



**Skills  
Development  
Scotland**

# **Foundation Apprenticeship Progress Report July 2025**

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## Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this Foundation Apprenticeship Progress Report for 2025.

This report supplements our joint reporting with the Scottish Funding Council in relation to delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships.

It is designed to provide additional evidence and context around SDS delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships. It captures insight from a range of data sources that we hope supports a richer understanding of the impact of the programme.

Over the last decade, it has been my pleasure to work with partners to grow and expand the delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships.

In doing so I'm incredibly proud of the positive impact the programme has had on young people, schools and the many employers who have engaged.

There is no doubt that introducing a new, national learning pathway into the senior phase of secondary school has been incredibly challenging and we have learned much along the way.

However, the underpinning rationale for Foundation Apprenticeships is as strong today as it was when they were introduced in 2014.

By providing young people with meaningful, structured hands-on experience of the world of work, we are empowering them to make better decisions about their career choices.

By providing a practical, applied approach to gaining a qualification, we are opening doors for people with different learning styles.

And by connecting people to the local labour market, we are providing a much-needed skills pipeline for employers.

As this report is published, we are approaching a significant juncture for the future of Foundation Apprenticeships, as the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) Bill progresses through the parliamentary process.

If passed, this Bill will see responsibility for all Foundation Apprenticeship delivery pass to the Scottish Funding Council.

Should this happen, I am confident that the programme which SDS currently delivers will be handed to the SFC in a position of strength, with a wide range of robust, committed partners who passionately believe in the Foundation Apprenticeship pathway.

Regardless of where these funding responsibilities sit, my strong hope is that after many years of reviews, recommendations, uncertainty and complexity in the operating environment, there is a rejuvenated focus on renewal, growth and continuous improvement of this critical programme.

Over the last decade I have seen with my own eyes how powerfully Foundation Apprenticeship can become embedded as a highly valued senior phase option that helps a diverse range of learners achieve skills, raise attainment and progress into work.

I've had the privilege to be involved from the start, working with leaders who are passionate about making positive changes in education and I remain as committed as ever to building on the success of Foundation Apprenticeships for the future.

**Diane Greenlees**

Director of National Training Programmes, Skills Development Scotland



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# Introduction

## About Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is Scotland's national skills agency. Our ambition is that skills contribute to a thriving, productive and inclusive Scotland. We help inspire and enable Scotland's people and businesses to develop the right **skills for a changing world**.

We achieve this through intelligence-led delivery of Scotland's careers service, apprenticeships, and other learning and skills interventions in support of Scottish Government ambitions.

## Partnership and Collaboration

To make this happen, SDS collaborates extensively across the education and skills system. By sharing expertise and intelligence, we enable the development and delivery of innovative solutions to Scotland's skills and labour market challenges and ensure that our work is led and informed by the diverse voices of Scotland's communities and employers.

Working with Scottish Government, our partner agencies, and other national stakeholders we seek to create greater efficiency and consistency throughout the careers and skills ecosystem.

We have dedicated place-based resource, who provide leadership on regional skills issues, share skills intelligence and insight, helping facilitate collaborative approaches to driving economic development.

Locally, we work with community planning partnerships, employability partnerships, and every state-funded school in Scotland as well as local independent learning providers, colleges, universities, employers, and equality organisations.

Further details on SDS's strategic approach and operational activities can be found in *Skills for a Changing World*, our [Strategic](#)

[Plan 2022-27](#), published in November 2022.

## About this report

Since 2021, SDS and the Scottish Funding Council have published joint statistical reports which reflect the totality of Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) provision across the country.

This report is intended to provide supplementary additional programme information and includes enhanced quantitative and qualitative data for the FAs that are funded by SDS.

We also provide additional context and detail of the evolution of FAs and how they have been adapted and developed over time.

SDS has been collecting 'real time' feedback from apprentices over a number of years and this insight helps articulate some less obviously quantifiable benefits and learner outcomes offered by FAs than are reported elsewhere.

The value of real-life experience is also a very powerful means for communicating how FAs work in practice and we provide a flavour of this through a selection of case studies.

We have also included a short piece from one of Scotland's local authority leaders who talks his experience of the success of FAs and how this might be replicated elsewhere.

## What is a Foundation Apprenticeship?

FAs are work-based learning qualifications, available to school pupils in their senior phase at secondary school. They are designed to help young people gain valuable, real world work experience and access work-based learning whilst they are still at school.

They are developed with industry and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and align with industry sectors where there are current skills shortages and projected future jobs growth. They provide industry-recognised qualifications where there is a real need for skilled employees and are based on existing and successful, industry-endorsed, Modern Apprenticeship (MA) frameworks.

FAs provide qualifications at SCQF Levels 4, 5 and 6 (equivalent to National 4, National 5 and Higher). During their FA, learners attend a learning provider where they build up their knowledge and skills, which they then put into practice through a placement with an employer (SCQF level 6) or a work-based challenge (SCQF levels 4/5).

They have been designed to:

- address the needs and aspirations of many young people in the senior phase by providing work-relevant learning and experience
- create strong links between young people, education and employers
- support and empower young people in their career decision-making
- strengthen industry leadership and engagement in the design and provision of industry-relevant learning in the senior phase

- address outdated perceptions about the value and equivalence of different learning pathways into employment and future careers, amongst key influencers including schools, teachers, parents and carers.
- present an opportunity to tackle existing under representation in certain sectors of the economy by increasing participation from young women, young people from BME backgrounds and young people with a disability.

FAs are available in the following subject areas (frameworks):



FAs are designed to benefit a wide range of young people between S3 and S6 to support attainment and achievement.

Following the completion of a FA, pupils have a range of post-school progression options that include:

- direct entry into work – FAs provide valuable work experience in key sectors for those young people who want to go straight into work when they leave school

- direct entry into work and learning through a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) – FAs are aligned to respective MAs enabling progression to work and continued learning and development, in some cases offering accelerated progression where apprentices have already achieved common units shared across both FA and MA frameworks.
- direct entry into work and further learning through a Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) – FAs are recognised as qualifications for entry to university to undertake a GA
- direct entry into college or university – FAs are recognised by Higher and Further Education, offering clear pathways for entry to college HNC/D courses and university degree courses.

The FA forms an important part of our work in enhancing the learner journey. We continue in our work to promote FAs across schools, with young people and their parents and carers, to enable and encourage more pupils to take the opportunity to experience learning out of the classroom, in a real workplace, where this is the right choice for them.

## Growth and development

Strong international evidence suggests that many high performing, economies with high levels of productivity have greater parity in uptake between academic and work-based learning (WBL) provision.

FAs were developed to address this by offering a blend of academic and work-based learning for young people in the senior phase of secondary school.

SDS's work with partners to introduce FA 'pathfinder' projects in 2014 was endorsed by the Commission for Developing the Young Workforce, whose remit was to bring classroom and employer closer together. This was reflected in Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy published by Scottish Government later that year which set out a clear commitment to FAs and their part in building a world-class work-based learning system for Scotland.

