



## **Queensberry Initiative: Enterprise and Employability, DG 188**

**2011-13**

### **Background to the Project**

Queensberry Initiative: Enterprise and Employability grew out of the pilot years of the Queensberry Initiative, 2009-11. Our first two years had allowed us to learn about how best to achieve our core goals. We had experimented with various approaches and techniques, learnt a lot about partnership working and built up trust with our volunteers and community connections as well as created a body of work which allowed us to plan for our second phase as a more focused and effective programme.

Our original strategic group has stayed on board with the project and the board as originally constituted are still with us. They consist of local business folk, a regional councillor the head teacher of one of the schools with whom we work and the Queensberry Estate manager. They have been key in helping us to keep our community focus and to listen to the various stakeholders of our project. Our project continues to work with the seven schools of Mid-Nithsdale. We also energetically share good practice with the schools of Dumfries and Galloway, with a wide variety of third sector organisations, with outdoor learning professionals from all over Scotland and also from further afield in the European Union, and we have effective working partnerships with over 100 local businesses and organisations. We work with many volunteers and their input was crucial in helping us shape the nature of our second phase project.

Our aims and objectives were to undertake to:

- Working with the community and businesses to support and challenge all the children and young people of Mid-Nithsdale
- Ensuring that all students are ready for work
- Providing vocational opportunities for a broad range of students
- Making students more aware of rural opportunities
- Giving all students full access to our vast 'outdoor classroom'
- Building an entrepreneurial attitude and skill base in the children and young people in our area
- Developing a community-based social enterprise

- Sharing our project's good practice with others to promote the benefits of outdoor learning and an entrepreneurial approach to skill development.

Our feedback from children, young people, parents, teachers, schools and partners tell us that we have come a long way towards achieving these goals.

We assembled our funding package with Dumfries and Galloway LEADER's support. We were very pleased that LEADER was willing to consider supporting us to develop our work beyond our pilot years. With their advice and support, we approached the Holywood Trust who were also willing to extend their grant support. The Holywood Trust gave us match funding of £10,000. We used monies remaining from our original seed funding from Dumfries and Galloway Council Determined to Succeed Fund as well as the amount remaining from our original Holywood Trust grant (amounting to £20,000). We also included In Kind support from the Queensberry Estate (£24,000) and other volunteers (£9,333) to help us match fund our LEADER grant. The Wallace Hall Academy Fundraising Account contributed £3,333.50 to our match funding search. LEADER agreed to pay 50% of our projected costs for 2011-13, up to £66,666.50. At the end of our financial year in September 2013, we have claimed £64,598.99, 50% of our total spend for these two years.

### **The Project Experience**

Our project, in this phase of Enterprise and Employability, has run from 9 September 2011 to 8 September 2013. Our base has been at Wallace Hall Academy, which has provided us with office space, access to land-line telephones, photocopying facilities and direct access to the teachers and students at Wallace Hall. We work with the six other schools in the area as well as the nurseries, playgroups and other organisations which work with young people.

Our key activities have included encouraging teachers to work with us to get their classes hands on in the outdoors. We have seen this encourage commitment to education, sparking positivity and increasing the capacity of the children and young people to believe in their own abilities. We have encouraged this for many reasons; one of the key reasons has been to build the self-confidence, resilience and self-belief of the pupils as well as giving them opportunities to take responsibility and to work as a team in activities. This has also combined with their feeling more a part of their communities and increasing their understanding of their own culture and neighbourhood.

We have also supported the development of various vocational courses, including piloting several for the first time in Scotland. We have taken these courses into the community, using premises and volunteers and

enabling our young people to have real-life experiences and to develop their career ideas more clearly.

Our career mentors (previously called business mentors) are a part of the project which we have continued to develop. It has become more focused on the final year students and our mentors have become very willing to assist these young people in finding placements as well as offering advice about routes to their possible career pathways. Over the two years over 60 young people have been mentored by our volunteers.

