

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education, Culture and Sport
DATE	12th September 2013
DIRECTOR	Gayle Gorman
TITLE OF REPORT	MAKlab
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS_13_061

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report provides Elected Members with an overview of the MAKlab project and advises on the allocation of Creative Scotland and Aberdeen City Council investment in support of the project.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

It is recommended that Committee agree the allocation of £50,000 from the Place Partnership programme jointly funded by Aberdeen City Council and Creative Scotland to support the MAKlab pilot in Aberdeen.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Aberdeen City Council has a Place Partnership investment agreement to the value of £250,000 to support cultural infrastructure development in Aberdeen. The City Council has agreed to support this programme both in kind and through the allocation of additional investment agreed at EC and S on 20th September 2012. £50,000 of this investment will be used to develop the MAKlab project.

4. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

No other implications have been identified at this time.

5. **BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES**

5.1 **Aberdeen's Creative Industries: challenges and issues**

Aberdeen's weakness in being able to retain creative talent in the city was highlighted in 2010 by 'Vibrant Aberdeen', the city's cultural strategy. This assessment has been further supported by the recently completed Aberdeen 'Cultural Asset Mapping Report 2013', and

through public consultation carried out as part of the UK City of Culture bidding process. The city has a particularly low retention of creative graduates, despite having an above national average level of creative industry courses delivered through Aberdeen's further education institutes.

There are a number of factors for this: graduates returning to place of residence: the higher cost of living in Aberdeen: and the primary reason regularly given for not staying in the city is a perceived lack of opportunities (employment, presentation, commissioned and producing) and lack of affordable studio, production or incubation space.

Aberdeen City Council is responding to this challenge through the Place Partnership investment agreement plan with Creative Scotland, presented as an information bulletin at the Culture and Sport Sub Committee on the 1st July 2013. This investment is intended to support strategic initiatives which contribute to addressing long term recognised issues and challenges within the city's cultural sector. One of these initiatives is the 'Production' programme, supporting the development of pilot creative spaces within existing premises and sites. These spaces will facilitate and incubate multi-arts form original production and activity, with a particular focus on supporting individual practitioners and Creative Industry SMEs.

These spaces have the potential to increase engagement in culture, develop partnerships between organisations and groups, link individual practitioners to organisations and, in the longer term, increase the level of artistic production from the city as well as retain and attract talent. Officers have identified two pilots with work ongoing for a third. These pilots are the development of Belmont Cinema's upper floor to become a filmmaker's hub/education facility through new programming and upgrade of facilities, and MAKlab, an open access new technology production space and incubator.

5.2 MAKlab background

MAKLAB is 'a not for profit' facility that offers young people, creative students, entrepreneurs, SMEs, community groups and the public the chance to make (almost) anything using a range of digital fabrication equipment they can be trained to use themselves, or with assistance, at low costs. MAKlab is currently based in Glasgow at the Lighthouse, have been operating for over a year and are run by Skirmishes Limited, which is a registered OSCR charity.

MAKlab is based on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's 'Fablab' model, adapted to ensure that the facilities are accessible to as wide a range of individuals as possible. The lab provides a range of 'digital fabrication' equipment including, laser cutters, 3d routers, 3d printers, vinyl cutters and digital design packages. Essentially this new

technology places advanced manufacturing processes and abilities in anyone's hands: applications range from prototyping design products, producing models for subsea exploration through to supporting artistic, community and educational projects.

MAKlab start up costs have been supported through Creative Scotland, The lab's revenue income is generated through an annual membership scheme (gives a 50% discount on PAYG machine rates & discounts on training). PAYG machine is charged at per a minute rate depending on technology, with users paying depending on the scale of project, staff assistance cost on commissioned and commercial work, material supply and training workshops & events. The lab operates a sliding scale membership scheme based on income, ranging from free to annual corporate memberships which can be up to £500. Furthermore, MAKlab's commitment to open access includes a weekly open day where upon anyone can come in and use some of the more basic equipment and software.

There is currently a proposal to extend MAKlab to other cities around Scotland, these would not be run directly by MAKlab, nor as franchises businesses, but as city specific pilot labs run by appropriate local partners and supported by MAKlab through a service agreement for business support, technical expertise and rent of equipment. Representatives from MAKlab, Lighthouse, Grays School of Art, Scott Sutherland's School of Architecture, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Institute for Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Peacock Visual Arts and Scottish Sculpture workshop met in March 2013 to discuss the possibilities of moving forward with an Aberdeen pilot.