Part funded by the European Social Fund, FAs were introduced to broaden options for learning, give young people access to meaningful work experience and offer a new means for qualification achievement while at school.

By 2017, FAs were being delivered in all 32 local authorities, across some or all their schools. That year, a new, single year delivery model was introduced in response to increasing demand. By 2018, 12 FA frameworks were available at SCQF L6, offering pupils a choice of subject areas representing 11 industry sectors.

In 2019, through close partnership working with the Scottish Qualifications Authority, FAs at SCQF L4 and 5 were introduced to further improve the accessibility of vocational learning for pupils and their opportunity to achieve a recognised qualification.

Figure 1: Foundation Apprenticeship timeline (2014 to 2024)



Following Brexit in early 2020, access to European funding ceased. This meant there was a requirement to seek alternative finance options which, in 2021, resulted in the mainstreaming of funding via existing Scottish Funding Council (SFC) budget allocation.

Today the SFC manage and fund college-led FA provision and SDS manage and fund provision by local authorities and independent learning providers.

Following publication of the Withers Review with its associated recommendations around simplification of the post-school funding body landscape, development of the FA offer in response to

recommendations of the OECD<sup>1</sup> and Education Scotland<sup>2</sup> has been limited.

That notwithstanding, there is evidence that the programme is delivering significant benefits for learners and employers, particularly in regions where local authorities, working with local partners, have worked to embed the offer as a core element of the senior phase curriculum.

The importance of Foundation Apprenticeships was reiterated in a statement in January 2025, by the Lead DYW Officer at Aberdeenshire Council:

“[Foundation Apprenticeships] are a blueprint with potential to bridge the gap between education and employment anywhere in the world. By delivering courses close to communities – co-created with industry – and focusing on meta-skills alongside preparation for further education, we’re preparing students not just for exams but for life. And in doing so, we’re building a more skilled and confident workforce that can face the challenges of tomorrow”.

In educational terms, the FA is still a relatively new programme. The last ten years have shown how this concept has enhanced delivery of work-based learning, giving school pupils a blend of relevant qualifications and employers a better equipped and informed pipeline of talent.

This is recognised in an independent report published by Rodel in partnership with OECD<sup>3</sup>, which referenced FAs as part of an

exemplar ‘no wrong door’ approach to the design and implementation of career pathways:

“Regardless of where a student is in their career pathway, there should be a “next step”. Whether they are in an apprenticeship, higher education, or a career, they should be able to move back and forth seamlessly. This is evident in Scotland’s mix of apprenticeships from high school to higher education”.

In The Edge Foundation’s 2018 publication *Towards a Twenty-First Century Education System*, FAs were recognised as beacons of hope in providing young people with the education they need.

Aligned with the principles, as set out by Hayward (2023), in her independent review<sup>4</sup> of qualifications and assessment in Scotland’s education system, this remains our ambition for the benefit of young people and the wider economy.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/12/edge\\_future\\_learning\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/12/edge_future_learning_report_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/media/yqjpulac/evaluation-of-foundation-apprenticeships-march-22a.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://rodelde.org/report/career-pathways-rapidly-changing-world/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-report-independent-review-qualifications-assessment/>



## Overview of SDS delivery model

Following the initial roll-out of FAs in 2016, we have continued to assess and refine the delivery model and the associated processes and procedures that support it.

Contract awards are offered to lead partners, who are responsible for creating FA opportunities for school pupils in their area. SCQF level 4, 5 or 6 FAs are started in the following academic year.

As described in the previous section, SDS currently funds FAs that are led by local authorities and independent learning providers. This equates to approximately 50% of FAs in any given year.

Each learning provider must have the appropriate awarding body centre and qualification approvals in place before it can deliver the FA.

The FA Product Specification, published by SDS, sets out the principles required for delivering each FA. The lead partner must give SDS a clear outline of how these principles will be met, the arrangements that are in place to develop and maintain delivery, and of the roles and responsibilities of each of their local partners involved in delivery.

Each FA Framework has a unique Product Specification. This outlines the component parts of the qualification, including the SQA catalogue reference numbers for each Group Award and the associated units. These are all mapped against SCQF levels and credit points. The FA product specification also outlines the notional learning hours required to achieve the required qualifications within each framework.

The contracting process and related evaluation criteria is designed with a strong focus on quality and requires a 'consortia' approach to delivery. This 'consortia' approach incorporates a range of different local partners that are crucial for successful delivery of the FA design principles, including local authorities and schools, employers, and learning providers.

Delivery partners are required to work with schools and local authorities to co-design delivery models that work with school timetables, ensuring that FAs can be offered as part of the senior phase curriculum. To further support this, the flexibility of FA delivery has evolved where, for example, learning hubs are offered within secondary schools to bring learning providers to pupils where the logistics of pupils travelling from a potentially remote school may act as a barrier to FA participation.

Initially, SCQF level 6 FAs were offered over a two-year timespan, meaning that component parts of the qualification were predominantly achieved in year one, usually equating to one full day per week with a learning provider and the work-based learning, work placement element would be completed in year two over one or two days per week with an employer.

Additional flexibility was added to delivery models in response to feedback from local authorities and learning providers with the introduction of a one-year FA which aligns more closely with other senior phase school subjects and enables an FA to be undertaken by those in their final year of school. This approach requires the learner to allocate more hours per week to the FA programme, usually two full days each week, with some learning providers offering block arrangements for work placements.

At SCQF levels 4 and 5, the delivery model is slightly different. These are all delivered over a single year, and learners work towards

achieving a Customised Award in one of three subject areas: Automotive, Hospitality and Construction. The Customised Award consists of a Skills for Work qualification (Hospitality and Automotive) or National Progression Award (Construction) combined with a work-based challenge unit, which gives learners the opportunity to work with a local employer to design, develop and deliver a project.

All FAs are comprised of learning elements, combining practice based experiential learning and complementary underpinning knowledge alongside the development of meta-skills.

The role of employers is critical to the success of FAs as they provide the work-based context and experiential learning opportunities that reinforce knowledge elements delivered by the learning provider. Employer engagement in the FA programme is not solely reserved for work placements or contextualised project requirements. Employer engagement features throughout delivery with industry talks, visits and industry-related challenges throughout the duration of the FA.

