

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD****26<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2020 AT 2:00PM, HELD ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS****PRESENT:**

Professor Andrea Nolan (Chair), Professor Donald MacRae, Dr Siobhán Jordan, Dr Stuart Fancey, Stuart Bain, Johnny Mone, Brian Brown, Jo Bisset, Dr George Baxter, Yekemi Otaru, Gillian Galloway

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

John MacKenzie (HIE), Shelley Breckenridge, Howell Davies, Heather Rattray, Lorraine Thomson and Laura Goodfellow (Interface).

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair opened the meeting and explained the agenda to the Board.

**2. APOLOGIES**

The Chair noted the following apologies from Board members: Dr Colin Cooper, Marc Crothall, Liz Connolly, Gary Bannon and Jim Watson.

**3. ORAL UPDATES**

Professor Andrea Nolan (AN) provided an update to the Board on the COVID-19 response from Universities. In addition to supporting the health response through research and skills, there is considerable collaboration underway across the Universities for economic recovery. The recent announcement of a specific £75m support package for HEI research and innovation has been most welcome. Nevertheless, the recent modelling undertaken by SFC has predicted a £450m-500m deficit in income which will have long lasting implications.

Dr Siobhán Jordan (SJ) updated the Board that since the start of the pandemic when the team transitioned to working from home, the team have been very responsive to many requests from NHS, industry, and Universities for research and expertise. Many team members are juggling commitments of childcare, caring for vulnerable dependents etc. alongside work. She confirmed that the Chair of South of Scotland Enterprise (Prof Russel Griggs) would join the Interface Strategic Board in August to represent the new enterprise agency.

**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 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020. They noted progress against the actions as outlined in the table (Appendix 1).

Dr Stuart Fancey (SF) updated the Board that the meeting of the funders to discuss Paper 5 recommendations had not taken place and so the action was outstanding. He indicated that progress on the recommendation outlined in the Muscatelli and Cumberford-Little reports had paused but work was continuing on the Innovation mission of the Enterprise & Skills strategic board.

Professor Donald MacRae (DM), commented on the valuable insights shared by Prof Sir Anton Muscatelli at the Interface Strategic Board meeting in February 2020. DM noted the requirements of both UK and Scottish Governments to grow the economy sustainably in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

The Board noted the limitations on cash flow for many businesses, the desire by businesses to accelerate fast routes to markets to generate sales and the many limitations current recovery funds offered to high growth start-up/spin out companies. The Board agreed that investing in innovation and skills to gain commercial advantage was of particular importance to the independent Advisory Group on Economic Recovery which was established by the Scottish Government in April 2020 and chaired by Benny Higgins.

DM encouraged the Board to consider how Interface could play a more proactive role in supporting businesses for recovery e.g. by administration of funding for innovation.

## 5. PROGRESS REPORT INCLUDING Q3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION REPORT FOR FUNDERS (PAPER 2)

The Board acknowledged the progress by the team in the last three months to deliver against the targets as outlined in Paper 2. They noted the challenges to deliver the ambitious 2019/20 KPIs due to the unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 crisis which has adversely affected business demand and university supply alongside more limited funding available for larger scale projects (e.g. Advanced Innovation Vouchers).

## 6. SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE (PAPER 3)

The Board commended the team on how they had readily and rapidly adapted to supporting businesses and other organisations for the national COVID-19 medical response. The rapid response impartial brokerage service and innovation voucher funding decisions by SFC had been welcomed by companies and Universities.

Gillian Galloway (GG) noted the need for companies to pivot and change their business models to support recovery and develop new markets, drawing on the expertise within Business & Management Schools. Yekemi Otaru (YO) highlighted the current high threshold innovation required to access support such as Innovation Vouchers / Workforce Innovation Vouchers. This would need further consideration to be more inclusive of business model innovation. JB noted the importance of positive mindsets within businesses and the need to rebuild / boost both public and employee confidence.

**ACTION: Proactive approaches to Business/Management Schools to support business remodelling AN, SJ, JM**

## 7. INTERFACE CORPORATE RISK REGISTER (PAPER 4)

The Board noted the updates to the risk register in line with COVID-19 and the ongoing reviews by the senior management team within Interface. The acknowledged the many factors that were out with the control of Interface including resource constraints of HE and FE.

## 8. INTERFACE - SUPPORTING RECOVERY 2020 -2021 (PAPER 5)

In response to Paper 5, Board members held a wide-ranging discussion on how Universities, Colleges and Interface could assist in inspiring economic recovery. There was agreement that businesses “*don’t know that they don’t know*” and need inspirational webinars or equivalent to consider what might be possible.

Suggestions for themes included:

- Articulating how disruptive technologies can make a difference to industry led challenges
- Understanding consumer behaviour to enable greater customer reach and sales through online / e-commerce platforms
- Reduction of costs through automation
- Re-inventing the business model – change, improve, what is the new normal?
- Adapting to new circumstances – what companies survived and thrived in previous widespread disruptions?

The Board noted the initial success from the *Adopt a Business* campaign to the tourism and hospitality industry and encouraged the team to explore all opportunities to assist businesses. AN highlighted that it can be difficult for SMEs to access funding and questioned whether SFC would be able to influence Innovate UK funding.

**ACTION: Explore with Innovate UK the repurposing of large-scale Industrial Strategy funding for shorter term business- academic projects to aid recovery SF**

## 9. FUNDING CYCLE TIMELINES (PAPER 6)

The Board noted the information outlined in Paper 6 with respect to funding cycles and decision points

**ACTION: Request update from the three funding organisations CEOs on funding cycles and timescales for decisions.**  
**AN**

**10. AOB**

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

**11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

20th August 2020 – 10:30 - 12:30pm

Location will be confirmed – most likely online.