Falkirk Council Case Study

Procurement People of Tomorrow (PPoT)

PROCUREMENT
PEOPLE of TOMORROW
ENGAGE • RETAIN • DEVELOP

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1. Introduction

Public and private sector organisations across Scotland continue to experience a procurement skills shortage. Through a commitment to the Scottish Government's Procurement People of Tomorrow (PPoT) programme, Falkirk Council has embedded the delivery of future procurement talent within its Procurement Strategy 2024/25 - 2028/29. With a planned outcome to raise and increase awareness of procurement as a career, the Council has been contributing to the wider development of the profession.

The Council has, for a number of years, recognised the value of investing in modern apprentices and graduates, both to support workforce development and to build a strong pipeline of future talent. The Corporate Procurement Unit (CPU) has contributed to this success by supporting numerous entrants, helping to develop valuable procurement skills within the local workforce. These hires, ranging from modern apprentices to graduate trainees, have shaped our understanding of what effective support looks like and have informed the continual improvement of our approach to developing early-career talent.

Alongside our external awareness work, we place strong emphasis on internal development. Procurement activity touches many roles across the Council, not just within CPU. When colleagues with a procurement requirement develop the skills and confidence through training to lead on Quick Quotes or manage small sourcing exercises, it strengthens both compliance and service delivery. This internal capability building complements our PPoT activity, focuses on raising the profile of procurement and supports Scotland's wider talent pipeline.

2. Local Challenges

Procurement as a specialism remains relatively unknown among young people, their parents and teachers, and it is seldom viewed as a natural career option. Although Falkirk Council already had links with **Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)**, which connects employers with schools, and **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)**, the national careers and employability agency, these partnerships had not been used to their full potential. Strengthening these relationships became essential to improving external awareness and building meaningful engagement with local schools.

At the same time, we recognised that internal capability varied across services. Many staff interact with suppliers or are involved with purchasing processes as part of their roles, so improving baseline procurement knowledge was equally important. These combined challenges shaped our overall approach: improving internal confidence while also increasing the external visibility of procurement as a modern, relevant profession.

3. Our PPoT Approach

Our PPoT work focuses primarily on increasing awareness rather than filling vacancies. While earlier years saw us recruit and develop graduates and apprentices, recent activity has centred on engaging with high schools, teachers, parents and career advisers to

highlight what procurement involves and the opportunities it can lead to. This outreach has strengthened relationships with schools, improved understanding of procurement among teaching staff, and increased the visibility of the CPU within the wider community.

We have also invested time in strengthening our connections with DYW and SDS, enabling them to more confidently explain procurement pathways when supporting young people. Internally, we have continued to deliver practical procurement training and provide support to colleagues involved in purchasing activity. This ensures that procurement knowledge is shared across the organisation, rather than held solely within the CPU. Taken together, this approach allows us to contribute to the wider development of the profession while simultaneously improving capability within the Council.

4. Key Actions Delivered

4.1 School Engagement

Our strongest area of activity has been direct engagement with local schools. These sessions have allowed us to raise awareness of procurement among students, parents and teaching staff, while also building long-term relationships with individual schools and increasing the visibility of the CPU.

At **Larbert High School**, we delivered a 'Career in Procurement' presentation to around 50 senior students from a wide range of subject backgrounds. This sparked good discussion and helped position procurement as a relevant profession across multiple career interests. We got the students to participate in a team based challenge to get them thinking about value for money, ethics and real-world decision-making. The students were able to link procurement to their existing skills and knowledge. We also spoke about the different routes into the profession and emphasised that, even if they never work in procurement directly, most jobs shall involve requirements gathering, market analysis, supplier selection, buying and performance management.

At **Braes High School**, we delivered the same session to a smaller, more focused group of around 20 students with a particular interest in Business Studies. The discussion at Braes was more targeted, with students making strong connections between procurement and their coursework.

The teachers at both schools responded positively, commenting on how useful it was to hear about procurement and its direct link to school subjects. The sessions have helped teachers gain a better understanding of what procurement involves and has created stronger links for future collaboration.



4.2 Careers Fairs and Events

We have also supported several local and regional careers events to broaden awareness of procurement and highlight how it fits into the wider world of work.

At the **Bo'ness Academy Careers Fair**, we hosted a stall, handed out resources and signposted students to online materials. The event attracted a mix of pupils, parents and staff, and we had meaningful conversations that helped raise the profile of procurement and position it as a modern, accessible career path.

At **St Mungo's High School**, we delivered similar activity but with even greater engagement from parents. Several adults expressed interest in procurement themselves, reinforcing that procurement as a career is not limited to school leavers - increasing awareness benefits the wider community as well.

At the **University of Stirling careers event**, we represented the wider Council and spoke with students exploring graduate opportunities. While the event wasn't procurement specific, it provided a valuable opportunity to highlight procurement themes to students studying business, social sciences and related subjects.

4.3 Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

We have strengthened our relationship with the DYW community across the local authority by working closely with individual DYW officers and keeping them informed about our activities. Following our school visits, we shared our presentation with DYW representatives, who circulated it to relevant subject teachers such as Business, Politics and Modern Studies. The teachers have subsequentially passed it on to their students, allowing our message to reach far beyond the sessions we have delivered in person.

This proved to be one of the most valuable aspects of our engagement. DYW staff now have a clearer understanding of who we are, what the Corporate Procurement Unit does, and how procurement fits into the wider world of work, including the Council's Education Services. As a result, we are better connected to schools and more visible within the local education network, making future collaboration much easier.

4.4 Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

Our link with Skills Development Scotland has also strengthened, as we delivered a Career in Procurement session for their advisers, many of whom work directly with young people exploring career options. The session introduced the basics of procurement, explained the types of roles that exist, and highlighted where opportunities can arise across the public and private sector. As a result, SDS advisers now have a much clearer understanding of procurement and can confidently explain these pathways when supporting individuals. This has helped broaden the reach of our message beyond schools and ensures that procurement is now visible within local careers guidance conversations.

4.5 Internal Training and Shadowing

A key part of our work has been improving procurement understanding across the Council. We deliver practical training sessions, including Quick Quote workshops to support lower-value, less complex procurement activity. We also use Teams channels to share up to

date information and resources, providing ongoing support to colleagues who have procurement or supplier management responsibilities.

Procurement training has also been extended to graduates from teams across the organisation, giving them the chance to explore procurement even if it is not part of their core job. Several have chosen to take part and benefited from in-depth sessions delivered by senior colleagues, including training on Contract and Supplier Management and Quick Quote processes.

Managers have welcomed the opportunities offered to their staff, as it has strengthened their skills and boosted confidence in carrying out day-to-day procurement tasks. This approach has raised the overall standard of procurement knowledge and capability within the Council while also improving collaboration between the CPU and other services.

4.6 Recruitment of New Entrants

The Corporate Procurement Unit has a strong track record of supporting new entrants. Graduates and Modern Apprentices have benefited from structured personal and career development, mentoring and hands on involvement in procurement activity, which has led to them building their capability to lead on procurement exercises.

They have been further supported with access to a wide range of Council-funded training through the Scotland Excel Academy. Courses such as **Contract and Supplier Management**, **Frameworks and Mini-Competitions**, **Introduction to Public Procurement**, **Managing the Tender Process**, and **Life Cycle Costing** have provided a solid grounding in practical procurement.

The time and financial investment has helped new entrants with no previous knowledge to build confidence, develop quickly, and prepare for progression. Reflecting the success of this approach, the majority of our new entrants have now moved into a promoted specialist post either within the Council or in another public sector organisation.

5. Impact and Outcomes

Our work has made procurement far more visible within the local community and across the Council. Through school engagement and careers events, we have increased awareness of procurement as a future career opportunity among students, parents and teachers, helping people understand what the profession involves and how it connects to everyday decision-making. Our relationships with DYW officers and SDS advisers are now much stronger, meaning they are better placed to share information about procurement with the people they support.

Internally, colleagues across the Council have gained knowledge and confidence in procurement processes as a result of our training and support, which has improved capability, strengthened compliance and enhanced working relationships. New entrants have benefited from structured development and training opportunities, creating a small but effective talent pipeline that demonstrates what good early-career support can achieve. Collectively, this work has helped raise the standard of procurement practice within the Council while contributing to wider awareness across the local area.

6. How Other Organisations Can Replicate This

A key lesson from our work is that the most effective engagement starts with understanding what partners and schools already have in place. Instead of trying to create new events from scratch, it is often far easier – and more successful – to join the activities that schools, DYW teams and SDS advisers are already running. Careers weeks and job fairs, employer panels and classroom sessions are all opportunities where procurement can naturally fit.

Building relationships with **DYW** contacts in local schools is the simplest way to get started. They can identify upcoming events, introduce you to the appropriate teachers and circulate your materials to the subjects that will find them most relevant. Strengthening links with **SDS** advisers is equally valuable, as they play a key role in helping people of all ages explore potential career paths.

Offering to engage via a short presentation, hosting a stall at an existing event or leading on a practical activity makes it easy for partners to involve you. Internally, providing procurement training helps raise capability across your own organisation and demonstrates the value of procurement in all aspects of service delivery. And for organisations with the resource and capacity to recruit, apprenticeships, graduate roles or short-term placements can further support the wider talent pipeline.

7. Conclusion

Falkirk Council's support in developing the PPoT has helped make procurement more visible, more approachable and better understood across our schools, partner organisations and within the Council itself. By combining internal training with strong external engagement, we have raised awareness of the profession, strengthened relationships with DYW and SDS, and improved procurement capability across our services. Although our recent focus has been on awareness rather than recruitment, the development of previous new entrants shows the value of investing in people early. Together, this work demonstrates a practical, sustainable model that other organisations can adopt to support the future of procurement ensure that a strong and resilient pipeline of procurement talent continues to grow across the public sector.