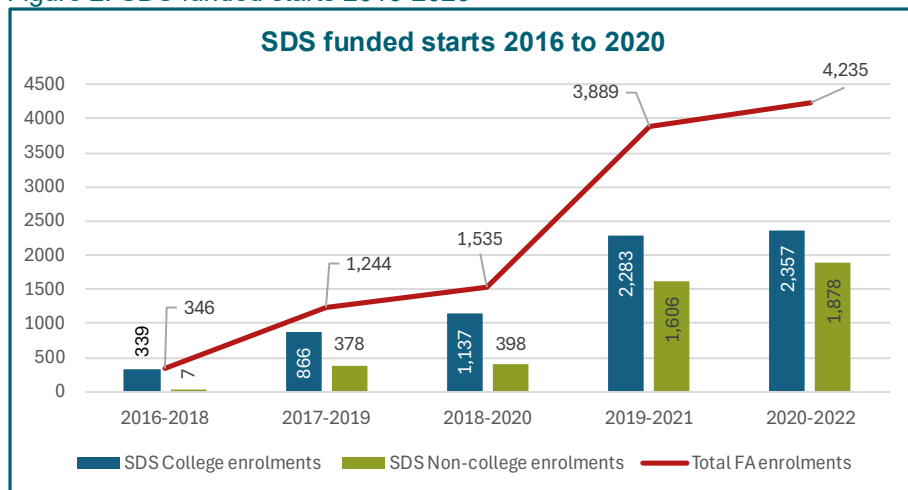
## Performance data

Following the early pilot phase, 2016 was the first year of FA delivery using frameworks that were fully designed with, and approved by, industry and certified by SQA.

### FA uptake

In 2016, FAs were rolled out across more local authorities and schools, with a gradual increase in contract bids (taking FA contracted places to 5,000) and a corresponding increase in uptake even throughout the COVID pandemic period. In 2020 (the 5<sup>th</sup> cohort of learners), the number of school pupils registered for a Foundation Apprenticeship reached 4,235.

Figure 2: SDS funded starts 2016-2020



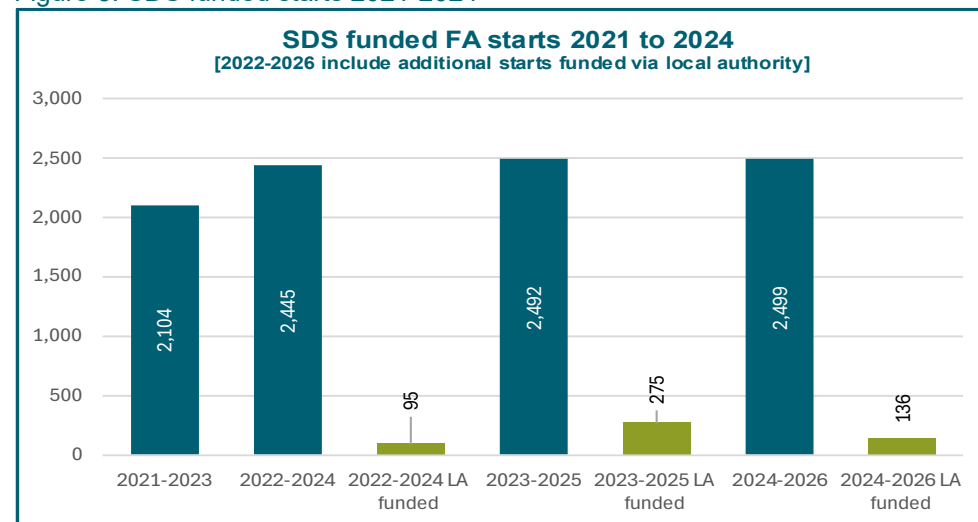
In 2021, the responsibility for funding FAs led by colleges was transferred to the Scottish Funding Council, with SDS retaining responsibility for funding starts via local authorities and independent

learning providers. Between 2016 and 2018, most starts were delivered through colleges.

Since 2019 there has been a significant rise in demand for FAs amongst local authorities and independent providers. Demand has been consistently in excess of the funding for 2,500 starts available through SDS in the last three years.

Additional starts have been funded by local authorities in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

Figure 3: SDS funded starts 2021-2024



The Scottish Government's longstanding commitment to the provision of up to 5,000 FA places was met in 2020. In 2021 SDS and SFC were each given a policy target of funding c.2,500 FA places – matching the previous 5,000 FA policy ambition.

With the senior phase in Scotland accounting for around 135,000 school pupils, less than 4% of S4-S6 have an opportunity to study for a FA, currently.

We are committed to working with Scottish Government and partners to grow the programme and make FAs accessible to all senior phase school pupils.

## Equality

FAs were designed to be accessible to all pupils. As the number of starts has increased over the lifetime of the programme and more schools have offered FAs as part of subject choices, there has been a corresponding increase in the diversity of pupils participating.

Consistently, around a third of pupils undertaking an FA at SCQF level 6 have come from the two most deprived (quintile) areas of Scotland, as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). For SCQF levels 4 and 5, this is higher at around 45% of pupils.

Over time, there has also been increasing proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups choosing an FA as one of their school subjects. At SCQF level 6, this reached 8.7% of total starts in 2024 with greatest representation in engineering, IT, business skills and healthcare frameworks. There has also been growth in participation in all frameworks at SCQF 4 and 5 with minority ethnic starts now 5.3% of all 2024 starts.

Pupils self-declaring a disability has been consistently high, tracking at around 20% on average, largely due to the broad definition of disability, which includes additional support needs and learning difficulties (incorporating dyslexia, dyspraxia and mental health issues). This is in line with the proportion of students at university (17.4%) and college (24.1%) who self-identified a disability in 2022<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications/sfcst052023/>

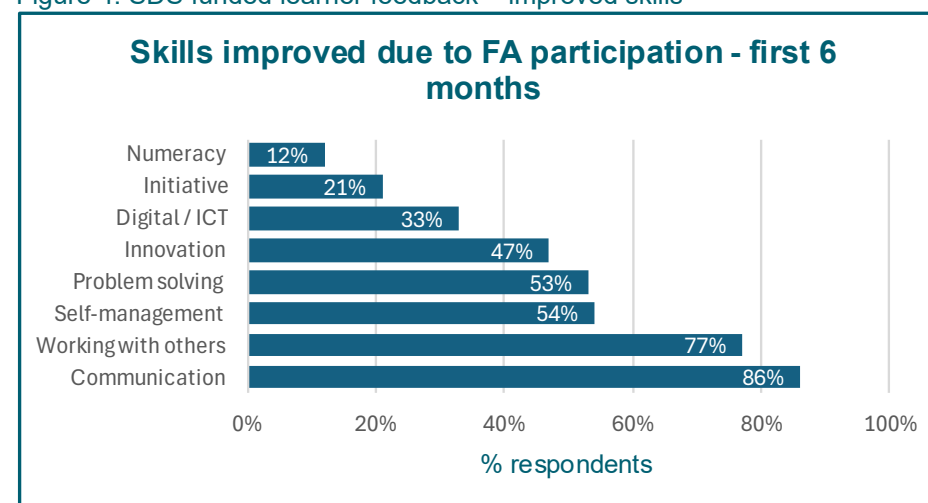
<sup>6</sup> Note that SDS do not survey SFC funded learners as we do not hold their data.

