

Arch have been working with Akzo Nobel, Northumbria University and Fusion PR to highlight and understand the need for a Manufacturing Academy in Northumberland, to support the skills shortages experienced by the local manufacturing sector. Arch have also identified through their engagement with other local manufacturing businesses that recruiting and developing technical skills is a problem not only for Akzo Nobel, but for a large proportion of the manufacturing business across the County.

Subsequently, a Steering Group has been established to help explore the feasibility of setting up an academy designed to support skills development within the local communities and to support the skills requirement of local businesses. The Steering group includes key partners, such as Northumberland College, Northumbria University and Northumberland County Council, who would need to be involved in the operation of an academy of this nature.

The vision for the Centre at present is that it will be a business-led training academy to provide a new pipeline of technically skilled employees and upskill the existing workforce of local manufacturing companies. It is envisaged that it will:

* focus on technical manufacturing skills
* be targeted primarily at post-16 and adult training, though it could also support technical learning within local schools
* provide for a range of skill levels from Level 2 (GCSE equivalent) to Level 4 (Degree level)
* focus primarily on the delivery of Apprenticeships, including Advanced Apprenticeships
* offer bespoke short courses for existing employees of local manufacturing businesses

It is currently envisaged that the academy will be a new building specifically developed for this purpose. The current suggestion is that the academy would be housed on Ashwood Business Park, as it is a Round Two Enterprise Zone which attracts incentive and it’s in close proximity to Akzo Nobel.

The Group has decided that Arch should commission a supplier to explore this idea in full and understand what is needed to set up a Northumberland Manufacturing Academy. The supplier would be expected to look at the development of a physical structure that would house the academy, as well as outreach/virtual complements, whether the project is feasible, potential funding models, operational costs, potential partners and frameworks/platforms for product development and learning frameworks.