



highlands & islands skills  
(CIC)

# Summary Business Plan

August 2025

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**We look forward to working together in the future.**

# 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 **Highlands & Islands Skills CIC (HI-Skills) is guided by a powerful vision: to establish a nationally significant, industry-led Centre of Excellence for Skills, Safety and Innovation which redefines how infrastructure, construction, engineering, and renewable energy skills are developed in Scotland.**
- 1.2 This vision is rooted in a deep understanding of the current gaps in training provision across the Highlands and Islands. It also reflects the lived experience of its founders, each of whom has encountered the limitations of existing systems and committed themselves to building a better, more equitable future for learners, workers, and employers in the region.
- 1.3 HI-Skills seeks to be more than just a training centre, it is designed to be a catalyst for regional transformation. By offering real-world, accredited, year-round training in site-simulated environments, the Centre will enable learners to develop the confidence and competence needed to succeed in specialist infrastructure roles.
- 1.4 From apprenticeships to upskilling and reskilling initiatives, the Centre will serve a broad and diverse population: new entrants to the workforce, experienced professionals transitioning between careers, and transient industry workers who are often overlooked as knowledge-sharing assets.
- 1.5 The first step in delivering the Centre will be to secure an appropriate site in Inverness. Once the site is secured the Centre will be delivered by two distinct phases. The first phase will involve the creation of a fit for purpose modular building which will allow training to commence within 2 months of the site entry. The second phase will be the construction of the flagship building to deliver the full skills and safety training by the Centre and support regional sector innovation.
- 1.6 This Centre will become home to HI-Skills and will be co-branded through a formal partnership of HI-Skills, the University of the Highlands and Islands, and the National Construction College ensuring no confusion in the region about where people need to go for specialist infrastructure education, training or upskilling in the Highlands & Islands.
- 1.7 The Centre will be owned by Highlands & Islands Skills CIC (registered number SC853712). As a Community Interest Company, all profits or surplus will be reinvested to expand opportunities, support disadvantaged learners, and maintain facilities for stakeholder and community benefit. Advancing the upskilling of the Region's construction and renewables workforce which will benefit the Highland community as a whole.





## 2. The Project

- 2.1 **Highlands & Islands Skills CIC (HI-Skills) is responding to this need by establishing a nationally significant Centre of Excellence for skills, safety, and innovation. Based in the Highlands, this Centre is essential to ensure that the region is able to fully realise the opportunities currently presented in the Region such as the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Freeport Status and Renewables opportunities across the Highlands and Islands.**
- 2.2 The Centre will feature both indoor and outdoor training environments, enabling high-quality, year-round delivery across a range of specialisms. Realistic, site-simulated environments will support practical, safe training for specialist roles in the infrastructure sector.
- 2.3 HI-Skills proposes to develop a 40-acre facility designed for flexibility and long-term use. This will allow for live site environments that support both construction-phase and operation and maintenance (O&M) training.
- In addition to supporting new entrants and apprentices, the Centre will play a critical role in harnessing the expertise of transient workers. These highly skilled, mobile workers move from project to project and represent an untapped asset for regional mentoring and knowledge transfer. By creating structured pathways for these individuals to contribute as mentors we can accelerate the development of the next generation.
- 2.4 HI-Skills and The Centre have a commitment to outcomes. **No learner should leave the Centre without a clear pathway into meaningful employment.** Upon completion, learners are matched with live job opportunities sourced through our recruitment partner. These include temporary contracts, permanent roles, and apprenticeships across the Highlands and Islands and beyond. Additional support such as CV preparation, interview coaching, and compliance readiness (e.g. face-fit testing) will be provided to ensure learners are fully prepared for the workplace.