## FA learner feedback

As part of our comprehensive data collection we survey all pupils, who are undertaking an SDS funded FA<sup>6</sup>, at three points in time. Initially, we ask them questions six months into their study to understand how well some of the logistical and practical elements of the FA are working. We also collect information about some of the skills and personal development they experience, because of their participation in a FA.

Figure 4 shows some of the transferable skills or meta-skills that pupils identified as improved due to participation in the FA. These skills are highly valued by employers and are critical for young people as they journey through education and into the world of work. Figure 5 highlights the personal skills that pupils felt they had developed during those first six months of the FA.

Figure 4: SDS funded learner feedback – improved skills<sup>7</sup>



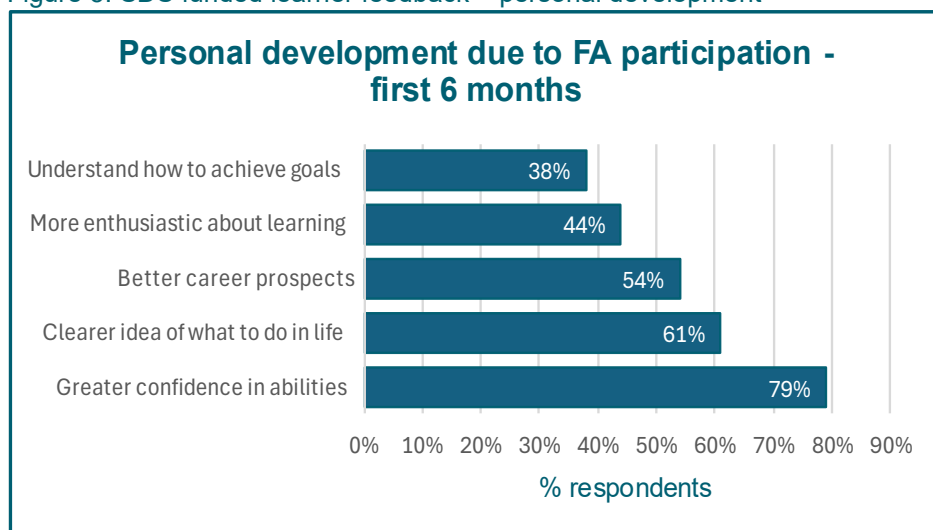
<sup>7</sup> Based on responses from 1,284 learners in training



The combination of better communication, teamwork and managing workload chimes with the high proportion of pupils recognising that their confidence levels had increased within the first six months of their FA.

One of the broad aims of the FA is to give pupils valuable experiential learning and to understand what they might want to do later in life (and what they might not want to do). At the six-month stage, over 60% of pupils felt they had a clearer idea of what they wanted to do once they left school and over half were confident that their career prospects had improved due to the FA.

Figure 5: SDS funded learner feedback – personal development



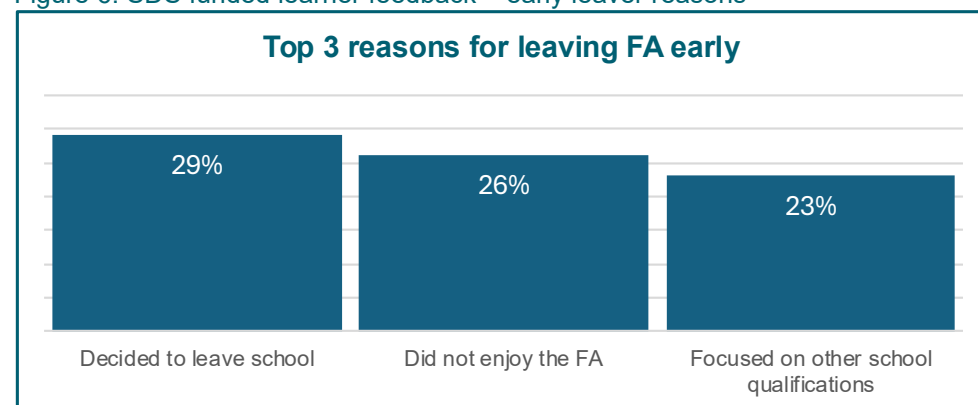
We also collect survey data from pupils immediately on leaving their FA, regardless of whether they complete the course. This helps us to understand why pupils might leave their FA early as well as the

benefits to participation and what they did after leaving the FA programme.

Figure 6 illustrates the top three reasons given for leaving the FA early. We know from earlier research that a reasonably high proportion of early leavers go within the first few months of study. This is common as pupils change their mind about what they want to do and is not unique to the FA programme. There is no data in the public domain to provide equivalent information about the numbers of pupils who change their minds about other school or school/college-based subjects. Almost a third of early leavers left their FA as they had decided to leave school completely – they may have been Christmas leavers or perhaps pupils on the two-year FA who left at the end of their first year. Feedback provided by all leavers is used to steer any programme improvements that may be required to encourage more pupils to complete their FA.

Any components of the FA completed by pupils who choose to leave early are recognised and certificated by SQA.

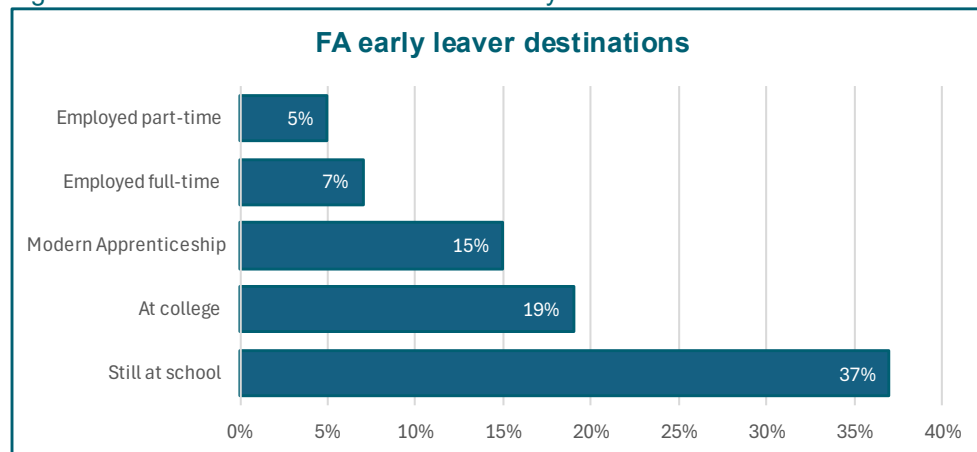
Figure 6: SDS funded learner feedback – early leaver reasons<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Based on responses from 149 early leavers

We also collect data to understand early leaver destinations. Figure 7 illustrates the top five destinations for pupils who leave the programme early, covering 80% of responses. Almost 40% of early leavers stay at school with the remainder staying in education, training or employment.

