

Queensberry Initiative Year End Report, August 2012

During the first three months of our project, Rural Skills started well with a large and very mixed cohort. We worked hard to ensure that these groups received a good mix of practical activities under difficult circumstances, as we lost some of our 'faithful' farmers due to changes at the Estate. We firmed up our social enterprise plans. Our brand new Hairdressing and Activity Tourism courses also made a good start. The Activity Tourism is the first course at school level to be offered anywhere in Scotland in this subject and the students started making good contacts with local entrepreneurs through the course. We enjoyed participating and presenting at the Holywood Trust conference in September and were pleased that most of the folk there had heard about what we are trying to do and were very supportive.

We are especially proud of the way our business mentoring scheme got started this year. We had 15 mentors volunteering and trained with us and a waiting list of young people eager to be mentored by these business people from the area. The students are very positive – one young man told us that it was the best thing the Initiative had ever done for him! Our five Outdoor Activity Groups made a very good start after their induction morning in early October. Forestry is now totally delivered by the Initiative and WHA school staff and is going extremely well.

When putting together the P7 Outdoor Activity Groups in November, for a January start, we were overwhelmed with pupils wanting to join. We have had to turn away as many as we can effectively work with, which we think is a good sign, although we were sorry we couldn't take more.

During December – February we only lost one day's work to the weather, so we were feeling lucky about outdoor activities after such a mild winter. All vocational courses continued to progress well and on target for pupils to satisfactorily complete them.

The P7 group started its outdoor work in January and pupil feedback was very positive. They participated in a variety of outdoor challenges and also undertook site visits to various businesses and colleges.

Business Mentors continued their work with young people from years 4,5 and 6. This business to pupil contact was reviewed by the young people involved and it was very positive so far.

The social enterprise made a good start. A shadow board of Wallace Hall Academy pupils, business men and women and teaching staff was formed, had a training session with the Social Enterprise Academy and formed research groups to take the project forward. Progress towards negotiating a site for the community orchard was made.

We continued to expand our partnership contacts with local businesses and continued our planning for our biannual Rural Opportunities Day to be held on 29 June. The contacts we made expanded our work placement scheme into new areas such as green technology and international placements. Two of our staff attended an Education Scotland sponsored study visit to Denmark in February.

They travelled with 18 other educationalists from around Scotland and were pleased to be invited to share details about their programme, which seemed to be of great interest to everyone on the visit. We progressed our plans to start offering a motor mechanics course along with a beauty course next academic year, using community partners.

During March-May, the Queensberry Initiative finished supporting the vocational courses with which it is connected – and almost all pupils gained passes in their courses and units. These include the Introduction to hair and beauty course, run partly in school and in part in a local salon, Rural Skills Intermediate 1 and 2 (agriculture) and Intermediate 2 (forestry), as well as Managing Environmental Resources, Construction Skills and Activity Tourism. Our pilot of that course for S6 students finished with a trip to the Solway planned by the students to interview Carol-Ann about her very successful F5 Karting business and then to experience the sport on the beach.

Our targeted groups have completed their final outdoor activity sessions and had their final individual interviews. The P7 group was particularly good fun this year and it was great to see some of the more withdrawn and nervous young people coming out of their shells, making new friends and taking appropriate risks. Highlights of the targeted group work across the board are when young people take responsibility and become more relaxed in a less structured situation. Archery is

a new activity we have added into our portfolio for pupils to try, using team work and individual challenge to channel ambition towards achievable targets. It's great to see pupils mixing freely and resolving conflicts using some of their newly developed confidence and self-esteem.

We have continued to support subject classes from both the primary schools and Wallace Hall Academy to get their pupils out of doors and into active learning situations. Biology classes have worked with brewers and farmers, MER classes have worked with the Salmon Fishery Board to release fry into Cample Water, etc.

The Scottish Farmer magazine visited the Initiative in April. They were particularly interested in the agriculture courses which the project facilitates but they also spoke to students about the impact of working with local businesses and community groups. We await a publication date for that article. Plans are now well under way for offering a Motor Vehicle Mechanics introductory course in the community, working in partnership with a local haulier and Dumfries and Galloway College. This course is over-subscribed and looks to be very popular. Again, having our pupils using business premises helps, we are sure, to reduce vandalism in the community.

During this quarter, the BBC came to film a Rural Skills class for their pupil-led news event. We also received an invitation from the Scottish Learning Festival to present a seminar at the annual major education convention in Glasgow in September and we are very excited about planning how we can take several students with us to simulate an outdoor lesson.

Finally, our pupil and business partnership – led social enterprise progressed well.

During June – August, the project completed the academic year's work with the targeted groups and began planning its new courses for starting after the summer. We completed our participation in Activities Week events by supporting new groups of young people into the Outdoor Classroom challenges.

Preparation for our second biennial Rural Opportunities Day occupied much of our time in June. In the end, the event went ahead on the wettest day of the summer to that point and much of our outdoor exhibitors had to put up with really atrocious conditions. However, the gazebos and marquees provided some protection and pupils and exhibitors remained very positive. Feedback was excellent from both and from teaching staff. On the day, over 190 participants from businesses and third sector groups, as well as colleges and other training providers, attended and worked with 830 children and young people. Participation was very positive and pupil and exhibitor written evaluations were very enthusiastic.

We were also pleased to send pupils to man a stand at the Royal Highland Show on the Friday of the event, as part of the Dumfries and Galloway area.

Our Social Enterprise Group (now named whapples) took possession of its orchard site, wrote its business plan and made good progress with its preparations for autumn planting.

The Initiative led a day of outdoor challenges for all our new P7s during their Induction Days at the end of the month, braving inclement weather again and helping these pupils to increase their resilience!

Our AGM was held at the beginning of July and pupil members of the Board were re-confirmed for 2012-13.

Plans are well ahead for the new academic year which will commence at the end of August. Just before pupils return to classes, about 20 of them will be assisting the QI team at the Galloway Country Fair.