## 3. Funding Requirements

- 3.1 The first step in project is to secure the site on which the Centre will be built.**
- 3.2 The preferred location for the Centre is the land at Torvean Quarry (UPRN 130112520).
- 3.3 The reason the location is the perfect for the Centre is because the proposed location presents an exceptional opportunity for development, leveraging a currently vacant and derelict ex-quarry site. It is ideally located for access on foot, by bus or by car for learners of all types plus Inverness is centrally located for those coming from the wider highlands and islands or beyond by road, rail or air travel. Torvean Quarry's expansive footprint offers ample space for these large-scale training operations, while the presence of high boundary sides ensures natural privacy and containment, critical for safety and safeguarding. Additionally, the availability of ideal on-site materials reduces logistical costs and supports sustainable construction practices. This unique combination of features makes the site not only practical but strategically advantageous for establishing a purpose-built centre of excellence.
- 3.4 Working with ThreeSixty Architecture indicative total capital costs are expected to be around £25.5million for the building of the Centre and assumes the land will be made available to HI-Skills by Highland Council as part of a collaborative effort to maximise the benefit of the regions economic opportunities. Alternatively a Community Asset Transfer is also an option as HI-Skills CIC meets all the criteria to be a transferable body under the Community Empowerment Act 2015.
- 3.5 The Centre of Excellence will be delivered through a carefully phased development approach that ensures early delivery of training interventions while enabling future scalability. Our premises strategy is guided by the practical requirements of specialist skills delivery, long-term sustainability, and strong architectural and environmental design principles.
- 3.5 The Centre will be developed on a single site, incorporating both Phase 1 and Phase 2. This co-location allows us to fast-track training delivery while master planning the entire Centre of Excellence. The project will be designed by ThreeSixty Architects, working closely with the project team and the UK's most experienced specialist training consultants to ensure the facilities meet operational needs and reflect wider community values.
- 3.7 Phase 1 will deliver a modular training facility and associated infrastructure to enable early skills delivery aligned with live construction projects and regional demand. HI-Skills is working with ELA Container, a global leader in modular building solutions, to provide a fit-for-purpose training environment that can be rapidly deployed. This phase will include external workshop areas, classrooms, and practical training zones, allowing training delivery to begin well before the permanent facility is complete.

- 3.7.1 The modular nature of the building not only enables speed of deployment but also provides future adaptability. Once Phase 2 is constructed, this Phase 1 facility can be dismantled and redeployed in smaller parts to other regions within our defined community as demand grows, directly supporting HI-Skills' hub-and-spoke model for regional delivery.
- 3.7.2 This early-stage model allows HI-Skills to demonstrate market demand, refine operations, and validate core aspects of the Centre's long-term vision through live delivery. It offers immediate value to funders, partners, and employers, while ensuring that insights from early delivery are embedded into the permanent facility.  
**The indicative capital costs for phase 1 are £6.7million**
- 3.7.3 From this phase **the centre will train all of Scotland's Plant, Crane, Groundworks, Roadbuilding, Formwork and Steelfixing apprentices** as well as all north of Scotland scaffolding apprentices through the HI-Skills partnership with CITB and the National Construction College. Removing the current barrier to entry due to course delivery being in Norfolk and as a result doubling apprenticeship starts.
- 3.8 Phase 2 will establish the full-scale, permanent facility, including but not limited to extensive outdoor training grounds, overhead line training, wind turbine and rope access training structures and a dedicated offshore survival training pool. Indoor space will expand to accommodate advanced technical workshops, renewables simulation environments and shared learning areas.
- 3.9 While the current development plan focuses on delivering Phase 1 and Phase 2, these represent key points in a broader, long-term growth strategy. The site and operating model have been purposely designed to accommodate future phases of expansion, which may include additional specialist infrastructure, extended delivery capacity, or new sector partnerships. This scalable model ensures that the Centre remains responsive to evolving industry needs and project pipelines across the region and beyond.
- 3.10 The Hi-Skills founders are currently in ongoing engagement with Highlands & Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Land Fund, the CITB, ECITB, Skills Development Scotland, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Community Benefit Funds and the Private Sector to secure funding for phase 1 and 2.



