

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD

22nd FEBRUARY AT 2PM, HELD ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

PRESENT:

Professor Andrea Nolan (Chair), Professor Donald MacRae, Dr Siobhán Jordan, Laura Goodfellow, Dr Liz Rattray, Gillian Galloway, Marc Crothall, Professor Russel Griggs, Dr Stuart Fancey, Brian Brown, Stuart Bain, Dr Eve Bird, Dr Martin Hawley, Angela Cox and Louisa Macdonell.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Colin Meager (SE), Howell Davies, Shelley Breckenridge, Alistair Warnock, Nicola Brooks, Lorraine Thomson.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed the Board, in particular; Angela Cox, Principal & Chief Executive of Borders College, who was attending her first meeting as the representative for Scotland's Colleges.

Discussion took place around the option of holding either the May or August Board Meeting in person, and this will be confirmed at a later date.

2. APOLOGIES

The Chair noted apologies from the following: Graham Watson, Jim Watson, Dr George Baxter and Gary Bannon (observer), noted Martin Hawley would be joining late, and welcomed Colin Meager who attended in Jim Watson's place.

3. ORAL UPDATES

Professor Andrea Nolan (AN) gave an update on the recruitment for the next Director of Interface, thanking Dr Siobhan Jordan (SJ) for attending and congratulating Laura Goodfellow (LG) on her appointment as Interim Director.

AN welcomed updates from Board members who noted the wide range of consultations currently taking place nationally. A brief discussion followed around the anticipated Scottish Government Innovation Strategy, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) consultation, SFC consultation on Knowledge Exchange and Innovation (KE&I).

SJ provided the following updates to the Board:

- The transition of line management with all directly affected has gone smoothly.
- The Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards (SKEA) is taking place on the 17th March 2022 and Board members were invited to register for the event.
- To follow on from the SKEA, Interface is planning three events to be held in different regions in Scotland to present awards in person to winning individuals and teams. It is anticipated that each of these events will have Ministerial and Scottish Funding Council representation. SJ invited Board members to note their interest or nominate other potential stakeholders to be involved in these events.
- Following the meeting with AN, SJ and Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, Jamie Hepburn in September 2021, two company visits are being planned to showcase the impact of knowledge exchange.

ACTION: Suggest proposed key stakeholders for SKEA presentation events
Circulate the secondment email from Scottish Government

ALL
Interface

4. MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING (PAPER 1)

The Board agreed that the minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the discussions held on 25th November 2021. They noted progress against the actions as outlined in the table (Appendix 1) which has been updated to reflect the discussions at the meeting.

Stuart Bain (SB) updated the Board on Action 2 informing the Board on the progress on meeting with senior HEI team members to explore deeper and wider relationships with universities. One successful meeting has been held, and three further meetings are being planned.

ACTION: Prepare a short note of the meetings to circulate to the Board **SB**

5. PROGRESS REPORT INCLUDING Q2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDERS (PAPER 2)

Laura Goodfellow (LG) introduced the paper and invited comments. The Board acknowledged the paper and discussed the following:

- The numbers for the collaborative projects facilitated in Q2 AY21/22 being significantly over target and the direct impact in terms of Interface resource
- The applications to SKEA 2022 compared to the applications in 2021 noting that the quality of applications was higher despite there being a drop in the overall number of applications.
- The company investment tracked through the public domain and what can be attributed directly to Interface.
- The pattern of staff returning to work in offices and parallels with that and Interface activity

The Board commended the team on the great work and achievements over the last quarter.

ACTION: In Qtr 3 progress report to provide examples of Interface involvement in follow on projects particularly where additional funding has been levered.

LG

6. INTERFACE AS A DELIVERY AGENT FOR INDUSTRY – ACADEMIC COLLABORATIVE FUNDING (PAPER 3 AND PRESENTATION)

Howell Davies (HD) introduced the paper and with LG and SJ presented to the Board on Interface as a delivery agent for industry-academic collaborative funding covering: Scottish Enterprise funded Advanced Innovation Vouchers; the Net Zero Scottish Food and Drink Challenge Fund; and the Inward Investment Catalyst Fund.

A wide-ranging discussion followed with Board members noting:

- The digital system and strategy developments taking place to support this work.
- The operational and strategic resource of the team based on the short-term availability of funds and the need for a quick turnaround of these funds.
- The potential to combine these funding opportunities under one system.
- The chance of similar or additional funding being awarded in the future.
- Engagement with HEIs around these funds and their abilities to respond to such short timescales.

The Board noted Interface's responsiveness and flexibility in relation to short term funding options.

ACTION: Revisit Interface digital strategy which can be presented to the Board **LG**

7. BENCHMARKING ENGAGEMENT WITH UNIVERSITIES (PAPER 4)

SBr introduced Paper 4 providing a brief overview of the methodology and highlighting that the included “league table” is a measure of performance relative to expectation rather than pure performance in an attempt not to disproportionately favour larger institutions.

A wide-ranging discussion followed and covered:

- Effectiveness of benchmarking for Interface to understand current engagement levels
- Alternative normalisation measures to the University Innovation Fund (UIF)
- Options to share information with individual institutions to enable positive discussions for Interface to add value

AN summarised that it would be an effective approach to share which quartile HEIs placed within the table.

ACTION: Use alternative options for normalisation to compare positions SBr

8. PROGRESSING RECOMMENDATIONS OF SFC’S REVIEW OF COHERENT PROVISION AND SUSTAINABILITY WITH INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD (PAPER 5)

SJ introduced the paper drawing attention to the 4 questions where Interface and Innovation Vouchers are most significantly relevant and inviting feedback from Board members.

Discussion took place around:

- College and Innovation Centre engagement
- Partnership working around place and locality as part of the national infrastructure of innovation
- Alignment to pathfinders
- The fluidity of the landscape and the need for Interface to remain a simple solution to the complex innovation landscape
- Limited funding and resource in Interface to deliver significantly increased activity despite the ambition to expand and grow activities

AN concluded discussions and thanked the board for input and suggested it would be useful to establish a working group with representation from funders, universities and colleges and business to start discussion in relation to the next strategic plan.

**ACTION: Establish a working group to start a discussion to build into the next strategic plan
AN/LG**

11. AOB

As there were no further items to discuss the Chair thanked everyone for attending.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair closed the meeting after reminding the Board that the date of the meeting is **25th May 2022 2pm – 4pm**. It will be confirmed whether this meeting will take place online or in person.