning experience they want and need.

For a number of reasons, in year one, we started with a small cohort of young people undertaking FAs. Firstly, this allowed us to carefully introduce FAs and engage fully with parents. We needed to make the case for FAs rather than more traditional pathways e.g. Highers. Secondly, to ensure we delivered a high quality experience and would be able to iron out any issues associated with the introduction of new programmes.

The focus on quality over quantity ensured that word of mouth across schools, parents and pupils would be positive and helped us to significantly scale up in the second year.

The Council has a Vocational Partnership Group with representation across all secondary schools, training providers, colleges, SDS, and SQA. This group's commitment to FAs has played a key role in supporting the Department in building capacity and introducing the programme successfully.

Promoting the offer and benefits of Foundation Apprenticeships to pupils and parents or carers

We work very hard to promote all the vocational options but we have delivered focused work in partnership with Colleges and Local Authority partners from Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire and the west of Scotland to support FAs.

We provide detailed information in relation to FA frameworks for teaching and pastoral staff and meet with them regularly to ensure this information is as up to date as possible.

In terms of promotion to pupils and parents, one important but simple change that we made was to develop one offer for the senior phase curriculum, where there were previously two different guides comprising a vocational booklet and one for school subjects.

Previously a pupil may have focused on the subject choice guide and discarded the vocational booklet. This new options guide covers everything that is available to young people to help them and their parents / carers look across and explore all the options to decide what individual learning plan is right for them.

To offer more information we include presentations at options evenings and parents' nights and ensure we also have a presence from our College partners. Talks on FAs are amongst the ticketed events that we hold at careers evenings; they are as equally well attended as the others, which indicates a real interest in them. Many parents in East Renfrewshire see the benefits, as they are professionals working within the sectors FAs support.

Schools themselves are also promoting Foundation Apprenticeships through their social media platforms so parents are more familiar with them.

Benefits to schools and pupils of greater employer engagement through Foundation Apprenticeships

Pupils get a good experience of a working environment in the sector they are studying in. However, we need to make sure that the type of experience they are being given is worthwhile, providing them with hands on experience.

As the current focus is for the Council to act as a main point of contact for employers we would expect that relationships between schools and employers will be a future development as they start to deal with more detailed aspects of pupil placements and build links over time.

Tackling challenges in introducing and embedding Foundation Apprenticeships in the curriculum

The first two years of delivery have gone well. The main challenge for us has been putting in place good quality workplace experiences. This is across a number of areas such as finding placements and ensuring employers understand the specific needs of the young person.

In terms of supporting the FA team, we found a number of opportunities within Council-led services for example, placements in Council nurseries or in specific departments.

Another challenge is dealing with any changes that may happen with a pupil and their other studies over the two-year period of an FA. We are now asking pupils to give more consideration to their two-year journey when they are choosing their options.

In addition, we are also hoping to enhance the way training from the college is delivered by bringing lecturers into our own facilities, which would remove some of the issues we have experienced related to travel. We have facilities within the new build Barrhead High that could support Health and Social Care, Creative and Digital frameworks and others.

Plan to support the future growth in the number of Foundation Apprenticeship opportunities

The Education Department's vision is 'Everyone Attaining, Everyone Achieving, through Excellent Experiences', we will continue to offer FAs as part of the senior phase to meet the needs and aspirations of our young people.

L.A. partnership working

East Renfrewshire works in partnership with Glasgow City and East Dunbartonshire to deliver a joined up approach to promoting vocational pathways available across the west of Scotland. All three Local Authorities work closely with Glasgow Regional Colleges.

In practice, partnership working ensures a strong, clear message to young people about available opportunities, enables the LAs to work together to develop College provision and provides colleges with one point of contact.

The approach has led to the creation of a joint vocational handbook and joint events taking place at the colleges.