## 4. Socio-Economic and Strategic Impact

### 4.1 Social and Community Value

- 4.1.1 The proposed training centre will remove long-standing barriers to apprenticeship starts, unlocking opportunity for 300 additional new apprentice starts annually. This not only injects £6.24 million in direct employment value into the regional economy (based on average apprentice salaries of £20,800) but also stimulates local employers to expand capacity and take on new contracts, creating a ripple effect of economic activation that extends far beyond the initial cohort.
- 4.1.2 The Centre will operate as more than a training facility. Outside core hours, selected spaces will be made available for community events, ensuring the site remains an open and valued asset. We will actively partner with schools, veterans' groups, and other local organisations to widen access and create early pathways into training and employment. A structured mentoring programme will also link learners with experienced industry professionals, strengthening employability outcomes and building long-term networks of support. In this way, the Centre becomes a practical civic resource, rooted in the region, serving both its workforce and its wider community.

### 4.2 Skills and Education Impact

- 4.2.1 With capacity to upskill 1,824 candidates annually during phase 1, the centre will enable individuals to climb the career ladder and increase their earning potential. Based on a conservative uplift of £3,500 per person, this translates to £6.384 million in added value each year. While some learners may originate from outside the Highlands, they will be living, working, and spending locally for the duration of their training, typically 3 to 8 years, embedding their economic contribution in the region.
- 4.2.2 In addition, the centre is projected to generate £1,828,622 in salary-based GVA in the first 4 years through its core staffing and operations, further reinforcing its role as a productive regional asset.

### 4.3 Environmental and Place-Based Value

- 4.3.1 The development will repurpose underutilised council-owned land, eliminating the need for ongoing waste removal and remedial works caused by fly-tipping and antisocial behaviour, estimated to cost £50,000 per annum. The site will be transformed into a low-carbon, future-facing facility.

4.3.2 This place-based approach not only improves land use efficiency but also strengthens the Highlands' identity as a leader in sustainable development and vocational learning not to mention being primed to support the needs of the Green Freeport.

## **4.4 Economic and Strategic Value**

- 4.4.1 The centre is a strategic enabler for the region's long-term ambitions. It would directly support the delivery of 250+ planned infrastructure projects valued at over £100bn by pump-priming the workforce required to execute them. Without this intervention, the region is at risk of seeing as few as 50% of these projects completed, due to labour shortages and skills gaps.
- 4.4.2 By investing in this initiative, stakeholders can position themselves as a proactive partner in unlocking national growth, while securing a legacy of inclusive, place-based prosperity. The projected Gross Value Added (GVA) is £4,099,485 million (based on production method) in the first 4 years, and is expected to increase as the centre matures, making this a high-impact, investment in the region's future.



## 5. The Team

### 5.1 Callum Mackintosh Founder & Director

- 5.1.1 Callum is recognised across the Scotland, UK and Europe as an industry leader and is an award-winning advocate for the construction and plant sectors in Scotland. With hands-on experience and policy-level influence, he brings a unique perspective shaped by his journey from aspiring plant operator to business owner and President of the Scottish Plant Owners Association. Callum has spent over a decade actively shaping skills strategy through his work with the CITB via the SPOA and industry working groups. His vision for a Scottish centre of excellence for sector skills has developed into a credible, structured response to the real barriers faced by Scotland's learners, employers and infrastructure developers.

### 5.2 Jack Howell Founder & Director

- 5.2.1 Jack is a highly experienced specialist in offshore construction and renewables recruitment, with an extensive track record supporting major infrastructure and energy projects across the UK and beyond. With a sharp focus on workforce planning and talent development, he has played a key role in aligning recruitment strategies with the evolving demands of the energy sector.
- 5.2.2 His insight into the rapidly shifting skills landscape, particularly within offshore energy, transmission networks, and the broader Net Zero transition has made him a trusted voice on the real, often complex, capabilities required to meet future challenges.
- 5.2.3 What sets Jack apart is his authentic understanding of the structural barriers faced

by new entrants and career changers looking to enter the sector. Drawing on this perspective, he has been instrumental in shaping HI-Skills' approach to fostering accessibility, championing inclusive pathways into the industry, and promoting a culture of lifelong learning. His work continues to influence how the organisation supports individuals not only in finding opportunities but in building sustainable careers within the green economy.

