

Lowering school leaving age to 14 'Unworkable and irresponsible' for technical trades, warns Federation

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[The Plumbing and Heating Federation](#) (SNIPEF) has criticised Scottish Conservative proposals to allow pupils to leave school at 14 for apprenticeships or college places, calling the idea “reckless, unworkable and deeply irresponsible” for industries that rely on safety-critical apprenticeships.

Fiona Hodgson, Chief Executive of the Plumbing and Heating Federation (SNIPEF), said: “Allowing children to leave school at 14 and enter apprenticeships is not just unrealistic, it’s irresponsible. Our industry operates under strict safety regulations, and we cannot fathom how a child of that age could legally or safely take on the demands of plumbing and heating work.”

“Even at 16, securing accommodation and appropriate support for apprentices is a significant challenge, particularly in rural and island communities where many must travel to the mainland for college.

“Expecting to extend this to 14-year-olds is not just unrealistic, it’s an unmanageable logistical and safeguarding nightmare, creating serious risks for both employers and young people. The insurance and liability issues alone make this a non-starter.”

The Federation also raised serious concerns about the academic implications of the proposal, questioning whether pupils would have the necessary foundational skills before leaving school.

“Our profession requires a solid grounding in maths, science and literacy; these are non-negotiable for everything from heat loss calculations to system design,” Hodgson continued.

“If pupils leave school at 14, they risk missing out on the critical skills needed to complete qualifications, progress in their careers, or even change direction if they realise a trade isn’t for them.”

Rather than pushing younger children out of school prematurely, the Federation called for greater investment in apprenticeships and further education pathways for those of genuine working age.

“Apprenticeships should be an exciting, skilled career choice, not a last resort for children forced out of mainstream education before they’ve even had the chance to explore their talents,” Hodgson added.

“Instead of throwing 14-year-olds into a system riddled with risks, we should be focusing on helping those of real working age access the training and opportunities they need to build successful futures.”