

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item	12
Report No	PED 14/14

12 February 2014

HIGHLAND SCIENCE ACADEMY

Report by Director of Planning and Development

Summary

This report outlines proposals for the establishment of a Highland Science Academy. This facility will promote careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics across the Highlands. The Academy aims to encourage young people living in the area to consider careers in technology based industries being developed in the region.

This project is supportive of the Council's Programme, "Working Together for the Highlands" in relation to the prioritisation and support of the creation of quality jobs in the Highlands. This is further underlined in its commitment to ensuring the best possible quality of life for children and young people in the Highlands, where every young person in the area has access to the best education and training system we can deliver.

1. Background

1.1 Science is becoming an increasingly essential aspect of everyday life, so its significance as a subject for study also becomes progressively more important. In the Highlands the study of science has been disadvantaged by the lack of a high quality higher education facility. The creation of UHI presents the region with a perfect opportunity to correct this imbalance. The Highland Science Academy has the potential to act as a local science hub, assisting with technological support for schools and their pupils. Furthermore, it can act as a catalyst, encouraging the take up of the science subjects being delivered as part of the UHI, as well as demonstrating the vast array of potential employment opportunities throughout the Highlands, that could arise from a better, practical understanding of science. A location for the practical promotion of the science and technological aspects of the Science Academy has been identified at the Inverness Campus as part of a proposed HIE/UHI building. Other options will be explored for additional aspects of the project.

2 Current Situation

2.1 The development of the Highland Science Academy is at an early stage, with potential demand, from both primary and secondary schools, currently being assessed. Industry support has also been gauged, and external support has

now been contracted to further develop the concept. This study will be in two parts, with the initial study examining existing models as well as consulting with a variety of public and private sector bodies. Understanding the needs of industry will be crucial if the project is to achieve its goal of an attractive science academy that fully meets the demands of the education system and of industry, both in the local area but also further afield. It will also examine potential delivery models such as a joint venture, a social enterprise, or an independent company.

- 2.2 Data on the current level of take up of science subjects will be examined as part of the second phase of the study, as well as comparisons made with take up in the rest of Scotland. Finally, another element of the study will be to undertake an examination of how best to plan the Highlands and Islands wide reach of the facility. This will look at the potential for mobile facilities, as well as at delivery of services utilising ICT/superfast broadband infrastructure.
- 2.3 The estimated cost of both phases of the work is £30k. The Council has been asked for a contribution of £5k towards the first phase of the study. Other anticipated funders are UHI and HIE as well as the private sector. A steering group for the study includes the Director of Planning & Development and Jeff Howarth, Vice-Principal for Enterprise at UHI.
- 2.4 Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is also very interested in partnerships with the project because of the links between education, science and the world of work. This link has been strengthened with the development of a goal for the Academy that aims at the creation of “an engaging and exciting environment that allows the young people of the Highlands to experience and to be influenced by a range of career opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) while simultaneously architecting work based career pathways that translate into employment”. Specific outcomes arising from this include:
 - advanced apprentices in key sectors
 - work based pre-apprenticeship programmes in schools
 - more young people entering STEM careers
 - young people better informed about the world of work
 - development of a Regional “Career World” Hub within the Science Academy
 - network of Career World Hubs across the region
 - better engagement of industry
 - integrated delivery

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 An important element in the development of the Highland Science Academy will be to ensure that it operates as a public private partnership. There is a widespread acknowledgement that there will be significant jobs growth over the next few years in the oil, gas, renewable, engineering and life science sectors throughout the Highlands. There is a shortage of people locally who have the skills or educational background to take advantage of these

opportunities. The Highland Science Academy aims to provide the link for young people in the area to benefit from these higher paid, quality job opportunities. Representatives from a wide range of businesses and public sector organisations have already met under the chairmanship of the Council Leader, Cllr Drew Hendry, and have agreed to take the development forward.

4. Implications

- 4.1 Financial: The £5,000 requested to co-fund this study can be met from the Planning and Development Service, Economic Initiatives Budget. The potential to utilise EU Structural Funding for this venture is also being considered, and the Council has also looked at the potential for a capital contribution towards the match funding for this bid in the light of the significant educational and economic development opportunities that such a facility presents to the area.
- 4.2 There are no equalities, legal, risk or climate change/carbon clever implications directly arising from this Report.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 The Committee is recommended to support the development of the Highland Science Academy and the public-private partnership approach detailed in this report.

Designation: Director of Planning & Development

Date: 28 January 2014

Author: Kenny Macinnes