### **5.3 Dylan Spink** **Founder & Director**

- 5.3.1 Dylan brings operational and commercial experience from the engineering construction, offshore and renewables sectors, with a particular focus on project engineering. Like Jack, he began his career on-site and has built up a broad understanding of subcontractor challenges, logistics, and training gaps. His practical knowledge has helped define the layout and real-world readiness of the HI-Skills facility, ensuring it is built for industry by people who understand it from the ground up.

### **5.4 Advisors**

- 5.4.1 The directors have onboarded nationally respected firms with a local presence to support the progress of this project.
- 5.4.2 Thorntons Law LLP, Inverness, for legal and Governance,
- 5.4.3 Saffery LLP, Inverness, for accountancy, finance and business planning,
- 5.4.4 Threesixty Architecture, Inverness, for design and planning



## 6. The Market

### 6.1 The core geographic market is the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, with potential reach across Scotland and the wider UK. There are several drivers influencing this market:

- i. Decarbonisation and Net Zero goals require the rapid expansion of renewable infrastructure and associated workforce.
- ii. Major civil engineering projects are coming online now and in the coming 10–15 years.
- iii. Local authorities and developers are seeking more impactful ways to invest community benefit funding.
- iv. Employers need access to localised training to avoid time and cost burdens of sending staff south.
- v. HI-Skills offers a tailored response: a regional centre designed to serve regional needs, reducing outmigration and equipping people locally for high-value jobs.

### 6.2 Clients

#### 6.2.1 The Centre will serve a range of users including:

- i. **Employers:** Infrastructure developers, civil engineering firms, utilities, housebuilders, renewables.
- ii. **Learners:** School leavers, NEETs, career changers, ex offenders, service leavers, underemployed individuals and those looking to upskill themselves or reskill into infrastructure, engineering, construction or renewables.

- iii. **Public Sector:** Local authorities, enterprise agencies, and government partners investing in skills for regional growth.
- iv. **Education Partners:** FE and HE institutions partnering to deliver long-duration qualifications or lease training space.
- v. **Community Benefit Stakeholders:** Renewable developers, community development groups and social investors focused on long-term legacy.

## 6.3 Competitors

6.3.1 HI-Skills will operate in a national training market with several competitors. However, many of these are allies such as the University of the Highlands and Islands and the CITB's National Construction College and are partnering with us to bring this business case forward. The landscape of infrastructure, engineering and construction training is clustered across Scotland and the UK.

6.3.2 The existing provision is particularly dispersed across the region. While there are some providers located within the Highlands, many specialise in narrow fields and operate with very limited geographical reach, limited trainer provision restricting capacity or poor-quality training grounds and equipment. As a result, there are significant challenges in meeting current or future demand for specialist, site-relevant training within the Highlands and Islands.

6.3.3 Existing providers include:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| i. AWARD Trading – Based in Evanton         | iv. Nigg Skills Academy – Based in Nigg  |
| ii. Donald Munro Training – Based in Ardgay | v. UHI Inverness – Based in Inverness    |
| iii. AM Training – Based in Stornoway       | vi. Aurora Training – Based in Inverness |

## 7. The Financials

**7.1 Detailed projections can be found in Appendix 1 and projected capital expenditure costs can be found in Appendix 2.**

### 7.2 Income

7.2.1 HI-Skills income is projected to grow significantly after the initial setup year (2025/26), with revenue streams including:

**a. Course Delivery**

- i. Core revenue comes from accredited programmes including GWO, IRATA, CPCS, CISRS and other specialist training. These reflect strong market demand and are scalable across sectors.

