

## Duke draws on Will power to nurture young techpreneurs

Like the rapper Will.i.am, Prince Andrew is trying to give pupils the business bug, writes Sian Griffiths



The singer Will.i.am's American project inspired Prince Andrew (The Sydney Morning Herald)

On stage they look an odd couple — the straight-backed Prince Andrew and the American pop star Will.i.am with his over-sized specs and constant fidgeting. It emerges, however, that the pair have struck up an unlikely friendship.

Last week the prince said he had been inspired to back a scheme to encourage up to 1m British children to set up online businesses after visiting a similar project created by the singer in California.

The scheme, piloted with hundreds of children over recent months, will be rolled out nationwide. The Duke of York hopes that it will create a British Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg — “the next new tech entrepreneurs,” he said.

The British project was born after Andrew visited an after-school club created by Will.i.am in the singer's old “hood” in Los Angeles. He even invited some of the 200 youngsters there to visit Buckingham Palace.

“It is fascinating to see what Will.i.am has achieved at Boyle Heights,” he said. “An after-school club built around hands-on learning, including computer graphics and robotics — the kind of thing that both fires young people's imagination and has a practical application.

“The support he gives them has led to the grades of those young people — many of them from tough backgrounds — improving markedly.”

He added: “I thought, ‘If this works in east LA, there’s no reason why it shouldn’t work in east London or other parts of the UK.’ ”

Will.i.am’s project is called the i.am College Track After-School Tutoring Centre, which Andrew visited with his ex-wife, Sarah Ferguson.

The duke, meanwhile, named his project iDEA after Sir Jonathan Ive, Apple’s chief designer, said there was no bar on the royal scheme using the technology giant’s “i” prefix.

On Tuesday Andrew will announce who in his project’s pilot has won thousands of pounds to help them turn their ideas into a business. The finalists include Gtracks, an app created by a group of teenage schoolchildren in Northern Ireland. Their teacher, Robert Johnston, said smartphones displaying the app could be attached to mountain bikes to deliver a video and audio guide to cycle trails.

“There’s a lot of interest in developing it for other leisure and tourist sites,” he said. “When the children went to the palace, the duke asked them to make an app for Balmoral, a guide to walking around inside.”

Risha Jindal, 17, a pupil at Watford Grammar School for Girls, has designed an app for students struggling to cook meals away from home.

“If you tap in three ingredients, it will give you a choice of five recipes,” she says.

Another finalist is a start-up business called Digital Acropolis, which designs 3D online art galleries for artists to display their work.

Launched in partnership with the Nominet Trust, and modelled on Andrew’s father’s Duke of Edinburgh awards, iDEA offers badges for acquiring entrepreneurial and digital skills. All the finalists received £5,000 to develop their projects and this week’s winners will receive a grant of up to £15,000 to take their business ideas further.

The prince said he wanted to hear from businesses to take the project forward.

“We’re now looking for allies in bringing about a cultural change: to encourage a more entrepreneurial mentality among our young people, harnessing new technology and ideas as a key part of that,” he said.

He thinks this generation of youngsters is more likely to have to make a living from setting up their own businesses than previous generations.

“In part that’s the inevitable consequence of technological advance,” he added. “As traditional industries and businesses become more efficient, they’ll need fewer employees, which in turn means we need to look to entrepreneurs to be the growth and job creators of the future.”

“The digital world knows no boundaries and is seen as plain sexy by the young.”

In an interview earlier this year the duke said he had never tried to set up an online business. But he added that both his daughters had an entrepreneurial streak. Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie, he said, were “full of ideas — they get that from their mother”.

He also said that he hoped the scheme would teach children confidence and that it was acceptable to fail.

Andrew said the thing he had “learnt most” as a boy at Gordonstoun, the tough Scottish boarding school, was that “failure was not something to be afraid of or something to feel guilty about, because so much of life is about understanding failure and the lessons to be learnt from failure”.