

THE AUSTRALIAN

University of Western Sydney lobbies to fund science centre

KYLAR LOUSSIKIAN THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM July 1, 2015

The University of Western Sydney has begun lobbying federal and state governments for funds as it plans the launch of a science education centre on its Penrith campus that will rival the National Science and Technology Centre, known as Questacon, in Canberra.

UWS already had committed \$30 million towards the project, and was searching for \$21.3m from the federal government or private donors, vice-chancellor Barney Glover said.

Professor Glover said UWS had allocated a 6000sq m building to the project, and required the additional funds for the refurbishment and to acquire the exhibits and displays.

“We’ve had a number of senior academics with science backgrounds who have been for some time some time talking to politicians in western Sydney about how critically important and transformational to young people in the region it would be to have access to a facility like Questacon,” Professor Glover said.

“Our board of trustees has agreed we can offer a building to support the development of a science centre in the Penrith area, and we’re seeking government and corporate support to refurbish it.”

If funding is found, it is expected the precinct could be operational within 18 months, with 150,000 schoolchildren to use the facility each year.

“Science, technology, engineering and maths disciplines are being talked about by both sides of politics, especially the use of coding and technology as part of primary school education, and future jobs are going to be very much influenced by STEM disciplines so it’s timely to contribute to that,” Professor Glover said.

Questacon was developed by Australian National University physics lecturer Mike Gore, and last year recorded an attendance of 130,000 school students. The centre’s director, Graham Durant, is a visiting fellow at ANU.

The proposed Penrith centre would be part of an innovation corridor being developed by UWS that will stretch from the Hawkesbury to Campbelltown. Facilities include the Baiada-developed Sydney Science Park, the University of Sydney’s Camden veterinary sciences site and a new UWS clinical school.

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A research paper on the corridor is being compiled by Donald McInen, professor of urban and cultural geography at UWS. It is expected to be released this month.