

Activity Agreements and the role of Business and Industry

Activity Agreements form part of a young person's entitlement to a coherent senior phase of learning from 16 to 18. Targeted at those at greatest risk of disengagement, Activity Agreements are a non-formal learning offer, which is focused on meeting the needs of the individual and providing them with the opportunity to continue to develop their skills and the four capacities, and progress towards more formal learning, training or employment. Activity Agreements see 70% of leavers making such a progression.

Business and industry play a vital role in helping young people progress through Activity Agreements. Local Activity Agreement partnerships have successfully secured commitment from employers. At this strategic level, business and industry work alongside Opportunities for All staff, colleges, school, and training providers to ensure that young people have access to meaningful opportunities within a local pipeline of delivery, and that this is linked to real opportunities within the local labour market. The Opportunities for All/Activity Agreement Co-ordinator role is crucial in bringing this partnership together to meet the needs of the More Choices More Chances client group.

At operational level, Activity Agreement partnerships harness the willingness, skills, expertise and knowledge of employers to offer young people attractive and meaningful pathways for those at greatest risk of disengagement. Business and industry bring opportunities to gain skills, help young people prepare for and develop an understanding of the world of work and provide invaluable experiences to help young people make decisions. Where this partnership works well, business and industry increasingly recognise the relevance of investing in young people both for the development of their own workforce and the local economy.

The following examples highlight some of the ways in which Activity Agreements are working in partnership with business and industry, to enhance opportunities for young people.

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

Helping young people prepare for work

Employer involvement in Dundee City allows Activity Agreements to provide a range of experiences to help young people develop an understanding of and prepare for the world of work and make decisions about their future. Local hairdresser Gary Wightman has been involved in supporting young people into employment for over a year. He closes his salon, Ziggy's, on a Monday and dedicates this time to the support and training of young people who are on an Activity Agreement in partnership with Dundee

City Council. Young people attend his workshops, based within his salon, for a period of up to 12 weeks. This gives them a taste of the workplace through the hairdressing salon whilst learning specific skills such as shampooing, blow-drying and hair design and at the same time developing transferable skills such as communication skills, working in a team, time-keeping and customer service.

Gary has a personal desire to give something back to the community. For the young people, his involvement provides an opportunity to experience a real working environment where they are supported and encouraged. Something that cannot be replicated in a classroom. Gary said, *"The biggest difference I see is confidence. Often when they start they are very shy and introverted but as the weeks go on they really come out of their shell and open up. They speak to me about most things, as time goes on trust is built up and I find I am offering them advice – from an employer's perspective – on things like interview skills and talking through with them what they want to do in life"*.

The opportunity to try new things is a crucial element of an Activity Agreement. Some of the young people, although choosing to undertake this work taster, then go on to decide hairdressing is not something they want to pursue. Gary appreciates that this is part of the process; *"whatever they choose to do next, they take with them the experience, the skills and the confidence from their time at the salon"*.

Such opportunities are offered to young people alongside a wider programme of learning activities through their Activity Agreement. For example, the *'Fairy Job Mother'* initiative helps young people reengage with learning and prepares them for such work experiences and ultimately for integration into the workplace. At point of progression, Dundee City Activity Agreements has also developed a job club (*TOWIE – The Only Way is Earning*), which offers practical support to further develop young peoples' understanding of the world of work and specifically the employment opportunities available locally. This was established in response to young people's views that participation in another training programme would not meet their progression needs and reflects the individual needs led approach of Activity Agreements. The club assists young people in finding work and runs once a week, followed by a period of one-to-one support.

Where appropriate, the Council has negotiated with its Opportunities for All partners that young people progressing from *'The Fairy Job Mother'* onto a training programme can go straight to a work placement. This ensures that young people's learning continues to be relevant and forward-focused and ensures that the young person is not lost at point of transition.

Ziggy's Salon has recently taken their training role further and for the first time are now involved in delivering training through the Employability Fund. As part of this Gary has provided full-time training over 13 weeks to three young women and is very proud that two of his trainees have gone on to secure employment in hairdressing salons. Kiley West, 16+ Programme Manager, Dundee City Council, says *"The participation of small businesses like Ziggy's Salon is vital to the success of employability programmes. They provide support for young people to experience a working environment, helping them acquire the skills and knowledge to enter employment or further learning opportunities. We know from speaking to our partners that employers are looking for young people who are prepared for employment and the opportunities provided by businesses like Ziggy's are crucial to our ability, within Opportunities for All, to do this"*.

Having been involved with training young people, what would Gary Wightman say to other small businesses about the benefits of investing in young people: *"No price can be put on the satisfaction you get from helping someone on a positive path to future work and life, especially those who have had a few hard knocks on their journey to young adulthood. I would say to employers, no matter how small, go for it, they are our future and we should encourage and nurture them"*.

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL – linking young people to real employment opportunities locally

Activity Agreements in Renfrewshire Council have developed a strong partnership model where business and industry increasingly recognise the relevance of investing in young people and play an inspiring role in helping young people progress.

