

**Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee Business Support inquiry -
Inverness 3 December 2018**

Members in attendance: Jamie Halcro-Johnson, John Mason and Gordon MacDonald Highland Biosciences

Meeting hosted by: Richard Day, Director and Emma Day, Director

A range of topics were discussed with Highland Biosciences, including:

- Highland Biosciences Ltd is a small product development consultancy (2 full time staff, 1 part time staff, 3 sponsored students, 10 local contractors) which was established in February 2006
- The company focuses on new technologies, and is currently working in a consortium with the NHS (NW London NIHR) and Imperial College London to develop a product to predict blood loss in major Trauma patients.
- The company has previously done development work with other companies including Sharp, Ford and GlaxoSmithKline.
- As an account managed business, Highland Biosciences felt there were barriers to accessing BG services.
- Introductory courses run by BG were useful, but they are restricted by what they can access as an account managed business.
- It can feel like you're being passed between the different business support agencies who all offer similar services. Highland Biosciences have had contact with SE, HIE and BG. They were passed to HIE because their sector fitted the type of business HIE were looking to support and had high growth potential.
- They are struggling to get any specialist advice for their industry. There is a feeling that they fall between the gaps as a business. If you are HIE managed then you cannot get support from BG.
- Innovate UK funding has been good as it has given them £1.7 million to progress with clinical trials.
- Highland Biosciences also accessed funding through Highland Opportunity, which was a £100,000 loan on simple commercial terms, that was repaid over 12 months. HIE only offer loans on a floating charge, or in exchange for equity scheme that made it mandatory to engage consultants/contractors of HIE choosing (legal and consultants - costing 25% of the loan over 2 years).
- They hoped HIE would help them to manufacture in Inverness, but there were rules that prevented HIE assist. I.e. we know experts work there but they can't get a mandate to support us.
- However, HIE were excellent for incubator sites and infrastructure project (building things: centres, universities). Rents on their properties not competitive, so you need a grant from them to afford to take them up. We are not making a profit every year (because we plough everything back in) so are considered ineligible for their support – hence we have our facilities (Lab workshop and office).
- HIE provided a 12-week innovation course called pathfinder which was very useful.
- More mentoring would be helpful. There is a scheme but it has never suggested to Highland Biosciences by HIE.
- They would like to access SE schemes and help directly, as they believe HIE support not as good.