

Promise of better partnerships to help school leavers

West Lothian is within the top 20 local authorities in Scotland in providing positive destinations for its school leavers.

Over 90% of the more than 8,000 school leavers went to either higher education or training in the last year – and officials think there's scope for greater partnership work to open more doors for more teenagers.

They are keen to engage with those who leave school without plans for study, training or work- and especially those who drop out of initial choices.

In a report the the Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, Stuart McKay, an Education for Work Officer said: "There's scope for future work to ensure further improvement."

The PDSP heard that the Annual Participation Measure (APM) is compiled by Skills Development Scotland each year and counts those classed as participating in education training or employment and those not.

It combines data from a range of data sharing partners including local authorities, colleges, the Department of Work and Pensions and Student Awards Agency Scotland

The 23/24 figures reveal 8,825 16 – 19-year-olds from West

Lothian were counted. This was an increase of 316 compared to last year.

Of those 92.7% of 16 – 19-year-olds were recorded as participating in education, training or employment as of April this year. This was 0.9 percentage points less than in 2023.

It places West Lothian 18th in Scotland, and equal to the Scottish average.

Mr McKay added: “As in previous years and in line with the Scottish average, more female students than male were participating with the gap sitting at 1.3 percentage points.”

A total of 4.4% were classed as not in education training or employment in West Lothian- slightly higher than the Scottish average of 3.7% for this year.

A third category – unconfirmed – covers those of which there is no record. A total of 254 young people were reported as unconfirmed in the APM in 2024.

Schools have introduced a number of programmes to ensure that pupils leave with some options if they are not interested in further or higher education.

A range of training courses has continued to support school leavers to gain additional qualifications, experience and employability skills and to help them with the transition from school into employment or further training.

The council’s Raising Attainment and Corporate strategies, along with Developing the Young Workforce programme have proved successful in preparing pupils from West Lothian’s secondary schools to enter a positive destination after leaving school. These include practical skills course in such trades as building introduced for senior pupils who are considering apprenticeships.

Mr McKay cautioned against too literal interpretation of the

numbers in the Unconfirmed category given that the data is collected at a specific time of year, when some older teenagers are not counted in education or training simply because they have finished courses and others may just be about to start.

He said: "It has previously been identified that there was an issue with the timing of tracking and reporting of partner organisations which resulted in a far higher number than expected of young people recorded as unconfirmed. This was predominantly an issue with young people aged 19 who are the hardest group to track."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter