



Bucksburn Academy

S3 Pathways:

Framework for Co-Creating a
Skills-Based Curriculum with
Industry Partners

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1. Introduction

Bucksburn Academy is a non-denominational secondary school in north Aberdeen. It serves a mixed community with just over 40% of students coming from Scotland's most affluent 20% of households. Within the catchment area, our school serves around 880 pupils in mainstream education and 96 young people with complex additional support needs from across Aberdeen City. This makes our vision of **Together We Achieve** and our values of **Ambition, Inclusion** and **Respect** especially important to us.

Bucksburn Academy's young people achieve and attain highly, with almost all going on to positive destinations; three-quarters continue in education, with over 40% attending university. A lower number also progresses to work or training, aligning with trends across Aberdeen City. As employment, and pathways into it, continue to change, we want to develop skills for life and work that give our young people an advantage when they move on from school.

Wider context

Developing skills for life and work has long been an ambition in Scottish schools. In 2009, in support of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, [Building the Curriculum 4](#) was published. In 2014, [The Wood Report](#) highlighted the need for employers to work with schools to support skills delivery. The [Developing the Young Workforce Career Education Standard](#) followed in 2015, providing details about the expectation on schools to support young people.

Today, the curriculum continues to adapt through the [Curriculum Improvement Cycle](#). Progress has generally been slow. Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, Bucksburn Academy developed a skills framework, but this did not result in meaningful change.

The Excelerate Investment with the Wood Foundation

Emerging from Covid, we had an opportunity to rethink our aims around developing skills and meaningful experiences for young people. Simultaneously, we were fortunate to become part of Excelerate – an investment funded by the Wood Foundation to support system-level change within Scottish education. Our visions aligned. We both wanted engaged, informed, motivated and empowered young people taught by upskilled, confident teachers. We also wanted deeper relationships between school, employers and the wider community to drive more diverse and higher-quality learner pathways.

The Excelerate Investment gave us access to:

- Study visits to innovative schools across the UK and the USA
- High-quality training – connected to real-world learning – to improve our learning and teaching
- A coach to ensure we remained focused on delivery
- A Business and Community Support Officer (BCSO) who provided valuable links to our partners. The BCSO is now an integral part of our school's staffing structure.

This partnership has allowed us to go far beyond what we thought possible, creating meaningful experiences for young people and giving them an advantage as they make their way from Bucksburn Academy into the world of work.

2. Journey

The Wood Foundation's Excelerate Investment has been transformative, providing the vision, experience and knowledge to evolve our learning and teaching approach. Central to this journey has been a commitment to empowering young people to achieve positive destinations after school, but also the necessary skills to sustain that destination throughout their lives.

Our approach involves pedagogical innovations, including **project-based learning (PBL)**, **oracy** and **partnerships**, which we have embedded in our **S3 Pathways** (PBL pathways involving workplace visits and hands-on practical learning across key industry sectors).

A key factor in making this vision into a reality has been the strength and mindset of our team. Bucksburn Academy is fortunate to have staff who embrace change and actively contribute to shaping it. Our success is rooted in this collective commitment.

Time and resource investment

We recognised early on that meaningful change requires investment – in our staff, our curriculum, and most importantly, our young people. This meant allocating time and resources to continuing professional development (CPD), curriculum design and staffing; ensuring our team felt supported and empowered to innovate.

Study visits

Through study visits to Nashville, Detroit, and XP School in Doncaster, we saw diverse educational models and philosophies in action. These experiences helped us critically and creatively reflect on what could work in our context.

In particular, the Academies of Nashville inspired us with their sector-based approach to education, where learning is framed through the lens of employment sectors. It was clear their students were developing not only academic knowledge, but also workplace awareness, employability skills and professional networks – preparing them for a wide range of future pathways.

Reimagining existing models for our context

Rather than replicate the models we saw wholesale, we focused on reimagining them to suit our learners and local context. This led to the birth of our **S3 Pathways curriculum**, originally conceived in a meeting room at Deloitte in Nashville with Thom Sherrington (previously Depute Head Teacher at Bucksburn Academy), Jon Scally (previously Principal Teacher of Pupil Support, now Depute Head Teacher) and Dave Salmond (Business and Community Support Officer).

Outline of the S3 Pathways curriculum

Our S3 Pathways curriculum is an interdisciplinary learning approach that incorporates **project-based learning (PBL)**, **oracy** and **community-connected learning** across the curriculum.

It is underpinned by our **'SCRIPT for Success' skills framework**. This outlines the six core skills young people need for life and work: Self-Management, Communication, Resilience, ICT and Digital Literacy, Problem-Solving, and Teamwork.

The S3 Pathways model allows students to learn through practical application, ensuring they gain relevant skills that are transferable to the real world. It also fosters creativity and confidence. Students may discover a passion for a specific field or realise a certain career is not the right fit – both outcomes are equally valuable in guiding next steps.

As students approach course selection in S4, S3 Pathways means they are better equipped to align their choices with their aspirations. Many students visit colleges and universities, gaining firsthand experience of higher education environments. Crucially, S3 Pathways is also inclusive of students with Additional Support Needs (ASN), with project-based learning tailored to their abilities.



[More information around Bucksburn's approach to PBL and oracy can be found here.](#)

PBL case studies from across the curriculum

S1 Community Engagement project

To introduce the concept of PBL, Bucksburn Academy's S1 interdisciplinary learning class created a public display exploring how to foster community pride. This involved students engaging with local businesses and organisations – including local shops and the community group, Brighter Bucksburn – through community walks, research and surveys.

Using PBL, pupils collaborated on creative outputs to showcase their findings, including maps, drawings and displays. The project incorporated peer feedback and reflection, while also encouraging inclusivity, with one group actively supporting new students from Ukraine in overcoming language barriers.

[Read the full case study here.](#)

S5-6 Laboratory Skills project

Using a PBL approach, Bucksburn Academy's S5-6 Laboratory Skills class explored the impact of microorganisms on individuals and society. Over two months, students worked on guided research questions, collaborated with local industry and academic partners and conducted hands-on experiments.

Project outcomes included a Google microsite, articles, scientific posters, and a public presentation for staff, partners and families. Students improved their practical skills, scientific understanding, and developed wider employability skills, including communication and networking. PBL proved effective for engagement and will be repeated with future cohorts.

[Read the full case study here.](#)

S3 Home Economics project

S3 Home Economics students used PBL to design a sausage roll recipe for sale in the local community. Guided by the driving question, *"How can we, as butchers, create a sausage roll focusing on nutrition and current dietary advice to be sold in our community?"* pupils collaborated in teams, conducted market research and developed prototypes.

Working closely with local butcher, H&S Milne, students gained hands-on experience in production, testing, and sales, including presenting their creations at the local library and a national education event. Alongside subject learning, the project developed practical culinary skills, as well as SCRIPT skills like teamwork and communication. The real-world context visibly increased engagement.

[Read the full case study here.](#)



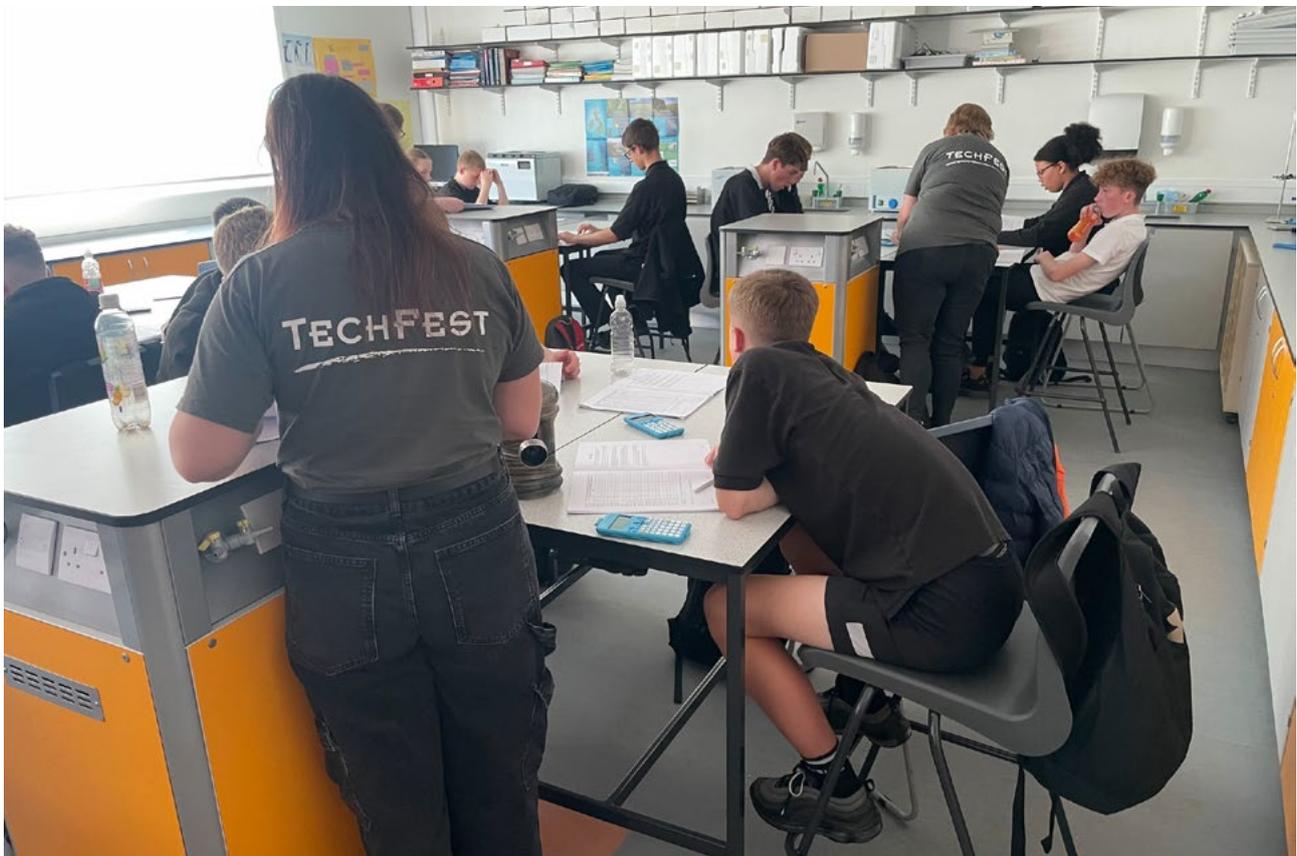
3. Coaching

While delivering the S3 Pathways curriculum was our end goal, one of the first requirements on our journey was coaching. To help maintain focus on our objectives, we were supported by the [Ford Next Generation Learning \(NGL\)](#) Community Coach, Donna Gilley.

Donna provided coaching for all aspects of school improvement at Bucksburn Academy, focusing on the three priority areas we had identified through our initial visioning process. These were:

- **Learning, Teaching and Assessment:** Enhancing teaching quality, student learning, and use of assessment to support progress.
- **Well-being, Equality and Inclusion:** Promoting the health, well-being, and inclusion of all learners.
- **Positive Futures / Employability:** Supporting students to achieve sustained, positive school-leaver destinations.

As part of the development of the S3 Pathways curriculum, our Depute Head Teacher and Business and Community Support Officer planned monthly check-ins with input from Donna. She brought experience and acted as a sounding board for any problems or challenges that arose, helping us maintain focus on our priorities. Her experience and understanding of our timelines meant she could offer good advice and practical solutions.



