

First apprentice heralds start of growth plan for city building firm

Edinburgh-based building firm The Garage Conversion Company has launched the initial phase of a planned programme of growth with the recruitment of its first apprentice.

The company, which was founded in 2022, has handed a four-year internship to teenager Riley Fraser after he impressed during extended work experience.

The former Castlebrae Community Campus pupil's journey began with a 10-week stint assisting the team to build the Net Zero Home for the Energy Training Academy in Dalkeith.

Impressed by his dedication, The Garage Conversion Company gave Riley the chance to extend his period of work experience on a variety of projects. Such was the quality of his work that the building firm offered him the chance to remain part of the team on a longer-term basis at its newly-opened base at The Wisp.

Derek Welsh, managing director of The Garage Conversion Company, surprised the youngster with the offer at the official opening of the Net Zero Home.

"Working on the Net Zero Home allowed us to work closely with the local Castlebrae Community Campus and we selected four of

their pupils to assist the team on the project," he said.

"Riley soon stood out as someone with real potential with his attitude, skill set and customer care. He didn't know he was being offered the apprenticeship until it was announced at the opening of the Net Zero Home. His reaction was priceless!

"It's a great chance for him to learn the trade, get a head start in life and I have every confidence he'll do well and we're looking forward to supporting his growth and development.

"He is our first apprentice but won't be the last as we want to keep giving youngsters a chance as we continue to grow. Our core values as a business are embedded in the community and in time it would be great if we could work closely with the local high schools and give more young people opportunities.

"I wasn't the most academic pupil at Portobello High School but the teachers identified I had a real interest in craft and design and they helped arrange some work experience with Sharkey, a well-known construction firm based at Newcraighall on the outskirts of Edinburgh.

"That then lead to me successfully securing an apprenticeship as a bench-hand joiner. That was a key moment in my life as I rose through the ranks and stayed for 16 years. It was a turning point for me. Now as a business owner, I'm committed to providing young people with opportunities to build a career in the trade and at the same time help close the skills gap which unfortunately seems to be widening in the sector."

Riley, 16, said: "Working on the Net Zero Home was a brilliant experience. I can't thank Derek enough for this opportunity and I'm determined to repay the faith he has shown in me. Everyone has been really helpful and is always willing to give advice when I ask for it. It's great that he was willing to work with Castlebrae Community Campus and hopefully there will be more opportunities for others to start a career."

Mark Glasgow, co-founder of the Energy Training Academy, said: "The Garage Conversion Company was one of a number of suppliers who helped us with the build of the Net Zero Home. They did an excellent job and it was great to see them reward Riley with his apprenticeship.

"One of the drivers in setting up the training academy was to give back to the community and it's encouraging to see The Garage Conversion Company doing likewise."

