

Pupils learn the pitfalls of job interviews

Lessons on how to impress employers

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THEY are commonly known as the passports to employment – a firm handshake and a friendly smile.

Pupils across Scotland, however, are to be taught the dos and don'ts of the job interview that many have never learned.

Careers Scotland has launched the initiative in response to concerns that school-leavers can miss out on jobs because the accepted social customs of the workplace are alien to them.

Jo Noblett, development officer for the Worknet programme, said the problem had arisen because many young people in Scotland had learned a completely different set of social conventions.

"Most interviewers would take it for granted that someone coming for a job would look them in the eye, smile and offer them a handshake, but that is not the case," she said.

"If you grow up in a tough community in Scotland, looking someone in the eye can be a threat and smiling could be seen as mocking.

"What we are trying to do is tell people that they have to

learn a different set of social skills for the workplace, just as if they are learning about the culture of a different country."

As part of the Worknet initiative, pupils are encouraged to act out an interview scenario, taking turns to play the different roles and exploring the rights and wrongs and why one way is better than another.

They are also urged to consider what they want to do in life and the steps they need to take to get there.

Debra Angel, who developed the Worknet programme in America and is now helping Careers Scotland with the initiative, said the strategy focused on establishing a reverse career path based on aspirations and interests, but which gave pupils realistic goals towards their dream job.

"Candidates are encouraged to consider their own values, areas of interest and strengths and that leads them towards choosing a career to suit their own goals," she said.

"To find out their own starting point on the career path, candidates are encouraged to telephone employers and ask what education and skills were required for the job they want.

"By asking employers they

are able to build a career path back to their own starting point that they are capable and qualified to do and have the opportunity to succeed. This creates their unique career path which is achievable within three to five years."

Before rolling it out to all secondary schools, the project has been piloted at 12 schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, many of which are residential.

Research into the year-long pilot concluded that there had been "positive progress", with 73% of participants either in work, training or education.

A follow-up study conducted seven months after the Worknet pilot found 57% of those who took part were still in work, training or education – compared with an average of 33% for those leaving care without taking part in the initiative.

Worknet will be expanded into 20 secondary schools in the short term, before being rolled out across Scotland later this year.

The initiative will primarily focus on pupils who are in danger of dropping out or those struggling to achieve through formal exams.