4. Business and Community Support Officer

As part of the Excelerate Investment, Bucksburn was given access to a Business and Community Support Officer (BCSO). While employed by The Wood Foundation for 32 months, the BCSO was dedicated entirely to Bucksburn Academy and was responsible for building relationships between the school, employers and the wider community. To make the most of our connections with external partners, we realised we needed this additional capacity to source, manage and maintain relationships. In April 2022, we decided to onboard our own BCSO, Dave Salmond.

Building internal relationships and trust

Before cultivating external relationships, the BCSO's first task was building relationships within the school. We wanted pupils to have access to outside experts but only in a meaningful way where their expertise complemented – and was embedded into – the curriculum; not as an add-on. To achieve this, it was imperative to give the BCSO time to get to know the school, teachers and curriculum.

For the entire first term, the BCSO spent the majority of their time getting to know colleagues. They met with various teachers, attended faculty meetings and presented at a whole-staff meeting. At this stage, there was no expectation of welcoming external partners into the school as we recognised the importance of developing internal relationships first.

However, during this time, the BCSO also explored the local community, met with local businesses, community groups and attended community council meetings. They introduced themselves, advertised the fact that the school would soon be looking outward and started building a portfolio of potential contacts to utilise at the appropriate time.

Cultivating a BCSO support network

The BCSO also took inspiration from colleagues in the same role in schools in the neighbouring local authority. Three BCSOs had been in post for three years prior, and around the time we recruited Dave, another two city schools also employed BCSOs. This network was (and remains) vital for sharing good practice, concerns and lessons learned. The BCSO role cannot exist in isolation. Given their unique role within the school, it is essential that they have a network to share information with and take inspiration from.

Recognising the value of the BCSO

Once relationships between the BCSO and internal stakeholders started to develop, so did those with external partners. Teaching staff saw the capacity and value the BCSO could add. The BCSO had time to research appropriate partners and create an extensive network. He was also well-equipped with reasons why we should welcome partners to the school and why they should want to collaborate with us.

When seeking a partner, it's important that they are engaging, kind, and genuinely have a desire to share their knowledge, expertise and career journey. Clear, honest and personalised communication is vital for developing relationships between the school and any partners. The BCSO has the unique capacity to research partners and contact them in a personalised way. They understand different partners' communication preferences, circumstances and availability. Teachers face significant timetabling constraints. However, the BCSO is free from these and can adjust to accommodate partners' needs when arranging meetings or activities.

Industry knows where skills gaps lie. Bucksburn Academy has incredible educators. It makes sense to connect the two. However, it requires someone to take ownership to make this happen. The BCSO does this while also providing timely, relevant feedback, keeping partners updated on school activities, and helping resolve any minor issues that might arise.

One of the valued organisations Bucksburn works with, [The Rowett Institute](#), says:

"It's so much easier with a BCSO. We want to engage with schools and have so much to offer, but either teachers leave, we don't know who to contact, or emails get ignored. A BCSO offers a dedicated point of contact and an open line of communication."

Inviting external partners into curriculum design

The BCSO was instrumental in bringing partners together as part of the visioning process for S3 Pathways. After two years in post, they had welcomed an array of partners into the school – even before planning for S3 Pathways had begun. They were also adept at telling the school's story of why industry collaboration was vital.

Again, relationships between the BCSO and in-school stakeholders were key. Stakeholders had trust in the BCSO and what they could offer. An excellent working relationship with the school's Developing the Young Workforce Employer School Coordinator (DYW ESC) was also key to partnership working. From the outset, roles were clearly defined:

- The BCSO was responsible for partnership activities embedded in the curriculum
- The DYW ESC was responsible for partnership activities for cohorts of young people with a specific interest outside the curriculum

Occasionally, there was crossover between the roles, but this allowed for excellent collaboration on S3 Pathways. S3 Pathways is both curriculum-based and cohort-driven by design.

When BCSO's contract with The Wood Foundation ended, the school chose to employ the BCSO directly. In the three years prior, the school had welcomed over 130 unique partners and had been gifted over 870 hours of engagement. This showed that the quantity and quality of partnership activity (particularly in S3 Pathways) was not sustainable without a designated contact responsible for managing external relationships.

Rev. Jonny Clipston, a partner who has helped in many ways beyond his usual school chaplaincy remit, says:

"It is wonderful to be welcomed into a school that values partnership so highly. I hoped to be able to use my different experience and qualifications to help the school in various ways, but could never have imagined how well that has worked out. The Excelerate Investment has been instrumental in bringing all these things together, and it is a huge privilege to interact with the pupils and staff in so many different contexts."

Additional BCSO responsibilities

As well as making partnership activity part of the lifeblood of the school, the BCSO has helped Bucksburn Academy communicate its achievements via social media, newsletters, articles in local community news bulletins and by speaking at events and conventions.

Bucksburn Academy

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP NEWS

A YEAR IN REFLECTION...

As summer rapidly approaches we look back on a busy, meaningful and fun academic year at Bucksburn Academy.

Before we delve into just some of the fantastic events, projects, visits, and workshops which have taken place throughout 2023/24, it's only right to start with a **BIG BUCKSBURN THANK YOU** to all of our valued industry and community partners for giving up their time, and sharing their talent!

We appreciate each and every one of you and look forward to welcoming you back to Bucksburn in the coming weeks, months and years!

Grab a cuppa and enjoy...

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much”

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

We want our pupils to be better engaged, informed, motivated and empowered. Knowledgeable and compassionate experts help us achieve this goal. Partners bring to life the curriculum and open the eyes of young people to the vast array of career options available. They help pupils to harness their potential and expand their vision of what is possible.

