

The diary of a SNIPPEF Apprentice

Apprentices are vital to the future of our industry and can greatly benefit your business. We asked **Iain Winnard**, a fourth-year apprentice with Blair Plumbing and Heating Solutions Ltd, to share his daily experience and reveal what's involved in the journey to becoming a qualified plumber

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MONDAY

My day starts at 8am, at either the office/yard or on a job allocated from the previous week. With this winter being particularly cold, there has been a large amount of call-outs to burst pipes. I arrive at work and automatically check the computer for emergency incidents which may need attending to straight away.

Today's work involved a boiler changeover, removing an open vented hot water system and decommissioning and replacing a sealed system boiler.

As a fourth-year apprentice, I am more independent as the company is just me and my boss. He helped remove the existing boiler/hot water cylinder and cold-water storage cistern during the



decommissioning, which was a big help. I was left alone for the installation, which I enjoy. As a plumber, your pipework for an installation is your signature of the work and how you design the system. I like being more independent and capable of doing these jobs, which helps

build my confidence, however help is always there from my boss, should I need it.

TUESDAY

I had a call-out to a boiler breakdown first thing which involved problem solving and ruling out what faults may

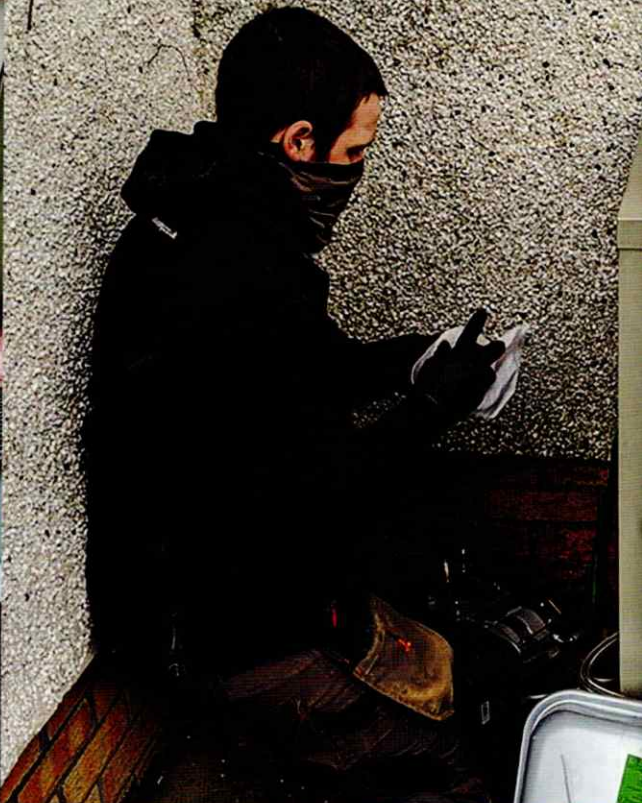
Iain is enjoying his plumbing career and takes pride in a job well done

➤ be causing the issue. The boiler was locking out due to soot build-up covering the photocell and choking the fuel nozzle in the oil boiler appliance. I changed the burner nozzle and cleaned out the boiler, checked the fuel condition and fuel supply line. The bigger issue was that the inner plate of the blast tube was not set to the correct depth, disturbing the flame picture and causing the burner to struggle to stay ignited. I contacted the manufacturer to help identify this cause and confirm the depth for the plate.

Later in the day, I was busy with two oil boiler services and another breakdown. One of the services involved a few extra outstanding repairs, so I replaced and re-wired a new on/off pole switch and thermostat and replaced the condensate trap.

The boiler breakdown had been caused by dirty fuel in the oil supply line which had contaminated the fuel pump. I changed the fuel pump on the burner, drained and pulled the dirty fuel through using a pump into a suitable container, then carried out a full boiler service to get the boiler back up and running.

To finish off the day, I drove back to the yard, tidied out my van and loaded up for Wednesday's work.



WEDNESDAY

Today I was working on an estate with a mix of ongoing projects. My task was to take

Iain's working week features a wide variety of tasks which keep him busy

a new water main into a coat room and first fix the pipework for a WC and a wash hand basin with an above basin instantaneous hot water heater and run a pipe for an outside tap located at the front of the building.

