

West Highland Business Statement of Support

Fort William STEM Centre

The West Highland Chamber Manifesto identifies improved access to STEM skills and technical education, including the development of the Fort William STEM Centre, as a critical success factor for the future prosperity of our region.

As businesses operating across the West Highlands, **we strongly support this ambition and believe there is now an urgent need to turn it into reality.**

The case for a STEM Centre in Fort William has been developed and supported by regional partners since 2015. Since then, the West Highland economic landscape has changed substantially, with unprecedented opportunities arising from major investment in renewable energy, electricity transmission, infrastructure, construction, advanced manufacturing, aquaculture and food production, and marine industries.

After more than a decade of developing the case, there is now a compelling need to move from ambition to delivery.

Our ability to realise these opportunities is increasingly constrained by the availability of the skilled workforce required. Employers continue to experience significant recruitment challenges, while apprentices, young people and existing employees seeking to upskill or reskill often have to leave the West Highlands to access specialist technical education elsewhere in Scotland or the UK, adding cost and creating a particular barrier for smaller businesses.

The proposed Fort William STEM Centre would help close this gap by expanding local engineering, construction and technical education; enabling businesses to recruit and develop apprentices and upskill or reskill their existing workforce; and helping young people access skilled careers without having to leave the region for training.

We therefore strongly support the Fort William STEM Centre and urge government, public agencies and investment partners to work with the West Highland Chamber, UHI North, West and Hebrides and the regional business community to secure the investment required to make it a reality.

Organisation endorsement

Organisation: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____