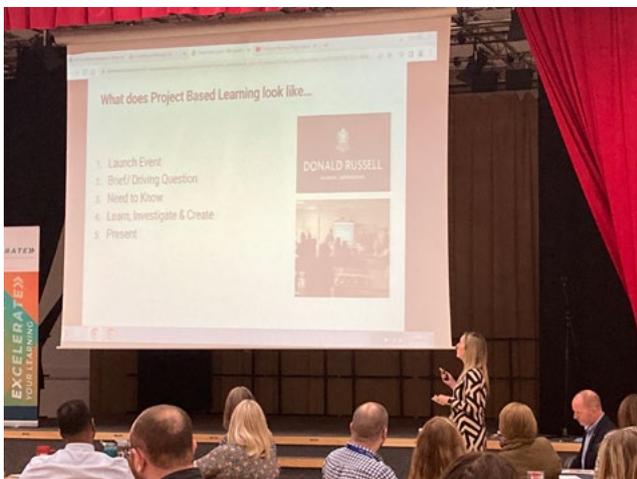
Ambition **Inclusion** **Respect**

@BucksburnAcad
@DavidSalmondAbz

EXCELERATE

5. Creating a vision for S3 Pathways

In line with our Excelerate action plan, Bucksburn Academy initiated a programme of research, collaboration and planning to shape the new S3 Pathways model. Our work concluded with a whole-school vision workshop involving around 70 staff members and external partners.



Starting point and strategic alignment

Initial visits to other schools highlighted the benefits of personalised learning, strong skills development and close engagement with employers. We were inspired by our visits, but the models we saw needed reshaping to reflect Bucksburn Academy’s specific context and priorities.

One key aim was to strengthen connections across the community, including with local employers and education providers. Skills for life and work sit at the heart of this approach, and project-based learning is a key method for empowering pupils to take ownership of their progress.

Analysis and visioning

Early on, we set up a visioning group to review school data and establish the need for change. They discovered that when pupils moved from S2 to S3, attendance below 85% rose from 8.3% to 18%. Meanwhile, behaviour referrals increased from 1,356 in S2 to 1,966 in S3. This reinforced the importance of addressing the S3 transition point. While pupils were preparing for qualifications, they needed time to re-engage and explore their future options.

Pupil voice added an important dimension, with many S3 learners expressing that making early curricular choices felt high-stakes and ‘scary’.

Why Bucksburn S3?

Year group	Attendance below 85%	Number of referrals
S1	7.5%	687
S2	8.3%	1356
S3	18%	1966
S4	24.7%	919
S5	15.9%	430

‘People tell us that it’s good we are getting to make our own choices, reduce our subjects, etc. but it’s more pressure as our future is getting closer and that’s scary’

‘Work is a lot harder, and we are really starting our qualification, so that can cause people issues where they don’t understand the work’

‘Teachers don’t understand that we are having a bad day and things escalate more than I mean them to, and I get a referral’

‘Teenage hormones cause us to not be able to control our behaviour and make good decisions’

‘Sometimes we have a bad day at home, then come to school in a bad mood’

S3 Pathways plan

During the planning stage, the steering group set a driving question to guide them:

How can Bucksburn Academy develop an ambitious S3 curriculum that strengthens young people's SCRIPT skills (Self-Management, Communication, Resilience, ICT & Digital Tech, Problem-Solving, Teamwork), increases their understanding of pathways, and supports them to make informed choices in the senior phase?

Their conclusion was that S3 required dedicated time focused on pathways rather than a traditional subject-based structure – two hours a week for all S3 pupils, delivered through the lens of one of the North East's major growth sectors.

Using Labour Market Information and analysing these growth sectors, the group identified eleven pathway areas as part of the visioning process. In the end, nine of these pathways ran in year one:

- Construction
- Life sciences
- Energy
- Digital technologies
- Creative industries
- Finance and legal
- Fitness and nutrition
- Hair and beauty
- Education, early learning and childcare

In the second year of delivery, some pathways were removed or altered, or new ones introduced, based on feedback and in-demand growth sectors in the region:

- Construction
- Life sciences
- Digital technologies
- Creative industries
- Finance and legal
- Education, early learning and childcare
- Energy in the North East (renamed from year 1 to shift the focus onto all local energy sector jobs, from engineering to HR, legal, etc.)
- Uniformed services (originally envisioned as health and social care, but later expanded to cover all uniformed services)
- Tourism and hospitality – a new pathway for year 2.

The emerging model focused on three key elements:

- **Explore:** A high-level look at the overall impact of the sector on the regional economy, backed up by exploration of data sources.
- **Experience:** Outlining experiences of as many different career paths as possible within the pathway sector, including external partner input.
- **Evaluate:** A detailed look at one career pathway and the associated skills required to pursue it.

These were supported by the guiding principles.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles developed during the visioning process ensure every pupil – regardless of pathway – will benefit from a consistent entitlement. They include:

- At least one visit to a college
- At least one visit to a university
- At least one workplace visit
- A holistic focus on SCRIPT skills
- A curriculum co-created with staff, businesses, community groups, and education partners
- Teacher externships
- A project-based learning approach
- Academic attainment should not be a barrier to any pathway
- Classes capped at 20
- Dedicated support from 'Pathway Champions', or teachers who guide young people through subject choice and pathway planning
- A Pathways Rubric, developed with partners, to support pupils in understanding their strengths in relation to SCRIPT skills and to help staff pitch learning at the appropriate level.

Approach to planning implementation

We devised a structured implementation plan:

- An initial 'sales presentation' to staff
 - o 97% of staff supported the concepts we outlined
 - o 67% expressed interest in planning or delivering a pathway
- Formation of a steering group to lead development
- Recruitment of founding business partners for each pathway
- Delivery of the stakeholder event to refine and validate the approach
- Appointment of a Principal Teacher for Pathways to coordinate operational delivery and ongoing development

Visioning workshop and feedback

In preparation for the visioning workshop, the BCSO identified and invited partners aligned to each pathway, as well as curriculum leads from local further and higher education institutions. The workshop ran for two hours in the school auditorium with seating arranged by pathway, ensuring a balanced mix of teaching staff and external partners.

The session included networking and short introductory explainers to outline both the purpose of the event and the S3 Pathways concept, before moving on to conversation and opportunities for co-design. Partner feedback was strongly positive, with partners expressing interest in supporting the programme. Most questions related to practical considerations such as time and cost.



6. Communication

Communication with stakeholders at each stage of the development has been crucial to the successful design and delivery of S3 Pathways.

Key activities and stakeholder touch points include:

- **Staff:** Organising initial conversations with staff and onboarding of potential leaders for each pathway (as per section 5).
- **Pupils:** Organising launch assemblies to ensure pupils were informed and excited about what was ahead.
- **Parents:** Hosting discussions at parental engagement events to guide course choice and answer any questions they might have.
- **Industry and community partners:** BCSO-facilitated sessions engaged potential partners and clearly explained the curriculum. During these events, the BCSO outlined the pathways structure and guiding principles, and opportunities were given for stakeholders to share feedback, specifically where they felt the vision's strengths lay, areas that were unclear, or suggestions for improvement.
- **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education:** We provided detailed information and updates during our HMIE inspections, demonstrating our curriculum planning and implementation. This included questionnaires completed by young people, parents, partners, teaching and support staff.



7. Timetable and implementation plan

To transform S3 Pathways from a vision to reality, our Ford NGL coach, Donna Gilley, used a needs analysis to determine what was required and to help us pull together a timeline. Through coaching, Donna encouraged the team to consider all aspects of the work being created and helped us develop a timeline to make sure all goals were met.

As part of the needs analysis, Donna helped us identify next steps. These included:

- The formation of an official leadership team, which would include a business and/or community partner with the capacity to ensure ongoing community-connectedness. This could be someone from The Wood Foundation or another partner from the initial stakeholder event.
- The leadership team should solidify the timeline, roles, and responsibilities of each stakeholder and recruit working teams, monitoring their progress with input from industry.
- Using the timeline, roles and responsibilities, the team should clearly communicate the plan, set deadlines for deliverables, and be flexible in adjusting the plan as required.

Following the initial stages, we conducted monthly meetings with staff to support continuing professional development, particularly for those who had opted into planning and delivery of oracy and project-based learning.

To maintain business connections for each pathway, we formed two groups: a steering group involving external partners (including business partners and The Wood Foundation), which helped to manage the process and ensure checks on our deliverables. Meanwhile, a staff group focused on training, support, making connections between business and education and ensuring that staff had all the tools they needed to bring their pathways to life.



“The pathways work is to be commended. From its inception as an idea back in March, Thom and Dave have breathed life into its existence. The initial stakeholder meeting was pivotal for ensuring business and community engagement from the infancy of the work. Dave and Thom also understand the need to develop a timeline, roles, and responsibilities for leaders to further develop an implementation plan. The team has worked collaboratively to identify important milestones that must be met over the next six months. Additionally, they have prioritised the events to make sure the work will occur efficiently and effectively.”

- Praise from Donna Gilley, Ford NGL Coach

8. Launch and delivery

All S3 Pathways use project-based learning and initially took place during a Tuesday afternoon double period (P5 and P6). All S3 pupils attended their chosen pathway at this time, with the pathway based on the top three choices made during their course selection. Having a two-hour block gives partners enough time to run substantial sessions and allows us to take classes off-site when needed.

Student launch event

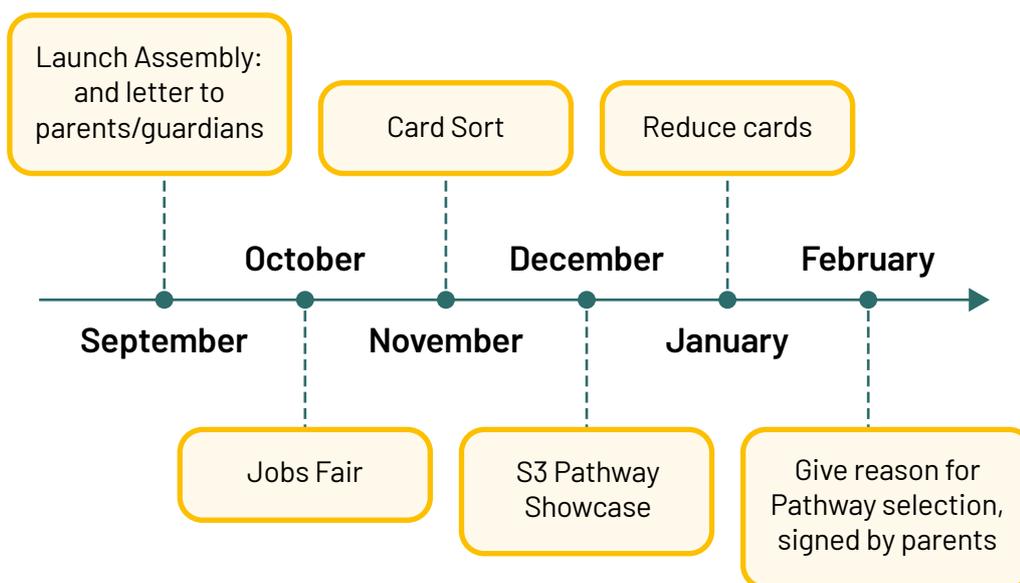
The student launch event took place at the Aberdeen STEM charity, TechFest. However, pupils didn't have the level of preparation needed to get what we had intended from the session. We realised the launch should have taken place at school. Partners still play an important role, and visits remain valuable. However, we need to deliver the introduction ourselves so pupils start with a clear understanding of the course.

To address this, we held a second in-school launch for each pathway. Relevant partners joined us for the sessions, and we set clear expectations so that pupils understood what the pathway would involve and what was expected of them.

S2 pathways card sort activity

Besides [descriptors of what the S3 Pathways would include on the school website](#), the first cohort to undertake them did not have a clear lead-in. We realised that a new approach was necessary to ensure more pupils chose the pathway that best suited their aspirations.

