

Case study - a school-business project

Rubberatkins and Bridge of Don Academy



Rubberatkins is an Aberdeen-based company which has been providing oil and gas clients with rubber products since 1988.

Employing around 130 people, it is a privately-owned company providing innovative technical, design and manufacturing services with sales offices in Houston, Calgary, Abu Dhabi and Beijing.

Several years ago, it formed a collaborative partnership with Bridge of Don Academy, a fully comprehensive mixed secondary school located in the north of Aberdeen City.

Part of Rubberatkins' motivation was looking to the longer term in engaging with the future workforce. It appreciated that these young people in the academy would soon be appearing in the workplace, looking for apprenticeships and jobs, and wanted them to be as prepared as possible.

The initial engagement with Bridge of Don Academy

was delivered through the curriculum. Rubberatkins wanted to instil a deeper understanding of polymers and rubber and their capabilities in the students, which they achieved through lessons in science subjects.

Leading the way

As the partnership developed, the company sat down with the school and asked the honest question: "What help do you feel would best support you?"

From this, a need was identified for leadership skills training for the academy's head students.

Mike Jamieson, depute head teacher at Bridge of Don Academy, said: "Our school leaders are responsible for managing and motivating a team of 40 prefects.

"We wanted them to understand the value and

credibility of their leadership roles – and to develop their leadership skills and experience for life beyond school.

“To achieve this, we felt they would benefit from talking to current industry leaders.”

So Rubberatkins created a leadership programme to guide and advise the senior pupils as they carried out their roles through the year.

“There was a team of four head students, who told us they had certain tasks which turned out to translate fairly easily into the workplace,” said Rubberatkins head of HR Claire Grant.

“They had to oversee issues around uniform, as well as keeping order in the school and leading by example.

“There was even an element of shift organisation, as they had to make sure that breaks were covered and school shop times were staggered to minimise queues.

The overview

“So we devised a programme for the students and broke it down into different sessions.

“We started with an overview of Rubberatkins the company - what we do and the roles that exist here. We gave the students a tour of the company as well so they could get a feel for the business.

“Then we arranged meetings with the management team where they could talk about their career paths and experiences. And from there, we put together the rest of the programme with sessions on subjects like time management, dealing with conflict and managing teams.

“They told us they did a lot of presentations to assemblies so our marketing manager gave a session on how to put them together, with tips on presenting confidently and communicate effectively.

The school’s motto is “be caring, be honest, be respectful, be your best” and Rubberatkins took this to heart when they were putting together the programme.

“We introduced some mental health awareness into the sessions. The students said they found it really valuable to learn that it was okay not to feel okay, and to feel able to check in on others around the school and talk about mental health,” said Claire.

There was an immediate result from the leadership skills training.

“Our pupils returned from the sessions buzzing with ideas,” said Mike.

“They gained a wealth of useful knowledge but also received a tremendous boost from having regular contact with an approachable team of senior managers, who really made them feel listened to.

“There is no doubt that the programme contributed to their performance as school leaders throughout the year and to their enjoyment of the roles.”

How it happened

“The programme developed and evolved year by year,” said Claire. “To be honest, it was a case of trial and error when we started out.

“The first year, we rolled it out month by month. But from feedback after the first year, we went on to deliver all the training at the start of the school year.

“By the third year, we were involved in the interviews to appoint the next cohort, which really helped as we then knew a bit more about their background and could really mould the programme to suit.

“The students injected a real air of enthusiasm, they were so motivated. And it was great to see the difference it made to them over the course of the programme. You could see the change in them as their confidence and experience grew.

“It was great that they could see how they could apply what they learned to their roles at Bridge of Don Academy.

“The management team was keen to get involved and really enjoyed being part of it.

“They found it gave them a chance to take a step back and reflect on how they did things and gain perspective on their own career journey.

Rubberatkins managing director Nick Atkins agreed.

“The involvement with the head pupils was a stimulating two-way experience,” he said.

“The students put us on the spot, asking probing questions such as ‘why do you do what you do’ and ‘what do you look for from employees?’

“We all benefited from the programme and we were pleased to give the students an insight into management in action.”

Lasting legacy

Emily Munro – now a second year student at Glasgow University – was one of the team of head students that took part and described the experience.

“Being given the task of managing a group of 40 of your peers at the age of 17 was daunting,” she said, “but receiving the guidance of Claire and the rest of the team at Rubberatkins made it manageable.

“I found the session on motivating colleagues to be intrinsically beneficial to the role of managing prefects.

“At the time we were struggling to have prefects complete their duties and sign up to assist at events run outside school.

“By taking on board what we discussed at our sessions we were able to work with the team of prefects resulting in an improvement in both uptake and quality of the performance of duties. I found both the sessions on mental health and time management to

be personally beneficial both while I was at school, and now that I am at university.

“It allowed me to focus on planning time to complete all tasks required of me, both academic and extra-curricular, while not becoming overwhelmed in the process.

I am extremely grateful to have received such a rewarding opportunity with Rubberatkins during my time at school. I imagine the experience will continue to benefit me in the future when I enter the professional world.”



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