



Activity Agreements Opportunities for All

The impact of employer engagement and how young people are prepared for sustainable local employment

Context

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. 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.

Key Elements

The Recruit programme for Activity Agreement participants runs for 10 weeks over 3 days a week, and begins preparing young people for employment, from the start, with an emphasis on time keeping and personal presentation.

Throughout the programme there is balance between experiential learning, through participation in 'challenges' set by local employers and opportunities for personal development, such as Career Essentials. The Career Essentials sessions are tailored to the interests of the group and help young people identify and develop their natural abilities and soft skills. 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 takes 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 2 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.

Participants receive individual feedback sessions once a week with Council *Recruit* staff to review progress and build confidence. These staff members take on the Trusted Professional role. The support they offer is enhanced by the use of social media. Young people are able to use this to communicate with them in confidence. Although this is a time consuming element, staff are clear of its benefits in building relationships with the young people and to help them apply for vacancies and prepare for interviews.

In addition to *The Recruit*, Renfrewshire Council offers other opportunities for Activity Agreement young people, such as Smart Steps, run in partnership with Community Learning and Development, covering personal development and more personalised support for those not ready for a group setting. 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.

Impact

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 Co-ordinator) 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."

Young people leave *The Recruit* ready for employment and many get a job very quickly. One of these young people is highlighted in the following learner journey.

GRANT

Grant was 16 when he left school and accepted a place on *The Recruit* as part of his Activity Agreement. He had few qualifications and an uncertain future.

Grant wanted to get a job and he quickly saw what *The Recruit* could do for him. He was enthusiastic about the programme and right from the start took on board the expectations that were required of him – he was always punctual and dressed in *The Recruit* uniform. Despite his enthusiasm Grant needed support to develop his confidence and to recognise and develop his skills.

Grant took part in all the sessions, enjoying the employer challenges such as redesigning unused space at St Mirren Football Club, planning a play scheme and sessions run by Construction Skills Scotland. Grant threw himself into everything despite his nerves and gradually began to realise his own abilities.

The personal development sessions and one-to-one support also helped Grant build his confidence, so much so that he volunteered to speak at *The Recruit's* finale event in front of over 100 people, including local employers and business leaders. He also emerged as a leader in his group.

With his new self-belief and confidence Grant applied for all of the jobs being held for participants on *The Recruit*. He made good use of the support available through the social media site to seek advice from his Trusted Professional during his interview preparations. Grant secured one of the four jobs that had been held specifically for participants of his programme to apply for. In fact, Grant was the preferred candidate in all four of his interviews! Grant was also awarded 'top recruit'. He said "*this has been amazing – it's changed my life*". Carole Paton (16+ Learning Choices Co-ordinator) said "*Grant's success was down to **him** – we gave him an opportunity and he took it*".

Grant accepted the job as a Leisure Assistant with Renfrewshire Leisure. As well as having the highest rate of pay, *The Recruit* course had helped Grant recognise that with the continued expansion of the leisure industry in the area, there would be long term opportunities for progression.

Grant has been working for Renfrewshire Leisure for six months and has already achieved his Pool Lifeguard Qualification. As a result he has progressed to a higher rate of pay. He is still only 16.