S2 pathways selection process



Pathways Showcase



"I liked the way in the poster they described what pathway contained what jobs. It was very well described" – Pupil voice



"I liked how you got to choose where you wanted to go and there were interactive things to do" – Pupil voice



"Really lovely atmosphere. All the pupils I visited were really engaged and knowledgeable about their pathways. A great way to generate interest and questions for the S2s about next year" – Class Teacher

To achieve this, we developed the S2 Pathways card sort activity, launched during an assembly. S2 pupils attended a showcase by S3 peers on each pathway to help them learn more about it, and then completed the card sort task during Personal and Social Education (PSE). The activity encouraged them to gradually narrow down their cards and, in turn, identify pathways that best suited their interests and strengths.

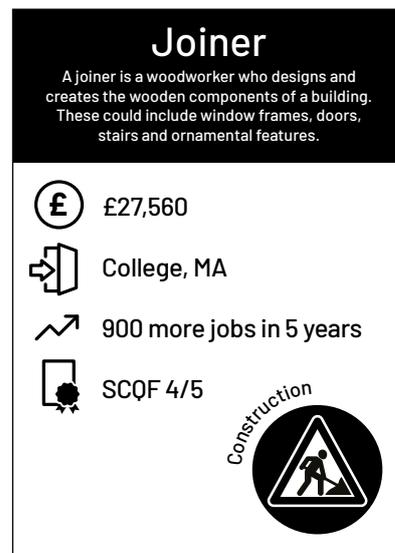
We adapted this approach from Romeo High School in Detroit, where pupils complete a similar exercise. Romeo also produced a short video that we used to help launch the card-sort activity with our S2 pupils.

Principal Teacher (PT) pathways

To maintain sustainability and operations of the Pathways curriculum, a need emerged for a Principal Teacher to take responsibility for leading, coordinating, and quality-assuring the S3 Pathways programme.

We required leadership, collaboration and a clear operational structure to bring ideas to life in the classroom. In particular, issues needed addressing around coordination, referral processes and consistency of delivery. Staff voice highlighted the need for clarity and support in managing these operational aspects of the programme. The PT pathways role filled this gap and provided strategic and operational leadership within the school.

It has required significant investment in training, scaffolding, and ongoing support to ensure staff feel confident and equipped to deliver a consistent, high-quality experience for our learners. However, the PT pathways role has become an anchor for integrating key elements, including SCRIPT, PBL, oracy, and community-connected learning.



Example of a card

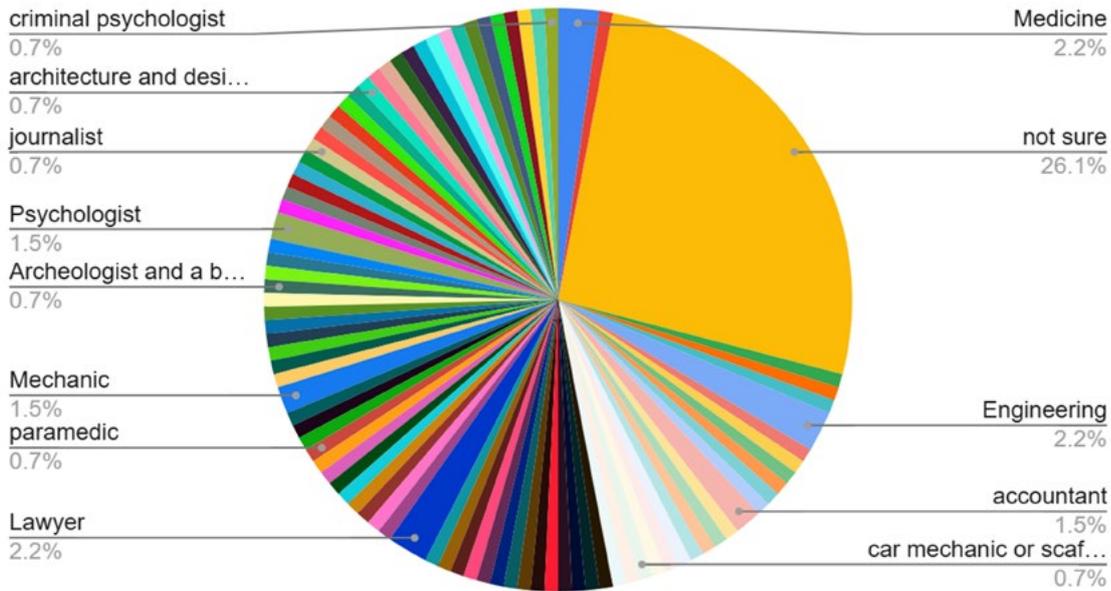
Some examples of driving questions in Pathways

- How can we, as early year practitioners, create a range of play and learning experiences focused on a children's story?
- How can we, as trainee hairstylists, plan and create 'a look' to demonstrate our hair and beauty skills?
- How can we, as financial planners, help clients achieve their financial goals?
- How can we, as pupils of Bucksburn Academy, create a video to showcase our work within the pathway classes?
- How can we, as make-up artists, design and deliver make-up services for the Bucksburn 'Starts in Their Eyes' competition?
- How can we, as pupils of Bucksburn Academy, create a brand identity that embodies our community code and our local area's history?
- How can we, as biologists, better enrich the environment of animals in captivity?
- How can we, in the construction industry, create a successful community?

