

All in a day's work

Youth work successfully builds bridges between home, school and work, preparing young people to be responsible citizens, confident individuals, effective contributors and successful learners. Jackie Cosh finds out more



To use a kids' cliché, youth work is all about 'keeping it real'. *Building the Curriculum 3* emphasises that "making the link between the classroom and workplace can help young people to see the relevance of their learning". With this in mind, it encourages flexible learning tailored to the young person, and calls on schools and voluntary youth organisations to work together to help young people make their voices heard.

One project enjoying considerable success in this area is Compass, an additional support programme run by Callander Youth Project in partnership with McLaren High School. The two organisations work together to ensure a positive transition from school to work or college, and Compass is one aspect of their flexible curriculum timetable. The programme offers personal development and employability activities for participants, making use of the Duke of Edinburgh Award to provide

structure and certification for activities such as physical recreation, volunteering in the community, skills development and outward-bound activities.

Ruth Jack manages the project. "When the pupils first come to us, we go through the opportunities we offer, and find out what they need," she explains. "We then make a personal action plan and decide an ideal outcome."

Based in the McLaren Leisure Centre next door to the school, a designated youth room offers computers, comfy seats and plenty of room for activities. "The atmosphere is relaxed," says Ruth. "We are on first name terms with the young people, and when they come in, they can go and make themselves a cup of tea."

Most of the time, pupils are only in the youth room briefly. Often they are out with the Forestry Commission or another group. The key to the success of the project is its ability to engage young people and to provide them with an alternative school experience. It teaches them to be

responsible citizens both now and in the future, and shows how they can be effective contributors to society. As Ruth says: "Compass participants develop strengths from which they can achieve the success, knowledge and confidence required to access meaningful employment and training, and to equip them to become valued and valuable citizens within society."

"So far, we have had a 90% positive transition rate. Of course, this is subjective, but a positive outcome is one where the young person goes on to do something they really want to do, rather than just taking any job. They gain a lot of confidence from the work."

Anne Gibson, Learning and Teaching Scotland's National Development Officer for Schools and Youth Work, hears these success stories echoed across Scotland. "Part of my work involves speaking to headteachers, depute headteachers and other school staff about the impact of youth work," she explains. "I also discuss the benefits with youth workers and community learning and development staff."



UK Youth's residential centre Avon Tyrrell enables young people to discover new skills in the great outdoors

Headteachers are extremely positive about the impact on improving overall outcomes for young people."

GETTING ENGROSSED

It seems that youth work programmes are particularly effective in helping to develop these soft skills. This has certainly been the experience of Lossiemouth High School, which has developed projects around UK Youth resource 'Developing Financial Awareness'. "As well as encouraging an awareness of financial matters, the Developing Financial Awareness package has had an impact on softer skills – team working, problem-solving skills, investigating skills," says Donnie Carthew, depute headteacher. "I don't recall having any behavioural issues since the work started. Nobody is disruptive or unhappy. They are too engrossed in the work."

The core activities of Developing Financial Awareness cover budgeting, financial planning and personal risk management, with the added bonus of a

youth achievement award accreditation. At Lossiemouth it has enabled the group to make a head start in the Standard Grade Business Management course. Importantly, it has also contributed to the four capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

David Millar delivers the course. "I have been involved in youth work in the area for a while, both in and outside of schools," he says. "I knew a lot of the youngsters before we began, and we all use first names. The set-up is informal, although

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we still abide by the school rules. Through project work, young people's maths and social skills have improved, and they have built bridges with independent youth projects they were previously excluded from."

A member of the school co-delivers the input with the community learning and development worker, an approach which Anne Gibson finds works the best. "The greatest benefits are when teachers and youth workers work together. Teachers report better results when they return to the classroom, as they try different approaches."

Often, the youth workers are known to young people outside of school, helping to build bridges between home and school. "Youth work brings the wider knowledge of young people from the community into school," Anne explains. "It's good for transition between primary and secondary, and also post-school. It broadens curriculum opportunities, offering flexibility and choice."

Another positive benefit is that youth work has been found to reduce crime. "Police reported huge reductions in crime and improvements in the local community. It gets youths active in a positive way."

LEARNING IN THE REAL WORLD

But while youth work is going on throughout Scotland, in some areas it is less embedded. "Youth work varies depending on the local authority," says Anne. "Often funding can be a problem and it can be patchy. If it is not built into the strategic framework, it can be inconsistent."

Curriculum for Excellence is very clear that youth work can make huge contributions. The work is pupil focused, ensuring that individuals get as much out of their learning as possible. It also in many cases provides qualifications for the future. Awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh are popular, as are the Youth Achievement Awards, Prince's Trust XL and ASDAN.

An explanatory resource *Amazing Things – A Guide to Youth Awards in Scotland* has just been published and launched at a conference in October. This publication is available from Youth Scotland (www.youthscotland.org.uk).

Meanwhile, Anne Gibson sums up: "We are committed to supporting and developing partnership in youth work. Learning is something which can happen in places other than school, and with people other than teachers."