5.3 MAKlab Aberdeen Pilot

After a period of exploration and discussion it was agreed that Aberdeen City Council would support a 6 month pilot MAKlab in Aberdeen through the Place Partnership Investment 'Production' programme. The MAKlab model presents an opportunity to address many of the city's creative industry challenge and issues. This pilot will test the long term viability for a permanent lab, develop new creative support, training, workshops, events and skills development opportunities in the city, explore potential income and sponsorship generation opportunities and provide a new production space which will support creative practitioners and make distinct and sustainable links to other industries in the city.

Peacock Visual Arts (PVA) has been identified as the most suitable local lead delivery partner for the pilot. They have a Digital Co-ordinator who has the necessary expertise and they currently run 'Aberduino', a new technology hack forum and collective who will be the primary source for volunteers to support the pilot.

PVA are a charitable organisation, not for profit and have experience of supporting graduates, delivering training/ internship schemes and working with groups such homeless charities, schools, mental health groups - all of which are potential users of MAKlab.

Other delivery leads were considered but further education institutes were ruled out as the lead partner as all indicated they would want the lab to be based on campus, which in turn caused access and perception issues that the lab is for academic use first and foremost. No independent companies in Aberdeen found to have the necessary experience, expertise or open access ethos to deliver the pilot could be identified. Discussions were held with companies based outside of the city but this was found to unsuitable as they lacked local sector knowledge or were not being run as 'not for profit' organisations.

5.4 The Market

At present much of the technology that can be accessed through MAKlab is either available only to a very select few or is not currently on offer within the city. Digital fabrication technology will open up manufacturing to a wide range of individuals and companies in Aberdeen, providing essential facilities to retain creative talent within the city, reducing the sectors carbon footprint, with reduced reliance on traditional overseas manufacturing, creating a hub network for innovation which will increase opportunities.

The anticipated audience/ users for the pilot MAKlab would include: Artists, Students, School Groups, Community Groups, Offshore Engineering and Exploration, Construction Firms, Industrial Designers, Jewellers, App Designers, Product Designers, Furniture Makers, Architects, Manufacturers, Graphic Designers, Sign Makers, Model makers, Robotics Engineers, Electrical Engineers, Teachers, Lecturers, Students, Hobbyists, Social Enterprises Start-ups, Academics, Manufacture Researchers, Hardware Designers and Programmers.

MAKlab in Glasgow currently run an expanding employment skills programme which includes a MIT approved skills course for fabrication and technology. The pilot is intended to gauge the level of interest, key user base, training and skills packages and to evidence the need, value and requirements for a permanent lab. Aberdeen has been identified as having a great deal of potential, due to the mix industries, but also the recognised skills gaps to serve the emerging technological sectors.

5.5 Staffing

It is proposed for the Aberdeen MAKlab pilot phase that PVA's Digital Coordinator will act as the Studio Manger overseeing daily operations and will be supported by volunteers sourced through the Aberduino project. The Digital Coordinator will attend a Studio Manager training program which has been organised in November and December at the

Glasgow MAKlab facility. Training costs will be covered through the Place Partnership Investment with PVA to cover travel and accommodation costs. MAKlab, as part of the pilot agreement, will provide a support package through out the period; this will include business support, technology expertise through to providing network and business opportunities. The Cultural Policy and Partnership team will have overall responsibility for supporting the lead up planning, monitoring and reviewing the pilot, assessing the viability of a permanent lab and how best to make the transition from the initial stage.

5.6 Investment and costs

Officers are recommending £50,000 through the Place Partnership Investment's Production programme to contribute to the pilot costs, lead up and potential transition costs if a permanent lab is to be established. This would include the lease on premises (unless venue in-kind), essential venue alterations, marketing, revenue and running costs. The MAKlab pilot package will cost £7200 + VAT for the six month period which will include technical assistance, Micro MAKLab machine lease facilitating, business case, daily virtual technical support, monthly onsite training / calibration and support events.

MAKlab have provided a projected start up costs figure at £100,000 for year one of a lab. Officers are currently exploring options to refine these costs and look how they could be meet through in kind contributions, sponsorship and the potential to expand the MAKlab initiative as part of incubator space within the city's Digital Connectivity project.