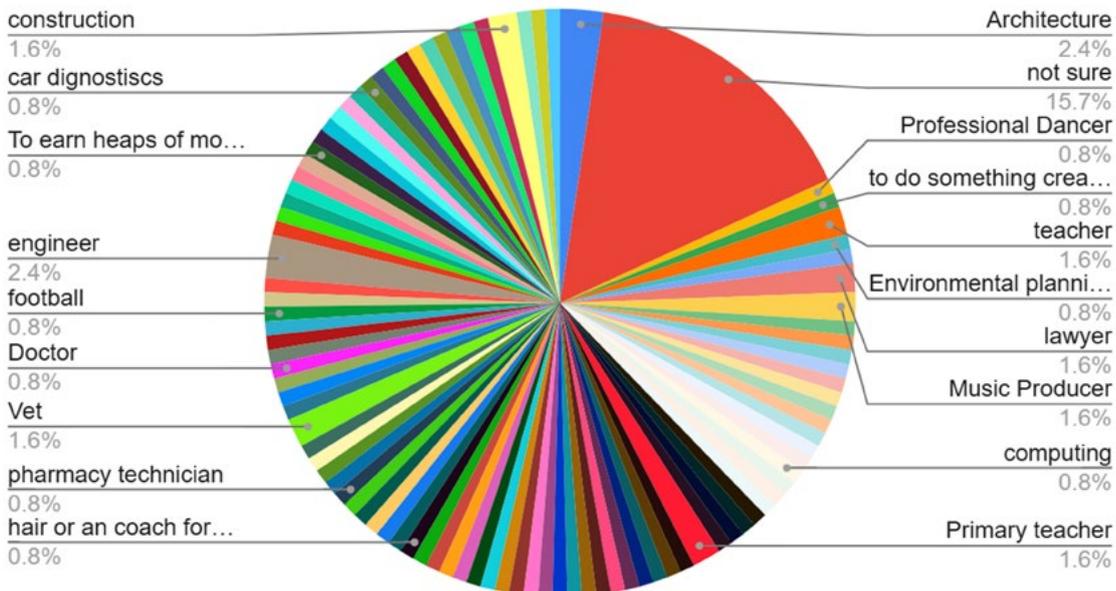


9. Outcomes

Pupils who are currently in S5 did not experience the pathways curriculum during S3. When selecting their courses for S4, 26.1% of this cohort reported being unsure about their future pathway.



By contrast, for the first cohort to complete the new S3 Pathways programme, this figure dropped to 15.7%. This demonstrates a significant improvement in their confidence and clarity when choosing subjects for S4.



Pupil voice session and findings

Lizbeth Paul (Excelerate Lead Coach, The Wood Foundation) and Kirstie Chapman (PBL 101 Trainer, Bucksburn Academy) conducted pupil-voice sessions with the first cohort to undertake the programme. Pupil feedback echoed staff reflections, particularly around the length of the original session – the block of learning time felt too long for pupils of that age.

Pupil voice session

General experience

What did you learn about the industry that surprised you?

- Amount of maths in game design is so much – music, characters, and game; amount of jobs, plumbing, bricklayer, electrician, architecture, personal trainer.

How did the class help develop your communication skills/oracy?

- Communication – learn to respect to each other; Oracy – nothing works if you don't talk, body language.

How did the class help you understand the different career paths within this industry?

- PE teaching – was enjoyable and you learn new sports; Engineering – would be cool to fix aircrafts; Construction – family does this work; Energy – engineering, talked about different jobs, analyze data.

Practical skills and knowledge

Did the class provide you with any practical skills or knowledge that you can apply in the future?

What can you tell me about SCRIPT skills?

- Self-management, teamwork, problem-solving skills. Honing the skills – taught about the skills and saw them in action and asked questions. Game design, we used teamwork, picked our groups and each person did different parts and communicated. We made prototypes. Pushes you out of comfort zone. You get more confident.

Did you have opportunities to work on real-world projects or with real business partners?

Can you talk about that?

- Lady came in to talk about children that need legal advice, tasks connected to real world – will be going AI, will help you get ideas and help you if you are stuck.

How did the class help you develop your problem solving and critical thinking skills?

- With law, it is logical thinking, emotional thinking. Mascot, we had to be critical – trial and error and had to make mistakes. The final mascot, Bucksburn Badgers, every team is making a different mascot; work in a team, share ideas, and get feedback from pupils about badgers.

Feedback and improvement

What would you change about the class to make it more engaging?

- Do not do double period next year
- Two periods per week on different days
- Do it in middle of day, more engaging; more business partners
- Want more personal stories and someone that has done the work
- Demonstrations – don't just talk to you
- Partners help with the project while pupils are doing the project
- More engagement with the partner, maybe do a project in their business

What advice would you give to students who will be taking this class in future?

- Do a pathway you enjoy and have the talent for

After taking the pathways class, how has it impacted what classes you will select for next year?

- Overwhelmingly YES maybe add music, pupils talked about courses they would be taking because they had learned about them in S3 Pathways.

In response, the school has reworked the timetable. Pathways now run across two shorter sessions on the same day. This provides a structure that is easier for pupils to manage, while still allowing the programme to expand into a longer block when needed for visits, partner-led activities or project work.



We also received feedback about the impact S3 Pathways had on course choice and whether students intended to continue on their chosen pathway. **63.8%** said it helped with course choice, and **66.1%** said they are continuing. Finding out early that this was not the path for them was also helpful.

As this is such a new initiative we are starting to see green shoots of the impact it is having for our learners, as we continue on this journey we will strive to share the impact on our [school website](#).

10. Next steps

Bucksburn Academy continues to integrate SCRIPT and employer-led learning throughout the curriculum, helping pupils develop the skills, confidence and self-awareness they need to achieve sustained positive destinations. The focus is now on enabling pupils across all year groups to assess their own abilities, reflect on progress, and articulate their skills to future employers.

S1 – SCRIPT and Global Goals

S1 Pupils are being introduced to SCRIPT early in the year, supported by partner-led events. They are also building a SCRIPT assessment profile using Global Goals (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) via Google Sites. This profile will grow throughout their time at the school.

S2 – Card Sort and skills reflection

We continue to refine the card sort activity with the Principal Teacher of Pupil Support (PTPS) and S2 pupils. It has been simplified this year with a single sheet to record on.

