

West Lothian schools forge links with local employers

New partnerships between local businesses and high schools are aiming to improve positive destinations for all school leavers.

Councillors learned about extra work being done on hearing that 94.1% of the more than 2,000 who left school in June 2023 had gone into positive destinations by October last year.

Across most West Lothian High schools around 30 to 50% go on to higher education, with others going into further education and employment. And while the numbers outwith these three categories remain small, developments aim to shrink that number further.

Details of a range of projects designed to improve chances for school leavers were revealed at a meeting of the Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel shortly before the summer holidays.

They include new funding to enable each school to appoint a Developing the Young Workforce Coordinator with responsibility for improving links between the school and locally based employers, continuing to help influence the curriculum and link it to the world of work.

The figures come from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and provide an overview of what happened to last year's school

leavers in West Lothian.

Education for work officer Stuart McKay who delivered the report said the figures were designed to give a headline overview of the leaver results.

There were 2,132 school leavers from West Lothian secondary schools in the 2022/23 dataset. This was a drop of 53 leavers compared to the previous year.

Of these, 94.1% of school leavers went into a positive destination as recorded in October 2023. This was 0.5% less than in 2021/22 and 1.8% less than the Scottish average.

The lack of details around the age range of leavers and balance between education work outcomes prompted Councillor Moira McKee Shemilt to suggest that the figures raised more questions than answers.

She said: "It would be useful to know who's leaving at the end of fourth year and who's leaving at the end of sixth year."

Depute chief executive responsible for education Dr Elaine Cook assured councillors that statistics around destinations could be gleaned from the data if required. "We don't actually hold that data, we get it from Skills Development Scotland but we do have information on gender or a variety of details. We would be happy to provide that." she added.

Council leader Lawrence Fitzpatrick asked: "Has there been any attempt by the Scottish Government or employers to seek to increase apprenticeships."

Avril Mclean, an education quality improvement officer, told the meeting that new links had been forged with local industry: "There's work just now with the West Lothian manufacturing group to try to increase the apprenticeship offer within West Lothian."

“We do now have some foundation apprenticeships in conjunction with West Lothian college but we are looking to expand the modern and graduate apprenticeship offer within West Lothian.”

Links have also been forged with Heriot Watt university.

Councillor Fitzpatrick asked: “Do we have any data on numbers that’s important. As regards our links in terms of basic skills in terms bricklaying, plumbing, electrical etc. We really have a massive shortage of these skills, not only in the building industry. As a councillor I constantly hear that people have difficulty in getting people like these. I wonder what guidance has been given to colleges to expand this area?”

Ms McLean outlined partnerships in construction training with school college partnerships West Calder High actually runs its own construction course in school and there are links to the West Lothian Construction forum which is supporting schools to help pupils understand what a career in the construction industry can look like.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter