

STORAS UIBHIST

**EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE
LIGHT OF THE COMMUNITY
REGENERATION
OF
SOUTH UIST ESTATE AREA**

Background

Stòras Uibhist is the company which in December 2006 purchased South Uist Estate on behalf of the community. The purchase, management, and development of the Estate assets by the community has, as its aim, to redress chronic problems of depopulation and economic decline within the Estate area. Stòras Uibhist has ambitious development plans for the Estate which will bring diverse employment opportunities for our young people. The company is naturally concerned that full regard should be taken by those in charge of education policy of the need for skills training for our young people which will meet the needs of this expanding and enterprising community.

The company is extremely concerned regarding the proposal of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to close the secondary department at Daliburgh School not just on the grounds of the adverse affects that this will have on the children and parents already attending the secondary department of the school but because the company believes that an opportunity will be lost to put in place a creative and imaginative solution for educational provision in the South Uist Estate area which would meet the needs of a rapidly developing community enterprise.

The Curriculum for Excellence

The Curriculum for Excellence, which adoption is enthusiastically encouraged by the Scottish Government, seeks to implement 'a wider definition of how and what children should learn'. There should be 'more freedom for teachers; a greater choice and opportunity for pupils; and a single coherent curriculum for all young people aged 3 – 18'. The Curriculum for Excellence wishes all those involved in the provision of education 'to think imaginatively about how (educational) experiences and outcomes might be organised in new and creative ways'. Indeed, Learning and Teaching Scotland describes the Curriculum for Excellence as encouraging the formation of 'Schools of Ambition' whose characteristic thinking was 'creative and innovative that ultimately extended them beyond the norm'.

The Company notes that the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence is not related in any way to closure programmes nor can it be legitimately used to justify the same.

Schools of Ambition

The Company is encouraged by the fact that the Nicolson Institute has been put forward/accepted as a 'School of Ambition'. The website states that *'the school has adopted a Transformational Plan that will support community regeneration.'* This involves the *'development of technological capacity and the expansion of vocational education provision which will allow pupils to become more confident. It will allow them to maximise employment opportunities. By embedding enterprise education across the school to create a more dynamic, ambitious environment, young people will be given the skills to create new industries. This will address the population drift from island life.'*

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar: Inclusion – A Policy for All, March 2005

This document makes the following statement: *'Education is a striving to raise attainment, promote inclusion, and celebrate achievement. This is no longer a responsibility only of schools and parents. It requires communities, other agencies, the voluntary sector, the private sector and young people to work together to develop a system that works for our community.'*

It outlines four principles of delivery:

- *Put the needs of young people at the centre of planning and service delivery*
- *Continue to maintain and train our workforce so that they are enabled to meet the needs of young people*
- *Devolve decision making and resources as far as possible to a community level*
- *Delegate authority to staff.*

There was a proposal to establish five Learning Communities based on the community and/or school catchment areas. The Comhairle was accepted as a Pathfinder Authority for Enterprise in Education. This involved enterprise education for all pupils; work related provision for pupils S3 – S6; and business engagement. The Company notes that the SQA stated in August 2007 that focus on the world of work should start in S3 and S4.

Skills requirement of South Uist Estate Community

Stòras Uibhist anticipates that in the expanding economy of South Uist Estates there will be a great need for training for our young people in a variety of skills both 'traditional' and 'new'. While, the Company recognises that 'education is for life', it also recognises that 'education is for jobs'.

As an enterprise itself, Stòras Uibhist has identified a need for skills education to train potential staff for jobs within the company that is not currently available in the Western Isles. These skills have traditionally been practiced in the Estate area but there is now no way to pass these on in a formal and structured manner as required by a dynamic and high growth company such as Stòras Uibhist.

Other enterprises and organisations have expressed a need for skilled staff that cannot currently be fulfilled and consider that a skills training facility on South Uist would greatly benefit the local economy and also greatly increase the career options for young people as well as other community members.

The skills required include traditional rural skills, business administration skills, marketing skills as well as a wide range of vocational skill required in a self-sufficient economy.

Indeed, it is well known that people leave the islands to further their education and this drain on the local community needs to be reduced through the provision of greater opportunity in the area, not less.

Increasing education and skills training on South Uist should be a Comhairle priority if is truly committed to economic development and social regeneration of the community.

Stòras Uibhist Proposal

- That the Comhairle should recognise that education has a crucial part to play in community economic and social regeneration in the light of the community purchase of South Uist Estate.
- That in the Uists there should be one secondary school with two/three campuses – Daliburgh campus, Paible campus, and Lionacleit campus.
(It should be noted that Paible lies outwith the scope of this proposal paper)
- That S1 – S2 education should be delivered in all campuses through the general curriculum.
- That Daliburgh campus S3 – S6 should focus on work related provision and skills training in relation to the needs of the community
- That a Transformation Plan should be drawn up and put in place with urgency

- That the new school (with its two or three campuses) becomes in reality a 'School of Ambition'
- That this proposal meets the requirements of the Curriculum for Excellence for creative and imaginative thinking which meets the needs of the community in the future.

As a community company, working closely with local businesses and organisations, Stòras Uibhist would welcome the opportunity to provide additional input to the Comhairle Education Department to help develop an ongoing development programme for Education and Skills training on the islands of South Uist, Benbecula and Eriskay.