**b. Asset-Based Income**

- i. Facility and equipment rentals, along with instructor hire, make effective use of existing resources. These streams generate passive income and maximise operational efficiency.

**c. Strategic Partnerships & Rebates**

- i. Contributions from the Health & Safety Centre and developer/community benefit schemes provide ongoing support and reinforce stakeholder engagement.

**d. Initial Funding Support**

- i. Early-stage grants, sponsorships, and stakeholder donations underpin the setup phase, allowing the organisation to launch with confidence and capacity.

7.2.2 This income strategy balances **growth, resilience, and impact**, positioning the organisation to deliver high-quality training while maintaining financial health.

## 7.3 Expenditure

7.3.1 HI-Skills expenditure reflects a thoughtful balance between operational delivery, infrastructure support, and strategic growth, summarised as follows:

**a. Salaries & Wages**

- i. Core staffing costs, including employer NIC and pensions, underpin the delivery of training and the management of day-to-day operations.

**b. Marketing**

- i. Investment in outreach and visibility to attract learners, partners, and funders, supporting growth and brand development.

**c. Professional Services**

**d. Accountancy, legal, and insurance costs ensure compliance, governance, and protection of assets and personnel.**

### 7.3.2 Operational Inputs

- a. Includes consumables, equipment leasing, and cleaning — all essential for maintaining a safe and functional training environment.

### 7.3.3 Site Services

- a. Broadband, telephone, waste disposal, and travel expenses support the smooth running of the centre and its outreach activities.

### 7.3.4 Strategic Costs

- a. Subscriptions, accreditations, and entertaining reflect efforts to maintain industry standards, build relationships, and enhance reputation.



## 8. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Strategic Response to Skills Gap:</b> Addresses a clear, well-documented regional need for infrastructure, construction, and renewables training	<b>Start-up Status:</b> As a new initiative, HI-Skills may face challenges building initial credibility, trust, and partnerships
<b>Unique Regional Offering:</b> The only centre to bring all sector training and accreditations into one place not just in the Highlands but the UK.	<b>Capital Intensive Development:</b> Establishing a 40–50-acre facility with realistic training environments requires significant upfront funding
<b>Real-World Training Environment:</b> Indoor and outdoor simulated environments enable practical, year-round learning	<b>Geographic Remoteness:</b> While strategically placed for Highland needs, it may pose accessibility issues for national learners without strong transport links
<b>Support for Apprentices and Transient Workers:</b> Offers dual benefit of new entrant development and knowledge transfer via experienced transient professionals	<b>Workforce Availability:</b> Recruiting qualified instructors and operational staff in a remote area might be challenging in early phases
Opportunities	Threats
<b>National Centre of Excellence Status:</b> Potential to position HI-Skills as Scotland's flagship hub for infrastructure training with future spokes in the region	<b>Competing Initiatives:</b> Other regions or private providers could step in first with similar offerings, diluting uniqueness
<b>Partnerships with Industry &amp; Government:</b> Strong potential for public-private collaboration, upskilling support, and employer co-funding	<b>Policy or Funding Shifts:</b> Changes in Scottish Government or UK-wide funding priorities may affect long-term financial sustainability
<b>Sustainability &amp; Renewables Focus:</b> Aligns with national net-zero targets and demand for green skills	<b>Economic Volatility:</b> Construction and infrastructure training demand may fluctuate with broader market conditions
<b>Digital &amp; Hybrid Learning Expansion:</b> Ability to innovate with remote elements or blended learning to reach wider audiences	<b>Initial Uptake Risk:</b> Without early buy-in from employers, learners, or funding bodies, the Centre may face slow traction

Appendixes 1 & 2 (Income & Expenditure Projections) redacted as financially sensitive on request of Hi-Skills CIC (the applicant group).