



Lorraine Clark, award winning apprentice electrician at Fife Council

From shaky ground to solid foundations

Fife building services is one of Scotland's largest building services operations and has shown a genuine commitment to developing an effective apprenticeship training programme. Here Alan Hill, of Fife council explains what makes Fife's scheme work so well.

Building Services has developed an apprentice programme, which has been transformed from shaky ground to solid foundations. The result is qualified, highly skilled trades persons to provide excellent services to our customers in the communities of Fife.

Building services provide a comprehensive range of construction services for Fife Council. The unit is split into three operational divisions and supported by a business unit. The operational divisions have been designed to meet the needs of specific clients including; Housing Maintenance, Property Maintenance (non – domestic) and Contracts. There are 1030 employees including 90 apprentices. With an annual

turnover of some £68 million providing a 24/7 repairs service and a full range of construction activities which include planned and responsive repairs, maintenance programmes, gas central heating and external works Fife building services is at the heart of a comprehensive range of major projects and minor works.

One of the main assets of the organisation is the highly skilled workforce. Building Services offer a firm commitment to provide apprentice opportunities for the community with over 300 apprentices having gained trade status year on year. Our combined effort ensures that we support, encourage and promote life long learning and

development. It is essential to assess the labour / skills requirements to ensure that we meet our contractual obligation and the ever changing needs and expectations of our customers and clients.

In 2004 we identified that the apprentice programme then in place was disjointed, poorly co-ordinated and lacked leadership and ownership which was affecting the quality of training and attainment. We decided it was necessary to review the programme, and, following a period of research it was agreed by all partners to manage the programme through strategic leadership.

Building Services over the last 4 years have demonstrated enormous

commitment to providing, developing and improving our modern day apprentice programme. The staff involved take great pride in providing and delivering the best training opportunities available. The service has committed significant investment and support to the programme in the region of £1.2 million. In addition the service applied for and secured £253,000 from the Council's "Investment in the Workforce" fund for the first year (2006/07) and a further of £52,000 in 2007/08. This money was channelled into an Adult Apprentice programme, which has given our skilled employees the unique opportunity to gain a recognised trade. In July 2008, twenty-two adult employees had gained trade status and qualifications.

Building Services review the modern apprentice programme working in effective partnerships with internal departments, colleges, trade unions and the apprentices themselves to ensure that the training we provide is of an excellent standard and meets industry and national standards. For the past 2 years apprentices have recorded a 100% completion rate.

Apprenticeships are "precious" and it is therefore vitally important that the process is tailored to ensure that apprentices receive a quality training experience. With this in mind Building Services have developed a programme that is robust and innovative: This includes:

- Maximum advertising exposure, to ensure equal opportunities and diverse culture are encouraged
- School visits and recruitment fairs
- Robust selection process that include trade specific tests and skills tests. (In 2008 there were over 1300 applications for 26 posts)
- Comprehensive induction programme
- Internal and external (college) reviews
- Programme review teams
- Reward recognition
- Career opportunities

Programme review teams have been introduced on a trade basis. These teams include supervisors, college lecturers, development staff and the apprentices.

These teams have a critical role to play in terms of training and development provision.

Building Services invest significant financial resources to training and development. At the forefront of this investment is our apprentice programme. The organisation has clear objectives in terms of securing a highly skilled workforce capable of delivering quality services to the people of Fife by:-

- Providing opportunities for the young people in our community.
- Developing local skills
- Retaining key skills
- Developing career opportunities
- Addressing skill shortages
- Maintaining equalities – male / female balance
- Supporting business continuity

Building Services believe and can evidence that they deliver on its objectives by the structured apprentice programme now in place in terms of:

- Continuous monitoring and review of apprentice performance enabling any weaknesses to be quickly identified and supported
- Practical skills aligned with college work
- Improved communications between partners
- Apprentice ownership of the process
- Apprentice contribution in terms of improved commitment, attitude and attendance
- Provision of a comprehensive training package
- Ability to act and react to changes / proposed changes to syllabuses
- 100% attainment
- College and national awards

Over the past 4 years, the Service has developed a robust "cradle to grave" programme that provides a structured, comprehensive MA Programme that

meets the needs of the service, the community and most importantly, the apprentices. We are now reaping the rewards within the community with an improved reputation of the scheme, which attracted over 1300 applicants for 26 posts. In 2007 and 2008, we achieved a 100 % attainment of qualifications by apprentices. We have even provided assistance to other bodies with members of the strategy group being asked to assist St Andrews university in the development of their own modern apprenticeships programme.

Building Services have now collected a host of prestigious awards including Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) awards, both regionally and nationally and the Scottish National MA Apprentice of the Year and Outstanding Achievement Award. In 2007 the SELECT National Electrical Award for Training provision and Fife Council's own Excellence Award for "Growing your own Workforce".

Building Services staff involved with our programme are very proud and passionate about the development and achievement of all our apprentices. The commitment shown over the past 4 years has been outstanding.

As we now embark on our 2009 apprentice intake offering 21 places, we expect, particularly given the decline in the construction industry, a huge response for these places. We have truly moved from shaky ground to solid foundations.

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