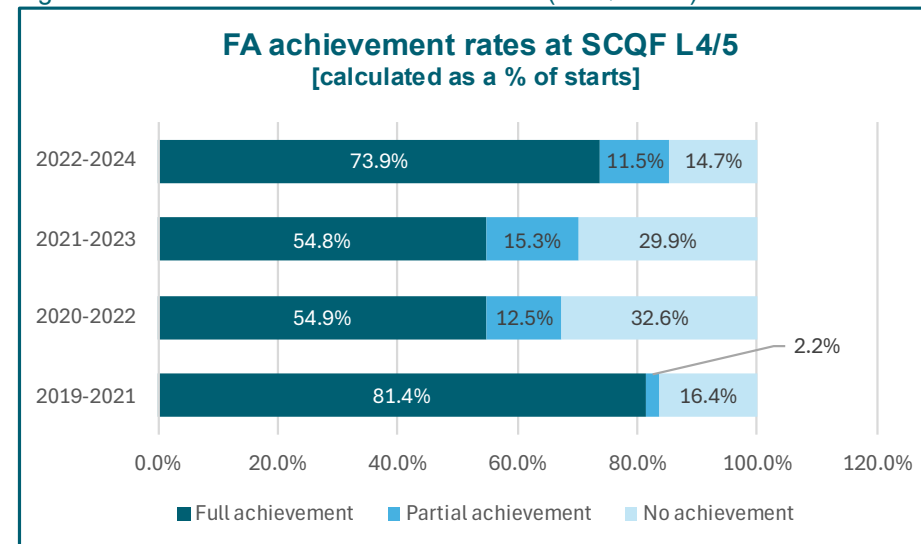
Figure 7: SDS funded learner feedback – early leaver destinations



## FA achievements<sup>9</sup>

Achievement data for all **SDS funded** FAs is included in Figures 8 and 9. Achievement rates are calculated as a proportion of total starts each year and so include those who left their FA very early, potentially understating the true achievement rate.

Figure 8: SDS funded FA achievement rates (SCQF L4/5)



At SCQF level 4/5, there are higher proportions of pupils from deprived areas (based on SIMD<sup>10</sup> ranking of home address) and greater proportions pupils self-declaring a disability. Achievement rates are high for these pupils, albeit with a dip in performance during the COVID pandemic. Latest data shows that the achievement rate is now back in line with that of the first cohort of learners, with only 15% recorded as no achievement (who were likely very early leavers).

At SCQF level 6, the proportion of pupils achieving their FA has grown each year (other than 2020, due to COVID) with almost 80% of pupils either gaining full or partial achievement in 2022-2024.

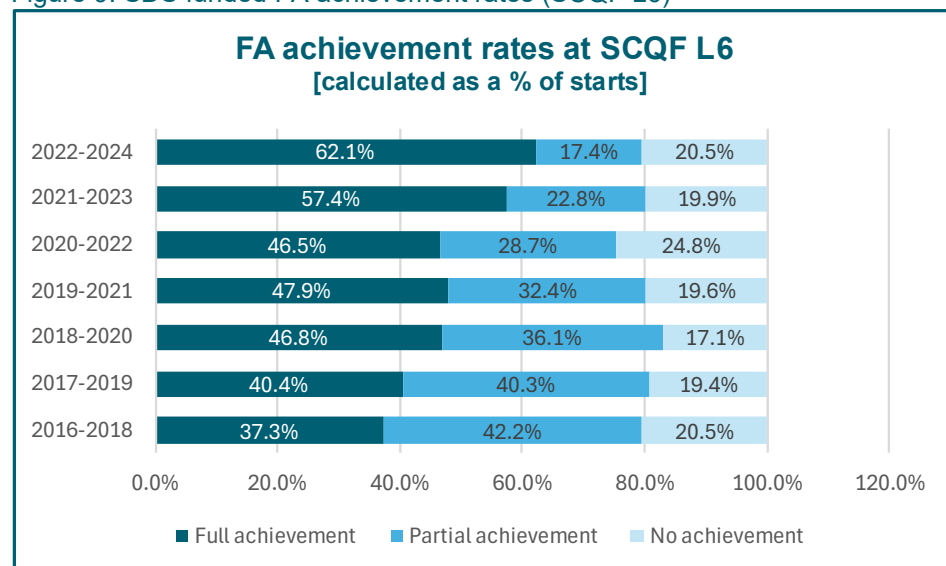
As described on page 19, there is no comparable achievement data available because in other school subjects, pupils are only included

<sup>9</sup> Data relates to SDS funded FAs only. We do not hold data for those funded through SFC.

<sup>10</sup> SIMD = Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

in the denominator when calculating pass rates if they remain on course long enough to be registered to sit the end of year exams.

Figure 9: SDS funded FA achievement rates (SCQF L6)



## FA learner outcomes – 15 months after leaving FA

All SDS funded FAs are surveyed 15 months after leaving their FA. Like the results immediately after leaving, the skills recognised as being most improved as a direct result of the FA included communication, working with others, problem solving and self-management. Pupils also cited increased levels of confidence, better career prospects and a clearer idea of their future career.

Being able to reflect on the FA and recognise the impact more than a year later demonstrates the value pupils gain from this type of experiential learning.

When asked to describe the most valuable outcome of their FA, pupils had a clear top 3:

- The qualifications achieved
- Gaining ‘soft skills’ such as managing own workload, teamwork and communication
- The experiences of working gained because of the FA

The value of the qualification achieved, whether perceived or quantifiable in terms of UCAS points or Insight tariff, is highly regarded by pupils. A later section of this report compares each FA with other school qualifications at the same SCQF level and includes some interesting evidence collected at local authority level that demonstrates the wider impact of the FA programme for participants.

## FA leaver destinations

Survey results show that almost 50% of former FAs progress to university or college with an additional fifth moving into a MA.

In total, 98% of survey respondents progressed into education, employment or training, which is slightly higher than the national average for all school leavers<sup>11</sup> (95.7%).

Figure 10: SDS funded FA pupil destinations



Almost half of the respondents that stated they were in employment are working in the sector that most closely aligns with their FA and 13% have remained with their FA employer.

Relative to the Annual Participation Measure, which tracks 16-19 year olds in Scotland, pupils who have participated in the FA are better represented in HE, FE, MA, GA and employment<sup>12</sup>. On average, 5.1% of 16-19 year olds were undertaking an MA in 2024, 19.7% were in HE, 10.4% in FE and 12.7% in employment.

We use two key metrics to gauge the success of our training programmes:

- Satisfaction
- Likelihood to recommend

These are presented as mean-point scores (MPS) based on a ten-point scale. Table 1 shows results from SDS funded FAs while in training over a three-year period. Results are consistently positive.

