

SKILLS FOR WORK

Millburn Academy, Inverness



Millburn Academy is a six year, non-denominational co-educational comprehensive school attended by pupils in the age range 11 to 18 years. The delineated area of the school lies to the east of the River Ness and extends to the rural areas to the south of the city.

The current roll is 1082 pupils and 83 teaching staff.

Why Skills for Work?

Changes in the profile of the pupils enrolling and a large proportion of placing requests meant that Millburn Academy needed to add to its traditional academic Higher and Intermediate courses to offer more vocationally-based qualifications. Having heard of the success of Skills for Work (SfW) courses at other schools, such as Sport & Recreation at Plockton and Rural Skills at Glenurquhart, Millburn wanted to participate, and started by delivering SfW in Construction Crafts and Hospitality in 2008.

By 2010 Millburn was delivering:

- Construction Crafts: Intermediate 1 (2 groups of S3/4), partnered with Morrison Construction
- Hospitality: Intermediate 1 (1 group of S3/4), partnered with the Kingsmills Hotel
- Sport & Recreation: Intermediate 2 (1 group of S5), partnered with DW Sports
- Laboratory Sciences: Intermediate 2 (1 group of S5), partnered with LifeScan Scotland

Benefits

Adding SfW to the curriculum means Millburn is now better able to meet the needs of a wide range of pupils. The school offers vocational opportunities to youngsters who would otherwise struggle to find a suitable course. Because SfW is timetabled and taught by teachers it makes these courses as important to pupils as more academic courses.

Getting started

The first step was to get approval from SQA to deliver each SfW course. This involved understanding the requirements for the course, buying additional resources, engaging partner employers to give the practical experience, and completing the necessary paperwork.

Once they had approval, some teachers were already equipped to deliver their course, while others needed training that varied from undertaking a National Progression Award Intermediate 2 in Construction at Inverness College, to a science teacher completing a EEBL placement with LifeScan to see Laboratory work in practice. Teachers had time out to prepare for their course, and training to use SQA's online facility 'Deskpace'.

Additional resources were needed, such as uniforms for hotel work, 12 sets of laboratory equipment, and safety items, as well as a dedicated area for construction work in the school. Financial support has been available to schools to set up and deliver courses through the Determined to Succeed budget.

Support

The Schools Liaison Officer was very supportive in helping Millburn understand what funding would be needed and guiding the school through the paperwork required for the approval process.

She also helped the school develop their existing links with employers giving them confidence they could deliver what was needed for SfW and cope with the minimum commitment for two years.

Her role was crucial in supporting staff who felt anxious about starting the courses, by helping them understand what was involved and the standards required.

After the set up phase her impressive knowledge of the courses helped the school prepare for SQA moderation.

Management

Initially SfW was managed by the Faculty Head of Technology, as two courses were delivered by his Faculty. As the range of courses broadened, the Depute Rector took on overall responsibility for coordinating SfW within the school, and liaising with the Schools Liaison Officer for SfW and SQA. Individual departments take responsibility for acquiring materials and day-to-day delivery of their course(s).

Skills for Work offers secondary school pupils from S3 and above opportunities to prepare themselves for the world of work by developing generic employability skills related to a particular vocational area, such as 'Sport and Recreation' or 'Rural Skills'. These skills are gained through experiential learning, which in Highland Region is offered through real work with partner employers.

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Timetabling

SfW courses are available as options in the column choices for S3/4 and S5, and timetabled accordingly. At S3 and S4 there are four 40 minute periods a week, while at S5 there are 7 periods a week. To minimise disruption to other subjects, and maximise time with partner employers, there is at least one double period a week ending at lunch break or the end of the school day. This gives some leeway for travel time, which is particularly important to get to Morrison's changing construction sites.

Construction involves a whole afternoon with Morrison every few weeks, Hospitality pupils go to the Kingsmills Hotel for a double period weekly, while Sport and Recreation and Lab Sciences pupils visit their partner employer for a double period every few weeks.

Partner employers

All pupils doing SfW in Highland gain practical experience through partner employers. Millburn already had relationships with three of the employers for work experience, which, with the help of the School Liaison officer, were nurtured to encourage them on board for SfW. Teachers and employers have an ongoing dialogue to plan the aims and outcomes of the next pupil visit.

Employability skills

To access the SfW course, pupils are interviewed by the school and the employer and given feedback on their performance. Thereafter they gain employability skills through their practical work experience, receiving feedback on how they measure up from their employer.

Deskspace

Deskspace is an online facility provided by SQA for pupils to submit their portfolios and interact with each other, which has a resemblance to Facebook. Millburn found pupils were keener to post their blogs and photos on Deskspace, even from home, than they would have been to update a written log. This facility also makes life easier for teachers.

Assessment

Formative assessment is carried out by the teacher observing and gathering evidence of achievement, eg through photos or a presentation. For Hospitality and Lab Sciences Millburn has partnered with other schools, to swap work and carry out internal verification for each other. The Schools Liaison Officer helps the school prepare for Regional Quality Assurance, to ensure that delivery meets the SQA and local requirements.

Challenges

The main challenge is staffing SfW, first to train staff so they feel comfortable delivering the courses, and second to source sufficient staff for classes with a maximum of 12 pupils.

Securing and maintaining employer involvement is an ongoing challenge which is met by a commitment to building good relationships. Being very open about what's involved, finding out and meeting the employer's needs and having face-to-face visits all help.

There is also the added cost of resources, which is significant for subjects like Construction that require a dedicated space within the school. Resourcing facilities and staff will become more of an issue as Determined to Succeed funding support comes to an end and the SfW courses have to become self-sustaining.

Future plans

Millburn would like to offer more subjects, providing they can be resourced. They would also like to broaden the range of pupils taking SfW: for example an academic pupil going on to study architecture would benefit from the experience of the SfW in Construction.

Key advice from Millburn Academy

1. Allow a full year to set up Skills for Work – to get teachers comfortable, adequately trained, and familiar with the materials and standards required, and to secure resources.
2. Use the support available from the Schools Liaison Officer for SfW.
3. Build confidence in staff to deliver.
4. Get employers on your side; understand what you expect of each other.

To find out more about Skills for Work

SQA overview of Skills for Work at:
<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/25259.998.html>

Skills for Work in Highland Region
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