Early exploratory conversation with representatives from the Aberdeen business community have indicated that they are supportive of the project and would be open to support an Aberdeen lab either directly through sponsorship, corporate membership or commissioned services.

5.7 Venue

Currently Peacock Visual Arts Gallery is being considered as a host venue for the pilot. It is recognised there is issues with this site in terms of access and visibility and therefore may not be suitable in the long term. This would be dependent on the success of the pilot and if alternative options are being explored to increase visibility and profile. Officers are also exploring options for retails units within the city centre if a suitable and affordable space can be found.

5.8 Timescales

The business case is currently being developed and refined for the Aberdeen MAKlab pilot with the intention of commencing with the pilot

at the end of January 2014. The pilot will last for six months and will be reviewed and monitored to assess the long term viability of a permanent lab. A taster workshop for the MAKlab pilot is being planned to take place at the end of November in the city's creative hub, Seventeen. This taster will be utilised to promote the pilot to potential users, engage with the business community to consider investment and to raise the profile of the creative industries in the city in general.

5.9 Long term sustainability

The MAKlab model is built on the premise that after the initial start up costs over a two year period, the facilities should be self sustaining without requiring further public grant funding. At present the MAKlab accounts indicate they are on track to achieve this potentially earlier than projected.

As stated earlier in the report, officers are currently exploring long term options for an Aberdeen MAKlab at the centre of a new incubation hub, providing affordable studio/workshop spaces for emerging graduates and creative SMEs who will utilise the digital fabrication facilities to grow their business. Beyond the economic benefits this model would bring it present a variety of positive social impacts as well providing Aberdeen's creative identity with a more positive perception, both internally and externally to the city.

6. IMPACT

This report relates to 'Aberdeen – the Smarter City':

- We will improve access to and increase participation in arts and culture by providing opportunities for citizens and visitors to experience a broad range of high quality arts and cultural activities.
- We aspire to be recognised as a City of Culture, a place of excellence for culture and arts by promoting Aberdeen as a cultural centre hosting high quality and diverse cultural events for the whole community and beyond.
- We will invest in the city where that investment demonstrates financial sustainability based on a clear return on investment.
- Working with our third, public and private sector partners, we will provide opportunities for lifelong learning which will develop knowledge, skills and attributes of our citizens to enable them to meet the changing demands of the 21st century.
- We will create a City of Learning which will empower individuals to fulfil their potential and contribute to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of our communities.

- We will aim to have a workforce across the city which has the skills and knowledge to sustain, grow and diversify the city economy.
- We aspire to be recognized as a City of Culture, a place of excellence for culture and arts by promoting Aberdeen as a cultural centre hosting high quality and diverse cultural events for the whole community and beyond.
- We will work with our partners to seek to reduce the levels of inequality in the city.

The report relates to the key objectives of 'Vibrant Aberdeen' the City's Cultural Strategy.

'Vibrant Aberdeen' has five objectives:

- Establish a cohesive cultural sector.
- Increase community engagement in cultural activity.
- Improve the city's cultural profile.
- Increase investment in culture.
- Effectively monitor and evaluate the impact of culture.

The report also relates to the 'Vibrant Aberdeen' desired Long Term Outcomes:

A detailed picture of cultural participation: the establishment of baseline figures from which development can be measured: clear evidence of strategic impact: a sustainable structure to record impact of culture: increased levels of cultural engagement in all areas and demographic groups across the city: increased levels of effective partnership working: increased level of cultural tourism; the creation of sustainable relationships with external investment groups: establishing links between individual practitioners and cultural organisations.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The decision of the committee to approve the allocation of £50,000 from the place partnership agreement for MAKlab will have a positive impact on the opportunities available to individuals and organisations in the wider cultural sector in the city. Not to progress with the initiative will impact on the city's ability to provide a range of appropriate pathways and employability opportunities in Aberdeen.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Place Making Partnership Bulletin Report, Culture and Sport Council Sub Committee, 1st July 2013

Creative Scotland and Aberdeen City Council – Place Partnership,
Bulletin Report, Education, Culture and Sport Council Committee, 31
January 2013

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Mark Bremner
Cultural Policy and Partnership Officer
markbremner@aberdeencity.gov.uk
01224 523805