Tailored work placements are a key part of our work. We spend a lot of time working with volunteer businesses and other providers as well as interviewing students at length, giving a bespoke service because we believe that this is the key way to increase the life chances of young people as they prepare to leave secondary education.

Our targeted groups, which operate from P7 through to S4, are designed to give children/young people who need a bit of additional help to make good transitions that extra helping hand. Using outdoor activities to build resilience, team challenges to encourage them to develop good working skills and to develop confidence with adults in a more informal environment, we aim to show the young people with whom we work that they can be successful and that they should be aiming high.

We developed and supported **whapples**, a social enterprise based at Wallace Hall Academy. We have taken the enterprise through the preliminary stages of its development over the past two years. It is now a constituted group with a board made up ten young people from age 11 to 18 and six adult members, three from the business community and three from the school. Queensberry Initiative continue to advise and support but **whapples** now stands on its own feet. We are very proud of their orchard and hope that their enterprise will become profitable when the fruit starts to be picked. It is certainly providing real life enterprise experiences for a wide group of young people both within the secondary school and also within the wider community.

We have been, we think, justifiably proud of our project and have been keen to share our practice as widely as we can. We attend local and national conferences and held a mini-conference our own in June 2013. Throughout the two years of the project, we have continued to meet regularly with colleagues from various organisations, regions, countries, etc., to try to learn from their experiences to continue to improve our work, as well as giving us the chance to share our experiences with them.

Our marketing has included annual seminars at the Scottish Learning Festival, our own mini-conference, a revamped website and a Facebook page, as well as participation in Learning Scotland working groups and study visits. We contribute regular features to the Wallace Hall Academy

newsletter and to the local press. We have also supported whapples in developing its own website and it is about to produce its own newsletter.

In terms of who benefitted from our project, we believe that we have impacted positively on all the children and young people with whom we have worked, over 1200 during the two years. We have certainly seen the positive destinations of young people leaving school from Wallace Hall Academy improve dramatically. We also think that the community at large has benefitted by the connections which have been built, due to our work with a large number of community volunteers.

Our final budget was slightly less than we expected. This was in part due to difficulty of getting our volunteers to claim travel expenses. Another factor in our underspend was that our staff have become more skilled in delivering all aspects of the project's work and so there has been less need to buy in outside providers for activities. We know that in the future transport costs will once again be an issue for us, but during these two years our expenses have been able to be kept within the agreed limits, with some requests for viring from parts of the budget to others being given a good reception by LEADER.

We have learnt lots of lessons during the course of the project. There have been crucial lessons about the nature of our work. We have realised that outdoor, experiential learning does not come easily to many teachers and that we need to work on getting curriculum planning processes to incorporate the possibilities which we offer. We have also had to learn about the Curriculum for Excellence and how our work best fits into it, thus being able to guide teachers through the Experiences and Outcomes which projects like ours are able to transform into real learning events. We have also learnt that planning time needs to be carefully built into the week; as we have become more successful and busier, it has been difficult to ensure that we are giving ourselves time to plan as we would like. We have also learnt that seeking financial support always takes longer than we would hope – but that there is a lot of enthusiasm for our type of work in the community and the business world.

Our project will be continuing for the next two years at least, continuing its present structure. It is not being mainstreamed or transferred. We will continue to both work locally but continue to have national impact we hope. We have sufficient funding in place for nearly three years (or two years with retaining match funding for a further two years.) We anticipate that we will need to seek further funding during 2014-15. We believe that this will be forthcoming from the sort of businesses and organisations which came forward in our funding drive in the spring of 2013. We do believe that we are delivering an important service and that the recognition of that has become more widespread amongst our partners, the community at large, educationalists and the world of business.

Our key LEADER issue was to promote a learning and skilful region. We believe that our promotion and development of employability and enterprise skills in the children and young people with whom we work has helped to promote our area and Dumfries and Galloway as a whole as a learning and skilful region. We have expanded vocational qualifications on offer in Nithsdale and we have also ensured that more of the young people in our area are engaged in education and making successful transitions.