

Volunteers at the HLF-supported Canal College

The development funding enables the Trust, which is Scotland's only national waterways charity, to plan for a second Canal College programme, which will open in 2017 if the full £1.4million in funding can be secured.

Canal College, the Trust's largest project to date, ran between between 2013 and 2015. The heritage skills and employability training course helped 162 young people facing significant barriers in their lives, with 72% moving into work, further education or training after the course. The college is offered free-of-charge to all participants.

With Canal College 2, the charity aims to reach over twice as many unemployed people (360 participants) in three ways:

- by running the college over three years instead of two
- to offer the 12-week course on the Forth and Clyde Canal in West Dunbartonshire and on the Caledonian Canal in Inverness as well as the original location in Falkirk
- to expand the age criteria from 16-25 to 16-30 years of age

Learning through practical projects in the unique outdoors environment of Scotland's canals, 360 volunteer participants will gain new, transferable skills, accredited heritage and volunteering certificates and qualifications and the vital confidence they need to create a brighter future for themselves.

The importance of mentors

The support and involvement of volunteer mentors has proven to be integral to the success of Canal College.

During the first Canal College, 24 volunteer mentors contributed their skills and life learning to help participants learn about the built, cultural and natural heritage of the canals, while improving their own confidence and employability prospects.

By involving volunteer mentors, individuals and partners across the local waterside communities again, it is hoped that Canal College 2 will engage a total of 860 people across the Lowland and Highland locations.

The support from HLF and Scottish Canals will enable Scottish Waterways Trust to develop the training programme and submit a detailed second-round application to HLF. If successful, the Trust will then seek further match funding and partners to deliver the programme.

It is hoped that Canal College 2 will open in summer 2017 and run until 2020.

Karen Moore, Scottish Waterways Trust Chief Executive, said: "The outstanding success of the first Canal College, along with our other established youth employability programme Green Action, has inspired our bold and ambitious plans to grow Canal College exponentially, expanding across the Lowlands and into the Highlands.

“If we secure funding for Canal College 2, we will be able to help twice as many young unemployed adults who have faced serious barriers in their life, whether learning or behavioural difficulties or chaotic home lives.

“Growing the scope of Canal College so significantly also means we will contribute even more to sustaining and caring for the amazing historic waterways and the wildlife they are home to. Through our first Canal College, volunteers contributed a staggering 19,568 hours of time working on practical projects. Through Canal College 2, we will double that impact across both the Lowland and Highland canals.”

Lucy Casot, Head of HLF Scotland, added: “As partners in the original Canal College project, we have seen just how big a difference this initiative has made to so many people’s lives. The canals have provided powerful and memorable experiences for young people, opening their eyes to the natural heritage and to their own potential.

"We are delighted that thanks to players of the National Lottery, we are able to support the next step in the development of this important project."

Steve Dunlop, Chief Executive of Scottish Canals, said: “Scottish Canals is exceptionally proud to support Canal College. The first phase of the project was a resounding success and saw each of its graduates learn vital skills while helping to care for the incredible environments of the nation’s canals.

“Our staff, who helped train the students in everything from stonemasonry to archaeological surveying, were incredibly impressed by their dedication, commitment and willingness to learn. Indeed, some of the graduates have since moved into full-time roles within Scottish Canals.

“Expanding the scope of Canal College will build on that success, helping to safeguard the rich, 200-year-old heritage of the nation’s canals and giving much-needed new opportunities, skills and confidence to even more of Scotland’s young people. We look forward to supporting the Scottish Waterways Trust throughout the funding application process and beyond.”

Angus Harkness, a Canal College participant and now an apprentice stonemason with Scottish Canals, concluded: “I made the decision to move to Edinburgh when I heard about Canal College. It was a brilliant decision. Learning about the history and heritage of the waterways was all new to me but I really enjoyed it. There was a lot of practical work too, which I loved. It’s not every day you get to help repair a 200-year-old weir! Without Canal College and the following placement with Scottish Canals, I don’t know where I’d be or what I’d be doing. I’m incredibly thankful to everyone who’s helped me get to where I am today.”

Notes to editors

Scottish Waterways Trust creates brighter futures for people, wildlife and communities along Scotland's canals. By connecting people with the heritage, wildlife and green open spaces of the Scottish canals, Scottish Waterways Trust inspires people to get active, improve their health and mental wellbeing, employment prospects and community life.

Find out more on the Scottish Waterways Trust website.

Further information

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