

**Written Evidence Submitted by Lesley Kirkpatrick, CEO, Techniquest
(DIV0103)**

I am CEO of Techniquest, a science and discovery centre and one of the first science centres in the UK and I have been on the IED webinar this afternoon. Techniquest is an educational charity based in Cardiff with a mission to embed science in Welsh culture. We operate a highly popular, iconic science centre in Cardiff Bay and over the past 36 years we have become Wales' largest provider of STEM enrichment activity, reaching over 180,000 people each year (pre-covid), both at the centre and through our schools and community outreach programmes. Our aim is to promote the advancement of education and learning of science, technology, engineering and maths and in particular to do so by maintaining and carrying on an exhibition to explore various scientific concepts. Like all science centres throughout the UK, we aim to encourage an awareness amongst the general public of STEM in society whilst helping to increase the accessibility of STEM.

This afternoon I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Science and Technology Committee as you made a very important point towards the end of the IED session about education and young people, ensuring they have the necessary skills and opportunities to help them achieve.

As you know the UK's science centres open up science, making it accessible for everyone. They find new ways to inspire people with the latest science and ignite curiosity about the world around us. They engage millions of children and adults every year in towns and cities across the UK. They cover all areas of science, from climate and environment to health, physics and space science.

Science centres are well run successful charities; they are entrepreneurial and innovative. Science centres exist to inspire people with the wonders of science and the world around them, to open up access to science to many who didn't know they would have an interest, and science centres have programmes to inspire careers in all areas of science. They specialise in future-focussed science, and hands-on science, and their popularity is precisely because the science is hands-on, interactive and fun. They earn their income from ticket sales, schools paying for specialist STEM workshops, inspirational STEM programmes, science events, industry events, subsidiary businesses, shops, cafes and fundraising. These income streams fund the charitable mission of making science accessible to all across their communities.

As a nation and as a global society we have some major challenges ahead. To solve these challenges, we need an entrepreneurial and scientifically engaged society and sufficient interest from young people in pursuing careers in STEM. However science centres, like many other businesses were hit really hard during the last two years and for some, like us, were closed for fourteen months.

I am writing as a member of the UK network of centres (the Association of Science Discovery Centres - ASDC) but also as the Chief Executive of Techniquest. We know that increasing the science capital of the population of Wales and the UK is critically important if we are to close the sizeable STEM skills gap, increase prosperity and raise aspirations within disadvantaged communities. Many political, cultural and community issues of the future require an engaged and informed society, with citizens who are empowered to join the STEM debate. Activities that engage a wide public audience in STEM, as well as schools are therefore also considered key to the success of a forward-thinking country. Our goal is to build a strong and dynamic science base that supports economic and national development.

Unfortunately like many other business and charities we have lost a significant amount of income during the pandemic. Quite clearly this is a very damaging situation for Techniquest and the sector as a whole. Over the last two years members of the ASDC lobbied the Government and relevant ministers seeking investment and support for the UK's science centres, but to no avail. So, I am asking if you would take up the challenge on the sector's behalf and help raise the profile of science centres and our vital work with the UK Government.

I look forward to hearing from you.

(March 2022)