In addition, we are continuing self-assessment using SCRIPT rubrics/Global Goals profiles. In S2, pupils work with teachers to give themselves a SCRIPT rating – Bronze, Silver or Gold – with the aim of building confidence and supporting their ability to identify and communicate their skills.

S3 – Pathways and SCRIPT assessment

Pathways sessions have moved to Wednesday afternoons (periods 4-5) with Beauty and Fitness no longer on the programme, but new pathways in Uniformed Services and Hospitality, Travel and Tourism. SCRIPT assessment is again being introduced as part of pathways work, helping pupils reflect on their progress and skills.

S4–S6 – Positive destinations support

For pupils who are uncertain about their next steps, we are providing targeted support, with positive pathways planning meetings being re-established alongside key agencies so that we can help all young people towards positive destinations.

S5–S6 – Leaver profiles and career readiness

Pupils are being asked to create leaver profiles via LinkedIn, where they can showcase their skills, knowledge, and experience to potential employers. Developed with partner [Katoni Engineering](#), this model supports networking and is a sustainable, relevant model for helping young people into the world of work. Launched last year, the emphasis on this initiative will increase in future to boost engagement with leavers.

Across all stages, we are also continuing to support PT Pathways teacher professional development. The goal is for pupils to develop confidence in self-assessment and communication, ensuring they leave us with the ability to understand their skills, articulate their achievements, and take the next steps toward positive destinations.

11. Partner comments

This section brings together some reflections from teachers, partners, and parents, offering insights into how the programme is experienced across the wider school community.

Teacher Interview – Kirstie Chapman (Home Economics Teacher, PBL Champion and previously PT Pathways)

Why did you decide to do the PBL training?

PBL training first caught my eye during Covid. I was a few months into my time at Bucksburn when the school was to take part in a splash event. When I found out about project-based learning, I knew exactly how we could implement it in the school. In my old school, we had a business partner for a project called Project Barracuda, linked to a local seafood processing company. However, it was not in PBL format. After the online event, I emailed Thom Sherrington (Depute Head Teacher) who introduced me to the Developing the Young Workforce Coordinator. That is how the Donald Russell Project began. Once Covid restrictions were lifted, I put myself forward for official training. I did it because it makes my subject come to life; it doesn't feel like I am ticking boxes. I am making my subject relatable and real, and it gives the students more purpose to engage with the topics.

Who approached you to be a trainer? And why did you decide to go through with that?

An email came from The Wood Foundation. I applied in writing and had to get permission from Mike (Head Teacher), which was followed by a lovely online interview. I decided to do it because I wanted teaching to become fun again and to inspire other teachers to reignite that spark for the love of teaching.

How has PBL impacted your learning and teaching?

PBL has changed my mindset. It has let me put more responsibility on the students, allowing them to be more responsible for their learning and for me to support them more in the class as a learning facilitator rather than giving them the knowledge. It has changed my lesson planning, thinking outside the box (it does take some time to get used to it). I don't just say 'Here is a task and get on with it' – it's structured but makes the students feel like they have control and freedom. I step out of the way and let my students flourish.

Partner Interview – Lauren MacAskill (Schools-College Partnership Manager, North East Scotland College)

What does North East Scotland College (NESCol) get out of working closely with Bucksburn?

As with all our school partners, working with Bucksburn gives us a great opportunity to interact with pupils who are thinking about their next steps in education. Whether studying on a School-College course or considering their Further and Higher Education pathways, exposure to the College gives pupils a greater understanding of what options are available to them.

Within the realm of S3 Pathways, the school's commitment to every pupil having a College experience has been very beneficial to us. Not only are pupils getting to see/experience the College, but they are also doing this in relation to an industry that they are interested in, so that they are much more informed when making decisions about their future – and they are including College pathways in those considerations.

The College's support of Bucksburn is also reciprocated, with the school always happy to support College initiatives, such as becoming a pilot school for our new [Energy on the Move vehicle](#), allowing us to test the setup of this in a school setting and trial delivery to S3 pupils.

Why did you want to be involved in S3 Pathways?

We are always keen to be involved in initiatives that develop young people's understanding of study and career options. One of the reasons the Pathways initiative was so appealing is because of the S3 demographic. This is a year group for whom there is not a huge amount of College interaction, largely due to funding and capacity.

Pathways allowed us to have meaningful interaction with these S3 pupils, who are at a pivotal stage in their school journey as they approach senior phase subject choices. It offered the opportunity for curriculum teams to interact with S3 pupils in a meaningful way, showcasing career and College options within each Pathway, but without huge time commitments. The level of input from the College into each Pathway differs year-on-year, and consideration is made for the capacity of our curriculum teams.

What's different about working with Bucksburn in comparison to other schools?

The school is always open to collaborative working – whether through Pathways or in other areas – in order to give their pupils great opportunities. This is not to say other schools don't have a similar ethos, but our experience with Bucksburn is that they do this exceptionally well.

Bucksburn has a very open-minded approach. They recognise that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to education or progression from school to a positive destination, and they value every pathway a pupil may decide to pursue. We appreciate and support their ambition to allow all pupils to find out about a variety of pathways so that they can make the best choices for themselves.

What is your opinion on S3 Pathways, SCRIPT skills framework, and the school in general?

We believe Pathways is an excellent initiative and are delighted to support it. Indeed, Bucksburn is a valued school partner of the College, and we look forward to continuing to work with them, through Pathways, and in many other ways.

We also recognise that the SCRIPT skills framework allows pupils to recognise the transferable skills they use and develop throughout school, and also see how those skills will benefit them in future.

Parental Feedback

S3 Parent:

My son is in S3 at Bucksburn Academy and came home and told me all about his talk with a Data Science Engineer from BP. He doesn't tell me a lot about his day at school, so the fact he came home and wanted to discuss it shows that it obviously inspired him. Thank you for arranging this!





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