Renfrewshire Council combines strategic planning with innovative approaches to create increased opportunities for young people to get into employment. The Renfrewshire Employability Partnership involves partners from Council services, SDS, JobCentre Plus, Reid Kerr College and the voluntary sector and employers. Provision across the partnership is mapped along a 5-stage skills pipeline and progression routes for young people are identified within this model. Within this strategic context, Renfrewshire Council has been running a hugely popular youth employment project since 2010. *'The Recruit'*, based on the television programme *The Apprentice*, has been offering young people in S5 and S6 the opportunity to improve their skills and confidence by taking part in a series of business challenges, with jobs on offer for the winners. This innovative approach has been adapted and offered to young people, post-school, as part of the Council's Activity Agreement provision. Through this model Renfrewshire is able to support young people furthest from the labour market into employment in sectors such as the leisure industry where there are real opportunities locally.

The Recruit programme for Activity Agreement participants runs for 10 weeks over three days a week. Throughout the programme there is balance between experiential learning, through participation in 'challenges' set by local employers and opportunities for personal development. The

'challenges' are opportunities to develop confidence, the ability to express ideas and to develop skills such as problem solving and managing a budget. Many of the challenges take place in the employer's workplace so that young people experience what different working environments feel like. Employer involvement in *The Recruit* has been developed over the two years the programme has been running and is a crucial component in the progression of young people. The Council approaches local companies to create a bank of supporters willing to provide work based challenges. Employers also send mentors to work with and support the young people on the challenges. The mentors are an invaluable source of motivation, guidance and advice for the participants. Right from the start employers saw this as an opportunity not only to invest in local young people but to recruit work-ready staff for their business. A range of employers have identified jobs specifically for participants on the programme to apply for, including positions with Renfrewshire Leisure and an apprenticeship in a local engineering company.

Activity Agreement staff stick closely to the ethos of the Renfrewshire Employability Partnership by offering young people a range of opportunities in sectors where there are real employment opportunities locally. For example, the leisure industry in the area is undergoing a significant expansion. The Council's partnership with Renfrewshire Leisure has led to the development of a 12-week Activity Agreement programme called Sport and Swim. Sport and Swim aims to improve young people's work based skills to enable them to apply for the opportunities created by the expansion, and to progress within these jobs.

In addition to those who secure employment through the programme, all young people participating in *The Recruit*, as part of their Activity Agreement, have left with vastly improved confidence and self-belief. Carole Paton (16+ Learning Choices Coordinator) says *"for me, success is seeing young people leave with a belief in themselves often for the first time in their lives – a belief that they can get a job."*

ANGUS COUNCIL – helping young people explore options

Angus Council have developed a successful 1st step option to reengage young people in learning. The Stepping Stones programme for young people engaging in an Activity Agreement gives young people tasters of different experiences, including the role of different organisations and businesses and the job roles involved. This helps young people develop an understanding of the world of work and the employment opportunities available locally. The programme has two key focuses – health/wellbeing and employability, reflecting the needs-led approach of Activity Agreements and the importance, at this first stage, to incorporate barrier removal work within an employability intervention. Young people attend two days a week, over eight weeks.

The programme has secured a high level of involvement from employers. Lisa Gilfillan, OFA Co-ordinator explains *"this has been achieved partly by approaching employers who already work in partnership with other departments within Angus Council, such as Petrofac, who work closely with our schools, and also by using local labour market*

intelligence to seek involvement from local businesses who recognise the benefits of up-skilling young people in terms of the development of their own workforce”.

The role of business and industry is through offering young people the opportunity to visit their workplace or through delivering sessions on specific subjects. Visits allow young people to experience different workplace environments and learn about some of the skills, expectations and opportunities possible. For example, young people have visited Montrose Leisure Centre where they learned about the various roles within the centre, such as coaching, administration, catering and cleaning. They also received advice about the kinds of skills, qualifications and qualities the centre looks for in an employee and the likelihood of positions becoming available. Young people have also visited the local fire station where they took part in organised activities and were given a tour of the Volunteer Centre where staff explained about the role of the organisation and also the opportunities for and benefits of volunteering.

Other employers, such as the RAF, deliver sessions to explain about their employment opportunities or to improve young people’s health and wellbeing. Petrofac deliver a session covering health and safety and various Third Sector organisations provide input sessions on subjects such as sexual health and drugs and alcohol. Barclaycard recently delivered a financial capability session which was an area that Activity Agreement staff had identified as a core skill to help young people progress.

Lisa says “at this 1st stage of engagement our aim is to expose young people to a variety of opportunities. At the end of the programme young people work with their Trusted Professional to identify their interests and skills which shapes the next stage of their Activity Agreement. For example, there was one young woman who had really enjoyed the sexual health session and expressed an interest in pursuing this. Her Trusted Professional secured a volunteering opportunity within this field, enabling her to explore this field in greater depth and develop her skills”.

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