

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD**16TH February 2021 AT 2PM, HELD ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS****PRESENT:**

Professor Andrea Nolan (Chair), Professor Donald MacRae, Dr Siobhán Jordan, Johnny Mone, Dr George Baxter, Gillian Galloway, Professor Russel Griggs, Jim Watson, Marc Crothall, Yekemi Otaru, Dr Stuart Fancey, Brian Brown, Jo Bisset and Marc Crothall.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Gary Bannon (SFC), Shelley Breckenridge, Howell Davies, Heather Rattray, Nicola Brooks, Lorraine Thomson and Laura Goodfellow (Interface). Cat Ball (SFC) joined for item 8.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

2. APOLOGIES

The Chair noted apologies from the following: Liz Connolly, Dr Colin Cooper and Stuart Bain.

3. ORAL UPDATES

Professor Andrea Nolan (AN) indicated she was looking forward to discussion later in the meeting.

Dr Siobhán Jordan (SJ) outlined that industry engagement during Q2 was at record levels and would be discussed in more detail under item 5. The team remained resilient despite juggling many commitments and the relentless pace of delivery.

She noted the range of partners from across the Scottish ecosystem who were seeking alliances and co-operation to enable greater support for their networks of businesses. Two were highlighted in particular:

1. CivTech – Scottish Government innovation accelerator where SMEs solve public sector Challenges. An MOU is being put in place to formalise the partnership.
2. CEIS (Community Enterprise in Scotland) who see value in working with Interface to accelerate social innovation especially around net zero.

Collaboration is also underway with industry sector organisations, including Visit Scotland to promote the outcomes and impacts emerging from *Adopt a business* support and with Scotland Food and Drink to support the Scotland wide food & drink recovery plan.

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 26th November 2020. They noted progress against the actions as outlined in the table (Appendix 1) which has been updated to reflect the discussions at the meeting.

GG noted that Innovate UK were hosting round table workshops to consult on their new strategy.

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

Laura Goodfellow (LG) noted highlights from the busy Q2 period with collaborative R&D projects facilitated during the period 70% over target. AN commented positively on the overall figures and demand coming from across all regions and sectors.

In response to a question from DMacR, SJ outlined that regular progress updates were provided to the Universities Scotland Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) and Universities Scotland Research and Commercialisation Directors Group (RCDG). The insights and trends provided by Interface on pan-Scotland business-led demand for technologies, knowledge, expertise and talent was of significant value to both committees. Johnny Mone (JM) commented that these were influential groups and a good forum to share the excellent work underway.

6. SCOTTISH KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AWARDS (SKEA) (PAPER 3)

Heather Rattray (HR) outlined the key dates for the Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards. As of the closing date on Friday 12th February 2021, over 100 applications had been received from across Universities, Colleges, Innovation Centres, Graduate Schools and Research Institutes.

The Board noted the record number of entries reflecting the status of the Awards and a potential correlation with the Research Excellence Framework (REF) submissions due to be concluded by end of March 2021.

ACTIONS:

- **Board members were invited to save the date for the online Awards Ceremony Wednesday 21st April 3-4.30pm.** ALL
- **Board members were invited to support promotion of the shortlist of potential winners when announced on March 11th 2021.** ALL
- **Further information on the geographical distribution of the SKEA applications to be compiled.** HR

7. NEXT STEPS FOLLOWING INDEPENDENT REVIEWS BY BIGGAR ECONOMICS (PAPER 4)

Board members noted Paper 4 which outlined the proposed actions, timescales and priorities in response to the series of recommendations in the reports.

A wide-ranging discussion by the Board noted:

- The need for greater advocacy and recognition of the contributions and impacts delivered by Interface in supporting innovation. There is a challenge that delivery is “taken for granted”.
- The recognition that greater integration is required across the ecosystem that supports innovation in Scotland.
- The challenge of ensuring consistency across the “web of actors” in the ecosystem in evaluating and measuring impacts. Many of the interventions that support innovation are by their nature high risk.

ACTION: A full copy of the BiGGAR Economics Ltd report is available to Board members on request

ALL

8. SFC REVIEW OF COHERENT PROVISION PHASE 2 – RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (PAPER 5)

Gary Bannon (GBa) introduced Paper 5 which outlined the SFC’s major [review of coherent provision](#) and sustainability of teaching and research & innovation activities as requested by Scottish Government in June 2020. Consultation with the Interface Strategic Board and in particular hearing directly from businesses during the current Phase 2 review period was very welcome.

The Board considered Paper 6 which outlined how Interface will support the emergency years AY2020-2022. The final version of the paper (currently in draft) would be submitted to SFC by 28th February 2021.

Board members observed:

- The requirement for a punchy executive summary.

- The value of compiled trends, insights and evidence that Interface offers to the SFC and Universities. These insights outline how the market is shifting as businesses seek to diversify, adapt and evolve in the wake of the pandemic.
- The need to highlight the ambitious future plans of Interface; including how the programme would evolve and grow in the wider ecosystem.

ACTION: Executive Summary to be shared with Board members following submission to SFC SJ

Board members contributed to the round table discussion chaired by SFC on the wider innovation system exploring the themes outlined in Paper 5. The following topics formed the basis of the wide-ranging discussions:

- What do Scotland’s comparatively high levels of R&D investment in higher education but lower levels of R&D within businesses mean for SFC’s approach to innovation investment?
- How can we promote economic, societal, cultural, and net-zero impacts?
- How can entrepreneurship best be supported?
- How could colleges be brought more fully into the national innovation agenda?

A summary of the key points included:

- For many businesses innovation is about adaptation to new situations, and they may not consider this as “planned R&D”.
- Better measures are required for innovation that happens in businesses rather than the “artificial” metric of level of investment in R&D undertaken by businesses (BERD).
- The pace of business-led innovation in the past year has been considerable across the entire spectrum of products, processes, service delivery and business models. This agile pace is sometimes in contrast with planned and structured R&D.
- Clusters of companies are now more willing to work together and co-operate to reach new customers.
- There is a significant opportunity for businesses to tap into the entrepreneurial mindset of students.
- Colleges offer an opportunity to harness talented innovators into multidisciplinary teams.
- Entrepreneurship is an unstructured and unpredictable journey with many unknowns.
- Driven by responding to market demands and customer needs, many businesses may not be aware of the assistance available. Therefore, initiatives such as Interface need to uncover demand.

GBa thanked Board members for their contributions noting that Phase 2 of the review concludes in March 2021 with Phase 3 concluding later in the year.

9. REVIEW OF INTERFACE’S RISK REGISTER (PAPER 7)

The Board noted the current status of the Interface risk register outlined in Paper 7.

10. AOB

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

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair closed the meeting after reminding the Board that the date of the next online meeting is **25th May 2021 – 2pm - 4pm.**