Table 1: SDS funded FA pupil feedback provided while in training

	2022	2023	2024
Satisfaction with FA	8.2	8.2	8.3
Likelihood to recommend FA	8.3	8.4	8.4

<sup>11</sup> February 2025, Scottish Government: [School leaver attainment and destinations](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Annual Participation Measure](#), August 2024



## The role of providers: successful practise examples

SDS works with providers and other key stakeholders to ensure delivery models are tailored to local need. Through proactive contract management and continuous improvement we seek to understand and share successful practise.

The following case studies demonstrate how providers work in partnership with employers and schools to deliver strong recruitment, retention and attainment.

### Learner-centred approach from Tigers

By working closely with schools and employers to provide the best experience for learners, Tigers is enabling Foundation Apprentices to thrive.

The Glasgow-based provider's relationship-led and learner-centred approach prioritises individual needs, practical experience and strong partnerships with education and industry.

Tigers have been delivering Foundation Apprenticeships since 2019 and have registered 1,062 learners through direct contracting, with a further 348 through sub-contractor delivery.

Since 2019, they have supported FAs to achieve qualifications in Civil Engineering, Business Skills, IT: Software Development and Social Services: Children and Young People at SCQF Level 6.

Through a unique 'hub' delivery model, Tigers has built strong, trust-based relationships with schools and become an integral part of the wider school team. This 'hub' model involves collaboration with

senior leadership, pupil support staff and SDS Careers Advisers to ensure a joined-up experience for apprentices.

Tigers integrates wellbeing into every stage of the learning experience and each FA framework is supported by a team with industry experience, ensuring tailored support for every learner.

Relevant practical experience is central to Tigers' model. Learners benefit from meaningful employer engagement, which enhances their current learning and opens pathways into Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships, further education and employment.

SDS's apprentice voice survey insights show high satisfaction levels with learner experience with Tigers with the majority of pupils recommending the FA to others. Several former Tigers FAs have been recognised as Finalists and Winners in the Scottish Apprenticeship Awards.



*Tigers Early Learning and Childcare Foundation Apprentices.*

## Young people at the heart of Working4U

Putting young people at the heart of delivery is key to Foundation Apprenticeship success at West Dunbartonshire Council Working4U.

Since 2018, the local authority learning provider has supported around 350 pupils to achieve qualifications across Business Skills, Civil Engineering, Social Services & Healthcare and Social Services: Children & Young People at SCQF Level 6, as well as Construction at SCQF Level 5.

Learners are offered tailored support at every stage of their Foundation Apprenticeship journey – from the initial application process, through to work placement, completion and supporting progression onto positive destinations.

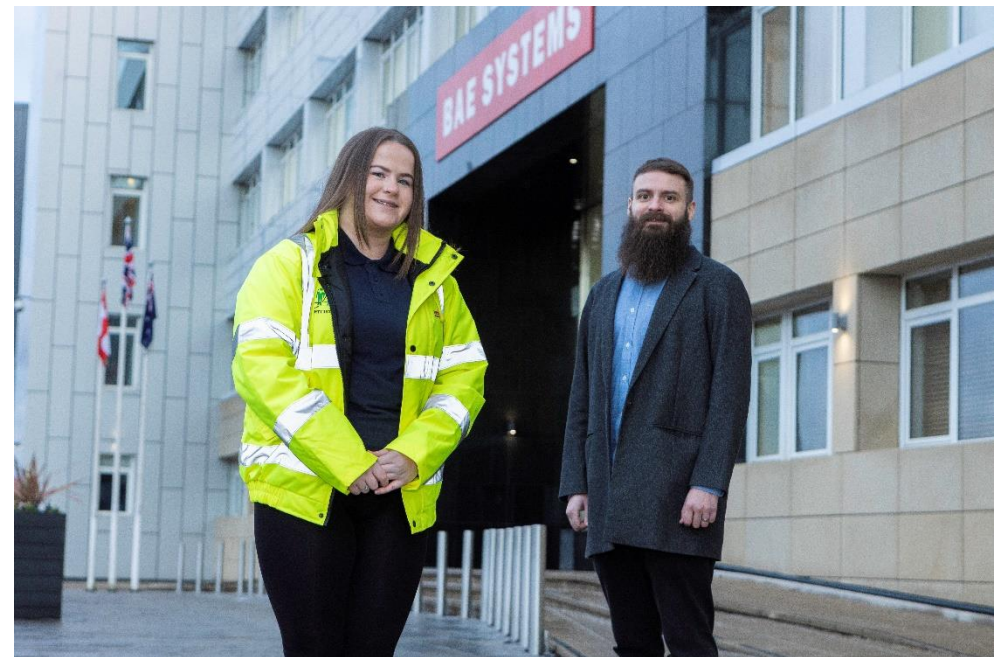
Working4U ensure the FA application process is supportive and informative, with staff delivering application workshops and offering one-to-one guidance to pupils and their parents, supported by input from former apprentices.

Work placement preparation is collaborative and pupil-led. Young people are involved in discussions about their preferences, and Working4U staff accompany them on their first day to meet mentors and settle in. Before starting, pupils receive wellbeing packs and placement clothing if needed. Support continues throughout the placement and doesn't end when the FA finishes.

Post-completion, Working4U helps pupils with personal statements, interview skills and applications for apprenticeships, college or university. The team maintains contact through follow-up texts and calls and a Working4U key worker continues to offer tailored support to any learners not yet in a positive destination.

Recognising success is central to Working4U's approach. They host regular celebration events spotlighting pupils' achievements, and several former FAs have been recognised as Finalists and Winners in the Scottish Apprenticeship Awards, and through local celebration events in schools.

SDS's apprentice voice survey insights showed all Working4U learners said the FA improved their communication skills, while three quarters said they improved organisational, team working and problem solving. The majority also said they would recommend the FA to others.



*Former FA Penny Hay moved on to a Modern Apprenticeship with BAE Systems pictured with Stephen Knox of W4U.*

## Comparisons with other learning

Table 2 provides some context for considering the value of the FA. It shows how FAs at SCQF Level 6 compare with Highers, the most common school qualification taken up by senior phase pupils at SCQF level 6. SCQF credits are based on the notional learning hours required for each qualification. UCAS points are used to measure the relative value of all post-16 qualifications in the UK and are used by some universities to define entry requirements.

It should be emphasised that FAs are very different from Highers. However, this provides a means for comparison using two well established measurements.

Table 2: FA SCQF credits, Insight Tariff and UCAS point comparisons

Qualification	Grade	SCQF Level	SCQF Credits	Insight Tariff	UCAS points
<b>Higher</b>					
All Higher subjects	A	6	24	204	33
	B	6	24	182	27
	C	6	24	160	21
	D	6	24	149	15
<b>Foundation Apprenticeship</b>					
Accountancy @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	64	427	42
Business Skills @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	51	340	42
Civil Engineering @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	84	560	56
Creative & Digital Media @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	64	427	42
Engineering @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	87	580	56
Financial Services @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	52	347	42
Food and Drink Technologies @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	53	353	42
IT: Hardware/System Support @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	59	393	42
IT: Software Development @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	59	393	42
Scientific Technologies @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	51	340	42
Social Services and Healthcare @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	61	407	42
Social Services Children and Young People @ SCQF L6	Pass	6	61	407	42

Table 3 shows that, in terms of UCAS points, all FAs at SCQF Level 6 are worth at least two C grades at Higher, with the Engineering frameworks being equivalent to at least two B grades at Higher, or an A grade at Advanced Higher.

