

# SCOTLAND on SUNDAY

## All aboard the careers carousel

SBC leads way in preparing school children for the world of work

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THERE is no mystery about why it pays companies of all sizes to "lend a hand" when it comes to the education of their potential workforce - even if that potential workforce still hasn't quite reached its teens. The gap between school and employment is huge and children often have great difficulty getting a grasp on what the world of work really entails.

To address this, SBC, in conjunction with Glasgow City Education Department, runs a project called Closing the Gap.

One of the aims of this project is to work with schools and businesses to offer pupils "work appreciation carousels" at two stages in their secondary education. In second year, the carousel targets young people about to make their academic choices at the end of second year.

As Tracy Kerr, part of the employability team at SBC explains, the idea is to help pupils understand how their choice of subjects might relate to the kind of career choices that most interest them. Obviously, very few pupils at that age will be making definitive career choices, but it is important that they do not make choices unwittingly that would automatically make it next to impossible for them to pursue careers that actually do interest them.

From the child's point of view, it is all about keeping their options open, and one good way of doing this is for them to understand a little more about what might be required for them to pursue particular career options.

The fourth/fifth year carousel is aimed at pupils who have returned to take further qualifications. It also aims at those who may be Christmas leavers. This carousel is more focused on career opportunities available in the wider world, including further and higher education.

As Kerr points out, the carousels are focused around what SBC has identified as the top ten employability skills. These, in a nutshell, are reliability, punctuality, willingness to learn, ability to teamwork, tidiness, enthusiasm, the ability to work with minimum supervision, initiative, numeracy and, of course, possession of a useful number of SQA exam passes.

"We emphasise the fact that there are at least 10 skills, and that academic merit is just one of them. We try to link these with the kinds of skills pupils need in school anyway. But we point out to them that, whereas not turning up for school lessons would get the pupil an attendance slip to take home to their parents, in work the consequences of becoming a regular absentee would be far more drastic."

The Closing the Gap programme works with seven Glasgow primary schools, seven secondary schools and two special education needs schools, all selected by Glasgow City Education Department for having the highest percentage of students leaving school to no positive destination.

"The idea is to help schoolchildren to see what is available out there in the world of work and to get a feel for it, in a way that



**The SBC's Closing the Gap project focuses on giving pupils the right skills to prepare them for the leap from education into employment**

might help to give them the motivation to get the skills they will need to achieve that kind of career," says Kerr.

Each of the schools has a business advisory group. This involves senior teachers from the school, usually the head and the deputy head, together with senior business leaders. Each school has its own individual action plan, raising areas that it would like industry to help with, and then Closing the Gap works with business leaders and the school to help the school improve the outcome for its pupils.

"For example, one of the schools we are working with had a group of pupils who said they had no idea what they wanted to go on to do after school. We brought in senior people from the local college to talk about further education opportunities and we had business leaders from a range of industries. At the same time, we helped the children to work on the way they presented themselves as candidates at interview, and we worked on their CV skills and on helping them to manage their expectations about their probable starting point in a business career," Kerr says.

While businesses can help in this informal way, some businesses have considerable expertise to offer to help enrich and broaden the range of skills available to pupils. Oracle, one of the world's top database and enterprise applications companies, has used its expertise to produce the Oracle Foundation.

Introduced in Scotland in 2002, the Oracle Academy: Introduction to Computer Science & Business is a web-based educational programme which provides secondary school and FE college students with leading edge, glob-

ally recognised IT skills. The first step for any school or college taking on the Oracle Academy is getting staff trained up. Teachers undergo up to 80 hours of virtual training and 50 hours of in-class training at an international residential institute.

All training sessions include opportunities to collaborate with peers and share best practices. The training is aligned with a set of learning and collaboration tools, which they take back and deliver in the classroom.

Students are exposed to technical, business and professional skills that are used in a variety of industries and job roles. Advanced students have the opportunity to pursue Oracle certification - a distinction that provides an additional competitive edge in the job market.

The Oracle Academy develops not only industry-current high-level IT skills but focuses on exposure to real business issues as a foundation for the world of work or further education. Students can participate from the ages of 15 upwards and the programme fosters a sense of individual responsibility for learning, teamwork and information sharing.

The Oracle Academy promotes communication, collaboration and creativity in a structured educational environment whilst also delivering real industry-recognised qualifications that have been validated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

In Scotland, it supports the exchange of ideas and experiences between teachers in the participating schools through regular update and networking ses-

sions during the academic year. Schools are invited on to the programme regardless of their size, location or current academic achievement.

The academy is a key element of their stated policy to embed CSR into the business in Scotland. Other elements in Oracle's CSR programme include maths camps for school students, e-mentoring for students, IT workshops, and additional community care projects.

From an initial five schools and colleges in Scotland in 2002, Oracle now supports 40 schools with over 300 students studying the course. Oracle makes the academy available in a number of countries around the world, and globally there is a population of schools with in excess of 300,000 pupils currently participating in the programme.

Jane Richardson, pictured inset, senior regional development manager at Oracle Scotland, says her office's involvement with the academy began as a response to the recommendations in the Scottish Executive's Enterprise into Education report. The study acknowledged Scotland's need to compete in a global economy by ensuring that the skills of young people were linked to business needs, and that those skills should reflect the changes in the Scottish business base from a manufacturing to a service-based economy.

"In 2006 we mapped the curriculum against the new Advanced Higher Information systems course so that teachers could use the Oracle curriculum as the backbone of the Advanced Higher in advance of the SQA materials being made available to schools," she says. "This has resulted in SQA's credit transfer arrangements being further developed to achieve a credit transfer to the new Advanced

**'We had one group who had no idea what they wanted to do after school'**



