

**Local Value-Add Case Study
Forster Group Skills Academy**

*Providing local opportunities for local
skills development*

Project: **Forster Group Skills Academy**

Ensuring the future of local skills

Forster Group's Skills Academy programme addresses skills shortages in Scotland's roofing industry

Scottish roofing and solar specialist Forster Group has always recognised the importance of nurturing talent in a high-performing organisation. Throughout its 30 years in business it has continually invested in apprenticeships. In 2015 it launched the Forster Skills Academy, an innovative and impactful approach to skills development for the Scottish home building and roofing industry.



THE BACKGROUND

Prior to launching the Skills Academy, the Group had been trying for some time to contribute to the development of an apprenticeship model that answered the needs of both their company and the wider housebuilding sector in Scotland.

Having worked extensively but without success with training and educational institutions to try to address the gap, Forster Group decided to create its own in-house training facility.

Based in Brechin, Angus, the Academy would deliver a Modern Apprenticeship (SQFL5) in Roofing Occupations, designed for new-build housing.

Since its launch, the Skills Academy has taken on 50 apprentices and is now preparing to launch Skills Academy 2.0, which will create more opportunities for entrants of all ages and backgrounds to enter the industry.



“ The training program was designed to be visionary. It reached beyond the basic qualification, encompassing a broader understanding of the construction and build process. The offsite learning was completed on a residential basis and the program was designed to provide a diverse range of experiences and challenges which would mature, shape and help grow our learners, personally and professionally. ”

John Forster, Founder and Board Chairman, Forster Group



DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR SCOTLAND'S WORKFORCE

The two-year integrated Modern Apprenticeship programme combined structured job-based learning with contextualised off-site training. Apprentices travelled from all over Scotland to take part in the 16-week residential programme, which was delivered within a new secondary school community campus in Brechin.

The technical training was developed to the Forster Standard, which met all statutory, industry and National Occupational Standards.

That made sure the underpinning knowledge and competencies met both industry requirements and the Group's responsibilities as an SQA-accredited centre.

At the same time as developing and introducing the Skills Academy, the company was maintaining its commitment to existing apprenticeship programmes in Technical Modern Apprenticeships in Quantity Surveying through Dundee and Angus College, and Graduate

Apprenticeships in Business Management through the University of Dundee.

Forster Group's commitment to nurturing and developing talent for the future of the construction industry extends outside the company, too. Working closely with Skills Development Scotland, they helped in the development of work-based learning at secondary schools, helping to design the pilot model for the Foundation Apprenticeship at SCQF Levels 4 and 5 for pupils at an earlier level of learning. This project-based approach to work-based learning is now being delivered across Construction, Hospitality and Automotive sectors in many schools across Scotland.

FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

The final intake of apprentices into the Forster Group Skills Academy qualified in January 2021, but the commitment to training Scotland's workforce of the future doesn't end there. The design of Skills Academy 2.0 is under way, and the Group remains committed to providing Graduate, Foundation and Technical Modern Apprenticeship opportunities as part of its everyday business.

"We believe in investing in the future of our industry," says Group founder and Board Chairman John Forster. "Skills Academy 1.0 was financed almost entirely by Forster Group, from the direct employment of the 50 apprentices to the supporting staff and overheads associated with setting up and running the programs in a dedicated SQA-accredited learning centre.

"We hope through our commitment to encourage others to do the same – Skills Academies like ours open quality pathways into sectors like construction and specialist industries like roofing when there is no other suitable provision through traditional models.

"That's essential if our industries are to survive, so we have always considered this an investment worth making."



"We are best when we grow our own talent. We're leading the way in developing what the roofing company of the future will look like through an understanding of the skills that will be needed. Our apprentices have helped define what we've been able to do now, and set us up to take advantage of the opportunities of the future."

John Forster, Founder and Board Chairman, Forster Group