With social distancing in place, my goal of the day was to get all the first fix pipework done so the joiners could get in the next day.

My second job on the estate was to install a small circular stainless-steel sink for a workshop with a multipoint unvented water heater installed underneath it. There is still some work required at this point to bring a cold supply to the appliances in the workshop.

Meet the apprentice

Iain is a fourth-year apprentice, who started his apprenticeship in July 2017 and works for Blair Plumbing & Heating Solutions Ltd in Crinan, Argyll.

I am a hands-on worker, so an apprenticeship always appealed to me through school. People will always need plumbers so it seemed to be a good career choice – which it was!

When everyone first thinks of a plumber, you immediately think working with toilets and blocked drains, which you do work on from

time to time, but it is so much more than that. I have done lots of work on oil fired central heating and hot water systems, natural gas work on boilers, fires, cookers, log burning stoves, bathroom and kitchen renovations, air source heat pump servicing/maintenance and unvented hot water cylinder servicing – including thermal stores and overall plumbing maintenance and repairs. The variety of work I have encountered has never failed to impress me.

College and Covid

Coronavirus has had an effect in many ways. When the lockdown started back in March 2020, work was reduced for only essential work to be carried out. Through April and May, I was on furlough, then returned to work on June 1.

I was due to attend the Scottish SkillPlumb competition in 2020 to compete in the lead work competition, but unfortunately like most events during the pandemic, it was cancelled. This also included missing out on the Incorporation of

Hammermen award ceremony that was to be held later in 2020.

It also affected my last year of college. My classmates and I had four weeks left of our college rota, which we continued online via Microsoft Teams with our lecturers. The whole team in the plumbing and gas department at Glasgow Clyde College, Cardonald Campus, were exceptional. I could not ask for a better group of lecturers and they helped us every step of the way.

During the three years you're at college, you meet some exceptional people – both lecturers and students. Everyone in your class comes from different working environments, whether it is on a construction site, commercial industry, bathroom fitter or a bit of everything. You learn so much from each other. If you have an issue, your classmates may be able to help you out at work or for college. These scenarios build trust within each other and people you can rely on.

The estate staff are brilliant and help in any way they can with other companies and workforces dotted around the estate, everyone helps where they can.

THURSDAY

I was called out to a school which had developed a leak from the loft space. The school was just under an hour away, so I left sharp to get there for 8am for when it opened.

I got up into the loft space and on a tall platform there was a feed and expansion tank right above where the drip was coming through the ceiling. The

“ They were nice customers to work for and happened to know my family as they had moved from Islay, where my parents come from. The people you meet on the job can sometimes make your day”

tank had been leaking from the overflow tank connection.

The first step was to see why the tank was overflowing. The ball valve was off but had over filled so I isolated the cold supply and removed the ball valve, stripped the parts and replaced the washer, then re-adjusted the arm so the water will cut off at a lower level. I emptied some of the feed and expansion tank water out via a bucket, to drop the level below the overflow, and re-installed the ball valve. I also stripped the overflow tank connection and replaced washers as they had perished.

My final job of the day was to replace a mixer shower and rail, and install an outside tap for the couple's home. They were nice customers to work for and happened to know my family as they had moved from Islay, where my parents come from. The people you meet on the job can sometimes make your day.

FRIDAY

First job of the day was to go to a bar under renovation to

see what works they needed in the next couple of weeks and report back to my boss. The customer wanted a new glass cleaner/dishwasher installed, and a coffee machine at the end of the bar. Not much work will be required there as the previous owner must have had the same layout.

Later, I headed to a void house where there was a damaged sink that had to be removed and the pipework had to be stripped back and re-designed straight through the wall for a new unit to be put in.

Midday, I headed back to the office to catch up with some paperwork and after lunch I got a call to a house to investigate a leak coming from the back of a kitchen unit. It was a plastic push fit fitting that had cracked and come loose. I isolated the water, removed the old fitting, and re-joined the pipework with a new one.

After that I went back to the office/yard, had a tidy up, sorted out my van, tidied the work store and had a catch-up with my boss. ■

