

Portlethen Academy: Virtual Q & A session

Construction Crafts: Employability Skills, level 4, a unit of the Practical Woodworking course.

Overview

A virtual question and answer session was organised and facilitated by Portlethen Academy's Business and Community Support Officer (BCSO) to give S4-S6 pupils the opportunity to hear directly from, and question, those at various stages of their careers in manual industries.

Why?

It was important for class teacher Rebecca Mason to expose her students to the world outside the workshop, to show them why their class skills were important, and profile the pathways to success. First-hand insight from those working in manual industries brings a necessary perspective for career considerations. She wanted the students to be inspired and motivated by their learning.

Approach

Preparation: Objectives and an action plan were agreed between the BCSO and class teacher in May, in preparation for delivery in August. The clarity of ask from the teacher was a key factor in the success of this session.

The BCSO's network and a public LinkedIn post were used to reach out to potential panel members.

The BCSO organised for a diverse range of representatives from industry to take part:

- Apprentice engineer
- Welder fabricator
- Managing director
- Contracts manager
- Time-served plant fitter
- Joiner

There was also a focus on ensuring age and gender balance on the panel.

Ahead of the session, the BCSO spent time with each of the speakers to fully brief them and discuss technology and expectations.

 **6 industry partners**
 **17 participants**

Delivery: On the day, the BCSO spent time with the speakers to warm them up and test Microsoft Teams technology before the students arrived in the classroom. The BCSO facilitated the discussion giving the teacher the space to continue to engage the class and manage the Padlet platform containing the questions from students.

The session was 45 minutes long and opened with each speaker giving a brief overview of their job and company, the skills they use on a daily basis, and their career pathway.

The young people engaged with the speakers by asking detailed questions. They were keen to understand the practicalities of apprenticeships and the workplace, addressing issues such as travel, accommodation, and day-to-day working practices. The female welder fabricator was able to address a query from one of the pupils asking about her experiences in a male-dominated industry.

The session closed with each volunteer sharing a piece of advice that they would give to their younger self at the beginning of their employment journey.





Outcomes

The students returned to the workshop with renewed focus and appreciation of how their class skills would apply in the real world. There has been ongoing reference to the speakers and expected behaviours in the workplace.

100%



of industry partners would recommend that colleagues get involved in similar activities

and that the session was relevant, aligned with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in industry.

"It was good to see the school being proactive and setting these sessions up, and good to see so many people involved. I think there should be more sessions like this for pupils to help with the transition from school to work-life."



"It was a great way to engage with our new generation of potential workers."

100%

of students enjoyed the session.



"There is more than you think that you can do in a manufacturing career."

"The main thing that stood out to me in this session is that there is a wider variety of jobs than just joinery."

"This session has helped me a lot. I now know more about the skills needed and have more information about the construction industry."

94%

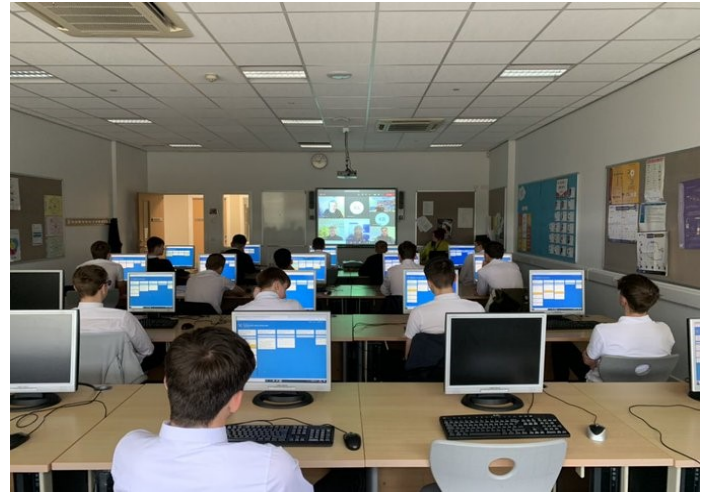
agreed that the session supported them in thinking about their careers.

76%

stated that they had a clearer idea of the variety of jobs available to them in the industry and what they wanted to do following school.



One student has already applied for an apprenticeship, with others discussing it as a possibility to consider later in the academic year.



Lessons learned

The students wanted to be able to ask their questions directly. Opportunities to do this, while taking into account online delivery, safeguarding, and microphone requirements are being investigated.

The clarity of ask and collaborative working relationship between the class teacher and BCSO underpinned the successful delivery and impact.

Understanding the target industry, and where its networks are connected, is important in connecting with the right people.

Providing wraparound support is key in relationship building and realising the potential of the connection.



Next steps

The students are assessed four times a year from the same skills matrix. There is hope to continue to work alongside some of the industry partners to assess the students' work and provide real-world examples to develop class projects.

One of the partners is investigating how a group of students could be taken to a new warehouse for national retail company which is based in Portlethen. Other partners have expressed a desire to continue working with the school to promote apprenticeship opportunities.

There were 17 student who undertook the live session. The recorded version will be shared with an additional 60 students this term across other technical subjects.

The success of this event provides a framework to deploy across a range of subject areas and disciplines.

For more information, contact Portlethen Academy's Excelerate Business and Community Support Officer Isla.Elliott@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.