Participants on the first ever canal college celebrate at The Falkirk Wheel

Scottish Waterways Trust has been awarded a grant of up to £1.125million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) towards Canal College, a major skills and employability programme centred on three of the nation's historic canals, it was announced today.

Created by Scotland's only national waterways charity, Scottish Waterways Trust, and developed in partnership with Scottish Canals, Archaeology Scotland and Developing Nation, canal college is a unique outdoor employability programme designed to help address youth unemployment by teaching practical heritage and environment skills to disadvantaged 16-30 year olds.

The charity aims to reach twice as many young people (360 participants) as the first, successful canal college programme by extending the age criteria and the number of locations where it will be offered to Falkirk, Inverness and West Dunbartonshire.

Between 2013 and 2015 canal college helped 162 young people facing significant barriers in their lives with 72% moving into work, further education, training or volunteering on completion.

Scottish Waterways Trust is now actively seeking further match funding to deliver the £1.4m programme. Once the additional funding is in place, it is hoped that canal college will open in early 2017 and run until 2020.

Learning through practical projects in the unique outdoor environment of Scotland's canals, volunteers will be offered the opportunity to receive first-hand experience of working on some of the nation's most valuable heritage assets, gaining a vibrant range of new and transferable skills.

Members of the wider community will also be invited to become volunteer mentors on the 14 week programmes, contributing their own skills and life learning to help participants learn about the built, cultural and natural heritage of the canals, whilst improving their own confidence and employability prospects.

Karen Moore, Chief Executive, Scottish Waterways Trust, said: "We are delighted to receive this incredible support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Following the outstanding success of the original canal college, we were inspired to significantly grow the scale and scope of the project to reach twice as many young unemployed adults who have faced significant barriers in their life, whether that be mental health problems or challenging home lives.

"It is exciting to think that canal college will be able to help even more disadvantaged young people gain the vital skills and confidence they need to get on the path to work in the Lowlands and the Highlands."

Lucy Casot, Head of the HLF Scotland, added: "Our heritage offers a rich resource for skills and education so HLF is delighted to support canal college where it is being used in such an innovative way. Thanks to players of the National Lottery, the canals will provide powerful and memorable experiences for young people, making learning fun and opening their eyes to the heritage which surrounds them. We know from the success of the last project that the newly-learned skills will not only make a positive difference to their own lives but will play an important part in looking after Scotland's canal network."

Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Employability and Training, added: "The Scottish Government recognises the positive contribution that canal college makes to remove the barriers to employment that young people can face. I would like to congratulate Scottish Waterways Trust on the award of this grant, and thank the Heritage Lottery Fund for their continued work to maintain, support and utilise our natural and historical heritage to engage and support people into employment and training."

Steve Dunlop, Chief Executive of Scottish Canals, added: "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 impressed by their dedication, commitment and willingness to learn and 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, 250-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 Scottish Waterways Trust and the canal college students throughout the project and beyond."

Abby, former canal college participant, now studying in the creative industries, concluded: "One of the main reasons I started canal college was my social anxiety, I would never talk to anyone. I wouldn't even make eye contact, and now I'm doing that and I feel as if I've taken leaps and bounds. It's been very helpful. I've built up so much confidence."

For more information about canal college visit the Scottish Waterways Trust website.

Notes to editors

Scottish Waterways Trust (SWT)

SWT 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, SWT inspires people to get active, improve their health and mental well-being, employment prospects and community life.

Find out more on the Scottish Waterways Trust website.

Scottish Canals

Scottish Canals is responsible to the Scottish Government for the management and development of the Union, Monkland, Forth and Clyde, Crinan and Caledonian Canals. As well as the waterways themselves, Scottish Canals care for 251 bridges, 212 buildings, 256 locks, The Falkirk Wheel, The Kelpies and 19 water supply reservoirs in locations across Scotland.

The reservoirs cover an area equivalent to 7,494 football pitches and supply the canals with the 332 million litres of water which flow through them each day. The Forth & Clyde, Union and Monkland canals in the Lowlands, the Crinan Canal in Argyll and the Caledonian Canal in the Highlands together extend over 137 miles from coast to coast, across country and into the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness.

Built 200 years ago to fire the Industrial Revolution, today the canals contribute to the Scottish Government agenda of developing a Greener; Healthier; Smarter; Safer and Stronger; and Wealthier and Fairer Scotland by acting as a catalyst for sustainable economic development, regeneration and tourism; contributing to education, biodiversity, heritage and promoting active living and healthier lifestyles. The Forth & Clyde, Union, Monkland, Caledonian and Crinan canals are recognised as Scheduled Monuments and attract 22m visits per year.
For more information, visit the Scottish Canals website or follow @ScottishCanals on Twitter.

Further information

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