



## LEADING PEERS

Matthew J, Mathew L, Morgan, Sam and Rhys are S5 YSLs utilising timetabled **Skills** lessons to enhance the development of themselves and their peers, reforming the content of these lessons and the way in which they are taught. They are currently working towards their SCQF Level 6 YSL Award.

Three classes are timetabled to come at the same time and so they split into three groups, all delivering the same lesson. The YSLs have arranged the groups to play to their individual strengths so that they can deliver the best lessons possible. They have planned 4 different lessons with each containing 2 or 3 different activities and using the lesson structure: 10 minutes introduction; 30 minutes of activities; and 10 minutes conclusion, encouraging their peers to reflect and re-state the purpose of the activity that has been completed. After each set of lessons, the group of YSLs come together to discuss, evaluate their experiences and complete their YSL Log.

When devising their lessons, the YSLs wanted to focus on a range of leadership and STEM based activities. All of the activities selected are “basic ones” which the YSLs expect participants will know how to do; however, they think participants will need guidance to identify the real purpose of the activity. A key part of their lessons is their own active listening: processing and evaluating the reactions and conversations of the participants. The YSLs can use their newly acquired insight to encourage participants to reflect back on their own experiences within each lesson. They are confident that participants will “then take the skills they’ve learned and transfer them into their future actions.”

Ben was attracted to the YSL Programme because of his own experiences with STEM; he feels that his year group has been unique in the exposure to and participation in various STEM activities. He joined the



## ABOUT

Stewarton Academy, East Ayrshire, works with their young people to ensure they always achieve their full potential whilst taking responsibility for their own learning.

The four values of determination, fairness, respect and responsibility are at the heart of Stewarton Academy’s vision and are embedded in the comprehensive curriculum offered. The school is committed to ensuring that young people are given chances and promote that education is about where you are going, not where you are from.

Stewarton Academy has built Wider Achievement opportunities into the curriculum in order to promote the development of skills identified as being key to success in learning, life and work. Alex, Ben, Euan,

YSL Programme to ensure that the opportunities he's been exposed to can be shared with others, continuing the cycle of the promotion of STEM based experiences within the school.

Shortly after starting his YSL journey, Matthew recognised the significance of leadership to the programme admitting that, in many of the STEM activities he has participated in, he has never considered the skills which can be taken on to other areas. Euan, also S5, recognises that the YSL Programme "is getting us to lead participants but also to show them how to be leaders themselves. By doing short lessons with our peers, we're engaging them in teamwork and demonstrating leadership. We are showing them methodologies that will help them progress in the world of STEM and potentially their future career."

All of the YSLs are more aware of the characteristics they want to improve to become good leaders and are hopeful that on completion of the YSL Programme they'll improve the leadership skills they have and gain new ones to support their future actions.

Matthew has found the focus on aspects of leadership beneficial, recognising that while he is confident, he lacks empathy. During his YSL journey he aims to "be more understanding,



especially when leading in something I know a lot about but another person doesn't. I've always found that to be a difficult thing but have only just realised. Looking back, I can see that I have to try to be more patient and more mindful of how people are feeling."

Alex is also hoping to learn patience while participating in the YSL Programme. He describes himself as someone who "likes things done" and this can prevent him from exploring alternative ways to do things. Alex explains that by "looking at the different perspectives it lets me see that the other options are good and can be used just as effectively as my way."

Arranged activities include:

- **Marble Run**, where participants build a course and compete to keep a marble in motion for the longest time
- **Kapla Bridge**, where teamwork is fundamental to constructing a self-supporting bridge made out of Kapla
- **Spaghetti Tower**, which requires participants to build the highest stable tower possible out of spaghetti and Jelly Babies
- **Toilet Roll Facts**, where the number of sheets participants remove from the roll is the number of facts they have to give about themselves, raising questions about the importance of decisions made and encouraging young people to consider their actions more carefully
- **Negative Positive Story**, which helps to build relationships and trust by encouraging participants to break down boundaries by sharing information they would normally try to keep to themselves.

## ORGANISING AN EVENT

Working towards their SCQF Level 6 YSL Award, S5 YSLs Rowan, Natalie, Jessica, Niamh and Ella are organising an event for S2 pupils to increase the uptake and diversity in S3 Physics. They believe there is a negative stigma associated with Physics in Stewarton Academy and they want to unpick and challenge some of the common stereotypes: Physics is simply "Maths in context"; you have to be good at Maths to succeed in Physics; Physics is confusing and difficult.

Jessica believes that their group has the perfect dynamic to host an event promoting Physics. Some of their group did not pick Physics in S3 and so have had little experience of it since S2; some of them selected Physics at N5 but did not take it on to Higher; Jessica plans to take it in S6 at Advanced Higher level. She explains that they all have different

perspectives which has enabled them to discuss the reasons pupils don't pick the subject or choose not to take it further. Jessica in particular, wants to "spread the word" about the benefits of studying Physics and hopes for an "uprising in Physics students within the school."

The YSLs have chosen to focus on S2 pupils because that is when they choose their subject options. They are currently devising a mixture of activities including experiments, workshops and a few talks. Jessica explains that one of their key criteria is to ensure the event is "something quite fun to move the stigma away from Physics being a dreaded subject."

Moreover, they feel strongly that young people could be better informed about what qualifications are needed to follow a desired career path. Within their group, those who opted to study Physics in S3 felt they learned more about what careers they could move on to with Physics than the pupils who did not pick it as a subject option. They want to highlight all the different career paths which are opened by choosing Physics as a career and intend to bring in speakers from a variety of fields to present to S2 pupils during their event.

Furthermore, they hope to draw on the support of S5 Higher and S6 Advanced Higher Physics pupils to host workshops and talks, providing S2s with real life experiences of Physics within the school.

In organising the event, the YSLs have been pushed out of their comfort zones. Jessica relishes having the chance to organise something as "large scale" and while she is worried that it won't work on the day, she is confident that their planning will ensure everything runs smoothly.

YSL Rowan likes that her participation in the programme gives her the opportunity to work with pupils in her own school. She explains: "if you're working with S2 who are about to do their options choice, they take what you're telling them a lot more seriously. We're helping them decide on their future life and I like that side of it."

With the national launch of the YSL Programme in the summer of 2020 and the addition of new levels, even more pupils, across all year groups, in Stewarton Academy will be encouraged to take part in and receive recognition for their contribution to the STEM agenda.