Aberdeenshire Council has published significant insight of analysis they have undertaken using Insight Tariff Point data (ITPs) tracking three categories of pupils: the lowest attaining 20%, the middle 60% and the highest attaining 20%.

The results, as outlined in Table 3, show that pupils either undertaking or having achieved a FA have significantly improved ITPs. The Council found this to be particularly true for pupils that were in the lowest attaining 20% prior to their FA.

By tracking the 'low, middle, high' associated with each pupil at S4 through to S6, the impact of the FA is striking with pupils also demonstrating improved engagement and performance across other school subjects. On average, across Aberdeenshire, school leavers with an FA had ITPs of +69.8% relative to pupils without an FA qualification.

Table 3: Attainment by Insight "Attainment range" 2023-24: Annual Insight Tariff Points (ITP) at point of leaving school

	Low	Middle	High
All Leavers	102	458	845
Not doing a L6 FA	87	419	843
Doing a L6 FA	436	640	854
Achieving a L6 FA	535	760	920

This illustrates that when made an integral, accessible part of the curriculum, FAs bring significant value in their own right but can also improve the value of other school qualifications for pupils. Further insight can be found in a [blog](#) published by the council.



## Areas for improvement

FAs are now an integral part of the senior phase offer, embedded in the structures of many schools across Scotland.

In addition to expanding the range of pathways available to gain qualifications at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, they have enhanced the voice of industry in the curriculum and contextualised complementary subjects.

Their attraction to learners, industry and education is reflected in the continued interest expressed for growing the existing offer and implementing new developments.

FAs were developed and expanded at pace to meet ambitious targets set by Scottish Government. As such they remain a relatively new pathway with opportunities to build on the strengths of the current programme to improve outcomes, enhance the experience for young people and employers, and support schools and providers to deliver.

Through SDS's approach to continuous improvement, including leading tests of change, leading communities of practise and launching a [Delivery Toolkit](#), we have captured significant insight and intelligence from apprentices, employers, teachers, schools and providers. This insight is enhanced by the Education Scotland Review and subsequent work of the Foundation Apprenticeship Enhancement Group to understand what is working well and to identify areas for further improvement.

Opportunities identified include:

- Continued evolution of the unique balance of underpinning knowledge, practical and work-based learning
- Embedding meta-skills across all frameworks

- Alignment and direct contribution towards the four pillars of Curriculum for Excellence
- Flexibility, enabling FAs designed for specific occupational pathways and local labour markets, alongside FAs that offer broader insight to multiple sectors, based upon the perceived values, interests and motivations of apprentices
- FA delivery models that optimise the use of digital learning, teaching and collaboration technologies enabling:
  - access to all frameworks, irrespective of geographical location
  - distance learning provision, particularly in rural island communities
  - pairing of employers to provision irrespective of geographical location
  - access to learning and teaching resources, guidance and materials
- Enhanced pathways opportunities and supported transition to employment through MAs or GAs alongside existing routes to FE and HE
- Standardisation of framework sizes at respective SCQF levels and in harmony with school timetabling requirements
- Modular design construct enabling flexible learner journeys and entry/exit points and certified records of achievement
- Opportunities to provide local and regional work-based contextualisation for key industries and embedding cross-cutting themes to support inclusive growth and the drive to Net Zero.

SDS remains committed to working with partners to realise these improvements.



## Foundation Apprenticeship leads to dream role

Dumbarton teenager Kaleb Mbise was inspired by his parents to choose a Foundation Apprenticeship in a caring role - and has now landed a job in his dream career as a childcare practitioner.

Kaleb completed a Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Service: Children and Young People with a placement at Bellsmyre Early Education Centre in Dumbarton.

In a sector that attracts mostly females, the 17-year-old was inspired by his parents' caring roles in social work. He has since progressed straight into a Modern Apprenticeship after his experience confirmed his own ambition to become a Childcare Practitioner.



Kaleb said: "The Foundation Apprenticeship gave me a real insight into childcare and confirmed that it was something I was passionate about and really wanted to do. [It has] helped me develop teamwork and communication skills, as well as being able to think on my feet and come up with solutions quickly."

Kaleb successfully applied his knowledge and communication skills to plan a range of activities for the children and deal with any challenges that arose.

He is now thriving in his new role at Andrew Cameron Early Learning and Childcare Centre in Dumbarton.

Kaleb, who had already volunteered at a local youth café for four years, loved his placement so much he did extra hours whenever he had spare time, honing skills like critical thinking, communication and creativity.

He completed his Foundation Apprenticeship at Dumbarton Academy alongside Highers in English and Music.

Kaleb's achievements have led to him being a finalist in the Foundation Apprenticeship of the Year category of the Scottish Apprenticeship Awards.

Tracy Monaghan, West Dunbartonshire Council Working4U Foundation Apprenticeship Mentor, said:

"Kaleb excelled at his work placement and clearly loves working with young children. He is enthusiastic, kind and determined and was able to draw on his learning around safeguarding when a child disclosed a matter of concern."

## FAs bring fresh ideas and creativity



A Foundation Apprentice proved to be a valuable signing for **Queen of the South Football Club**.

The club offered Dumfries High School pupil Emily Copeland a work placement as part of her Foundation Apprenticeship in Creative and Digital Media.

As a result, the Doonhamers have widened their reach on the net, with Emily's work scoring thousands more followers on the club's social media channels.

Emily developed fresh, dynamic content and introduced innovative player interviews that also boosted online engagement.

The 18-year-old, who is a lifelong fan of the club, also developed critical skills in campaign delivery and live event coordination and played a vital role on match days, capturing content from multiple camera angles before editing it for release.

She honed her understanding of the impact of social media, learned how to adapt posts depending on match results and was key in promoting the club's charity work at Christmas and raising awareness of its community initiatives.

Emily's contribution across a three-month period delivered tangible results for the club in areas where they lacked skills and resources.

Dan Armstrong, Queen of the South Football Club Chief Executive Officer said: "Emily was brilliant – she went above and beyond what was asked of her and clearly wanted to excel. She added real value to our social media offer."

The club was so impressed with the value of taking on a Foundation Apprentice that they have enlisted the help of another, who Emily coaches while studying for an HNC in Business.

Dan added: "Foundation Apprenticeships are a great way to bring fresh ideas, perspectives and creativity into the Club. We are a community team, and employability is one of our key areas, so being able to support young talent is important to us."

