



**Include-Us**  
young people mean business  
iomairt nan òg



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# Great chance to find jobs

Report by Katie Macleod  
Photographs by Kirstie Smith

**In the current economic climate, effective information on employment opportunities is essential for school pupils – a need that was successfully met in Sgoil Lionacleit on February 20th, with one of the largest careers conventions the Western Isles has seen in recent years.**

Organised by Include-Us on behalf of Sgoil Lionacleit, the Careers Convention brought together more than 40 exhibitors, including representatives from higher education institutions, local businesses and national companies.

The event was open to current and former pupils of Sgoil Lionacleit, as well as parents of current sixth year students; thanks to the financial support of Skills Development Scotland, all 56 secondary pupils from Castlebay School in Barra were able to attend too.

Bernard Chisholm, Assistant Director of Education and Children's Services, opened the Careers Convention with a speech thanking those involved, delivering a passionate message to the pupils present. Talking of the importance of maintaining "sustained, positive destinations" in the Curriculum for Excellence, he says: "We don't just want you to get a job; we want you to get the best job... Everything you're seeing here today is there to help you think big."

'Thinking big' was definitely on the agenda, with employers in attendance from a variety of sectors such as health and social care; the creative industries; the hospitality industry; and the energy sector.

For the organisations involved, the careers convention was a chance for them to get their message out there - what they do, who they employ, and what opportunities they have available. Some were even offering hands-on experiences; at the MG Alba stand, pupils were able to see the post-production process in action, standing in front of the camera themselves before watching the film being edited on a laptop.

A number of the organisations play a leading role in the local economy, something Include-Us took into account when constructing the programme. Libby Paterson from Stòras Uibhist explains that they are "very keen to promote the fact that there are quality local jobs happening now," while defence and security company

QinetiQ were promoting their current apprenticeship opportunities in engineering at the MOD Hebrides missile range in Benbecula.

These companies allow students to work close to home, while others – such as Caledonian Macbrayne and Scottish National Heritage (SNH) - offer the chance to live in islands while working elsewhere. Joanne Ferguson, the Stilligary-based SNH Operations Manager, explains that the organisation operates a 'home work' policy. "You can work from home and do a specialist job, and it opens up all sorts of opportunities, like the chance to come back when you've done a degree."

The careers convention was also an occasion for the organisations to inspire students, to provide them with information that has the potential to progress into passion for a chosen field. As Jane Ballantyne of CNES Social Care points out, "It's more than recruitment, it's inspiring, starting a conversation."

"We've had lots of people interested in different things; some people are not too sure, so they're coming for ideas," says Janet, a training coordinator for NHS Western Isles, which offered 90 training placements for pupils last year – ten times the number of opportunities that the government recommends. "It's really important to give young people a chance, to see what it's like."

With such a range of sectors represented, both local and national, there was something every one of the 300 students could take away from the event, whether or not they have a set career path in mind. Throughout the day there was a buzz in the air, an excitement at future possibilities as pupils milled around the hall with their arms full of fliers.

For younger pupils unsure of their future plans, the careers convention allowed them to ask questions and start thinking about what they need to study in their senior years. "It's been a fantastic day, we've had a lot of people interested," says Lindsay Matheson of Scottish and Southern Energy. "The kids are asking the questions, they're obviously doing their homework. By coming to ask, they know what exams they need to sit, what they need to achieve."

Even students certain of the steps they plan to take post-school found the convention helpful. For Hannah Macphee, a 6th year pupil from Castlebay School who has applied to study History at the University of Edinburgh, the careers convention allowed her to look at what options may be available after completing her degree.

"It's really useful to see what other careers are out there," she says.

Eilidh Macmillan, a 6th year pupil at Sgoil Lionacleit, already has an unconditional offer for the University of Strathclyde, but still made the most of the day. "I've wanted to do architecture for a long time, but I really love drama and don't want to drop it," she explains, adding that she was able to learn about short courses in drama, as well as volunteer opportunities.

Her friend and fellow 6th year Sgoil Lionacleit pupil Iona Maclean knew what she wanted to do when she arrived in the morning, but was unsure about how to enter her chosen career path; thanks to the convention she is now set on a career in conservation. "I couldn't find out much by myself, but I spoke to Scottish National Heritage today and that's really helped," Iona explains.

"All this hard work's been for the benefit of the pupils," says Include-Us Support Worker Gordon Macdonald, who spent seven months organising the event, personally contacting exhibitors from as many employment sectors as possible. He explains that a lot of work was done behind the scenes, commending the janitors setting up the hall for the event, and the canteen staff for providing extra catering. "It's a really good event, I'm really pleased, there's a good buzz."

When it comes to opportunities for young people, there's a national focus on partnership between educators and employers, and amongst employers themselves. Some links are already established – the Scottish Drama Training Network, for example, has strong ties with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, both of whom were present at Sgoil Lionacleit.

But connections were made on the day too, widening opportunities even further. "It's been excellent, there's been some serious interest," says Joanne from SNH, who responded to direct interest from a senior student by working with representatives from Volunteer Scotland.

Together they were able to help the student towards building a portfolio of experience in conservation. "It all completely came out of today. Some of the students are already very focused, so we try to do something more for them."

For all concerned, the Sgoil Lionacleit Career Convention was a resounding success: for students, for employers; and for the future of the local island economies.