Emily said: "Choosing a Foundation Apprenticeship meant I could support my club and gain valuable work experience while still at school. I was given free rein and trusted to work independently, which improved my confidence and professional skills including organisation and time management.

"It strengthened my resolve to pursue a career in sports media."

## FAs central to future of education



Foundation Apprenticeships are not just a successful part of the current curriculum at Oban High School - the school believes they are central to its long-term vision for a more inclusive and flexible education system.

The school is contracted directly (as the learning provider) to deliver FAs, using its state-of-the-art facilities to provide training on site whilst partnerships with local employers allow pupils to gain relevant, hands-on experience as part of their qualification.

Delivering FAs since 2019, initially offering Business Skills at SCQF Level 6, pupils can now also study Engineering at SCQF Level 6 and Construction and Hospitality subjects at SCQF Level 5.

Demand continues to grow, and FA pathways planned for delivery in 2025/26 are already oversubscribed. Executive Head Teacher Peter Bain said:

"At Oban High School, FAs are not an add-on, they're an integral part of how we're building a future-ready curriculum. Our success so far shows that schools can lead this work effectively, with the right support. The appetite for Foundation Apprenticeships is strong — we could double our places tomorrow and still not meet demand. That tells us everything we need to know about... the value young people place on these opportunities. That's why we're working to expand our offer across more sectors."

The school believes the appetite from pupils and families reinforces the need to further expand both capacity and choice of FA and is actively exploring the introduction of additional frameworks at SCQF Level 5 and 6.

"We are actively exploring new FA pathways in areas like digital media, financial services and automotive, because pupils are asking for them. They want meaningful qualifications that connect them to real careers. This vision for expansion is not driven by targets or external pressures, it is a deliberate move to better serve the diverse strengths, interests, and ambitions of young people."

As the first learning provider to deliver the Engineering FA in one academic year, the school also has ambitions to co-design more FA models, drawing on partnerships with local and national employers to ensure pathways remain relevant, engaging, and aligned with future workforce needs.

"Foundation Apprenticeships at Oban High School are about creating more routes to success, not narrowing them. We're excited about the future of FAs, not only in expanding what's offered, but in helping to shape entirely new frameworks alongside industry and education partners."



## The opportunity for the future

We absolutely believe that young people deserve the best chance to gain a varied and valued learning experience while at school. Having access to practical, work-based learning with relevant employer-led work placements or challenges is a key part of that while also raising attainment and better preparing young people for life after school.

We remain committed to providing more young people with the opportunity to start a Foundation Apprenticeship as part of their senior phase curriculum. However, we know that to reach our longer-term ambition, making them available in every school in Scotland and an equal component of senior phase subject choices, requires concerted coordinated effort across the education system.

We recognise that to succeed, we need to engage every part of the education system to ensure that change can be achieved by working together. This was highlighted by Education Scotland in their review of FA provision, published in March 2022<sup>13</sup>. Collectively, we need to be committed to making sure as many young people as possible have an opportunity to select the FA, so that they can experience work-based learning at such an important point in their education.

Gaining consistency in FA positioning, and value relative to other subject choices, at local authority and school level is crucial for improving equality of access for pupils and for ensuring that FAs are not overlooked in favour of more traditional qualifications.

In areas where local authorities, schools, employers and learning providers work in harmony, we are seeing compelling evidence that FAs can make a huge difference to the level of attainment, career choices and educational pathways for Scotland's young people.

### Derek Brown, Chief Executive, Highlands Council

**At Fife Council, Derek Brown played a key role in the creation and introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships, before moving on to oversee their delivery in North Lanarkshire Council. Now at Highland Council, the local authority chief shares his beliefs about why Foundation Apprenticeships are vital in delivering the region's economic strategy and their potential to support a wider range of young Scots.**



Ten years ago, I was lucky enough to be at the forefront of developing Foundation Apprenticeships for senior phase pupils. This offered a fresh opportunity to create valuable partnerships across different sectors, bringing education closer to business.

FAs are a different way for learners to gain work-based learning qualifications at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6 that develop the knowledge and skills valued by employers, colleges and universities. Importantly, they don't rely on the so-called 'two-term dash' to the Higher exam, thus allowing learners to fully demonstrate their abilities and aptitudes.

Along with Fife schools, FE and industry partners, I worked with SDS on the early pathfinder and later introduction of FAs. Starting in engineering, we expanded the offer making all frameworks available to all schools. The uptake was very strong from the beginning, showing that it met a need. Later, in North Lanarkshire, we built FA opportunities as part of the goal to raise attainment. Colleagues

<sup>13</sup> [Review of Foundation Apprenticeship Provision](#)



worked hard to develop the offer, which now takes in all SCQF levels of Foundation Apprenticeship supporting the local economy and widening access to opportunities for young people.

Now, as Chief Executive at Highland Council, I oversee a team which has huge ambition and aspirations for FAs and other work-based learning pathways. The number of young people undertaking FAs across Highland Council schools has almost doubled post pandemic, from 340 in 2021 to 662 in 2024/25. Delivered locally, FAs will play a crucial role in our community resilience strategies.

We want to get to the point where every child in the Highlands can access work related learning in their senior phase, with FAs embedded as an offer in every school.

The Highlands is experiencing generational investment that will see up to £100bn come into the area in the next 20 years, driven by developments in the energy and construction sectors. Not only does this present fantastic job opportunities within the sector, but will have a huge, knock-on effect on construction and housing and demand for skills.

The Council is working as part of a collective led by SDS called Workforce North, which unites the local authority, enterprise and skills agencies, industry and employers to ensure opportunities in the Highlands are realised in ways that enable young people to benefit.

This incredible exponential growth in demand requires a systematic approach to workforce (supply-side) solutions and is a pivotal time for embedding work-based pathways, with FAs central to the approach.

As one of the biggest employers in the region, Highland Council can demonstrate to other businesses the benefits of getting involved in

FAs, to tap into a pipeline of young talent. On a wider scale, Foundation Apprenticeships offer a fantastic opportunity for Scotland, and I am working with other local authority leaders to see how the programme can be expanded and offered across Scottish schools.

A Foundation Apprenticeship can provide individuals with crucial skills and knowledge that employers need. Our ambition should be to provide an FA opportunity for every young person in Scotland.

At times of funding pressures, we need to be open to creative ways to upscale, such as co-funding by businesses, the local authority and national partners – and the national best practice models already do this.

The quality experiences young people get from working with employers and undertaking industry challenges before leaving school can be life-changing, especially for those from more disadvantaged and rural backgrounds.

The goal is creating the best opportunities for young people and supporting them to contribute to the growth of Scotland's economy. To achieve this requires a shared vision across all partners, harnessing the partnership approach that created Foundation Apprenticeships a decade ago. They were a creative solution for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education system and it is now time for us to work together to find the means to scale up and embed them across Scottish schools.

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