

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Question 1: Do the 2011-2016 strategic priorities remain robust and relevant for the period 2016-2021?

Comments Yes. In light of mounting pressure on public resources it has become increasingly important for research programmes to produce tangible outputs which are clearly linked to policy development and benefits to the Scottish economy. One of the key challenges will be in balancing this goal with the need to maintain a resilient scientific expertise in Scotland capable of remaining at the forefront of cutting edge R&D which will be needed to meet the challenges posed by priority issues such as climate change and sustainability.

Question 2: Do these 'enabling principles' set the right context or should additional principles be adopted?

Comments Yes although there is a need to place particular focus on knowledge exchange and collaboration (both nationally and internationally) in order to optimise resources. This includes the sharing of intelligence and data between RESAS, other funding bodies and industry to identify common solutions and prevent duplication. There is also a need for greater emphasis on the dissemination of research outputs and co-ordination of activities by making better use of partnership initiatives such as Cameras.

Question 3: Are the high level outcomes sufficiently clear, if not, what changes would you propose?

Comments Overall yes although there is a need to recognise that safe, secure and sustainable food chains cuts across all three research themes. In particular, food safety is integral in ensuring a profitable and sustainable food and drink industry and it is therefore key that solutions for Scottish agriculture are cognisant of human health as well as animal health and welfare.

Question 4: Are the three broad themes identified an appropriate way of structuring our work? If not, what alternatives should be considered?

Comments Yes. The three themes are clearly set out to address research questions that will inform future policy relating to population, agriculture and the environment, and the inter-linkages between the policy outcomes are evident. The increased emphasis on a whole systems thinking approach is welcome and this will be critical in advancing knowledge in relation to the policy outcomes defined in the strategy. We note that the new health and

wellbeing theme is particularly relevant to the strategic aims of the FSA. It will be important to ensure that the development of this theme in particular takes account of the research aims of the New Food Body to ensure maximum benefit is achieved through the funding of science in Scotland. In the lead up to the New Food Body during 2014, RESAS should ensure that FSA is included in discussions relating to the development of policy led R&D around the Health and Wellbeing theme. In relation to food safety it will be important to incorporate horizon scanning to keep aware of changes and new challenges arising.

Question 5: How can the SG maximise the benefits of on-going investment in the MRPs to build and benefit from connectivity with the wider science base?

Comments More emphasis should be placed in ensuring the work undertaken by MRPs has better links into the programmes which are supported by other Government and scientific funders such as MRC, BBSRC,ERC,NERC,and Wellcome trust. There is also a need to drive up the competitiveness of the MRPs and encourage greater collaboration with academic and industry providers to enhance their access to other funding streams as a means of facilitating their involvement in cutting edge, 'blue skies' research and longer term coordinated work programmes. As highlighted above, it will be particularly important to ensure that the work undertaken by the MRPs in relation to the foodchain is fully co-ordinated with the research activity supported by the New Food Body.

Question 6: What are your views of the performance and operation of the CoEs to date, are there any additional areas that would benefit from such support?

Comments The CoEs represent an excellent resource for accessing scientific expertise to support emergency response and more immediate policy needs. However, the scope of the current CoE network does not provide coverage of all of the policy outcomes defined in the 2016-2021 strategy. In particular, consideration should be given to extending their remit to take account of zoonotic disease and its management across the foodchain in order that the expertise is more clearly aligned with the policy outcomes relating to safe food and public health. Going forward, greater emphasis should be placed on promoting the work of the CoEs and consideration given to how their role in the co-ordination of research activities and horizon scanning could be further enhanced.

Question 7: Do you agree with the SG's proposal to end support for SPs and to explore alternative mechanisms to strengthen engagement between its investment in research and the business sectors it aims to support?

Comments Yes, there are more cost effective and targeted mechanisms for improving the alignment of research outputs to business needs than the provision of on-going support for strategic partnerships. For example, better use could be made of existing technology transfer initiatives which work with

the Scottish Universities e.g. Interface Food and Drink <http://www.interfacefoodanddrink.org/> A more prominent role could also be given to Cameras and initiatives such as the RESAS funded initiative Co-operative of Zoonoses Experience and Expertise (CoZEE) in bringing the MRPs, Universities and Agricultural partners together to ensure that collaborative research programmes are designed to deliver benefits which are in the interests of both public health and economic growth.

Question 8: Do you have any proposals for how the research portfolio can better link to the business community to deliver the desired outcome?

Comments In addition to the comments above, there is scope for MRPs to engage more directly with businesses. We are aware of examples where this approach has been successful but it appears to be patchy. With regard to the food and drink sector establishing collaborative links with industry at the development stages provides the best route for research groups to assess whether their ideas are viable and in line with market trends. Early engagement with the agricultural and fisheries sectors is also critical in the development of research programmes to generate buy-in and ensure work remains focussed on identifying feasible and economically viable solutions.

Question 9: Is the purpose and value of underpinning capacity sufficiently clear, if not how can it be improved?

Comments Investment in underpinning capacity has a role in ensuring resilience in the provision of scientific expertise provided by MRPs, however it is unclear how the performance of research activity and expertise is monitored in comparison with HEIs and other UK research bodies. To ensure the quality of science is maintained and that MRPs are on a competitive footing with HEIs, consideration should be given to the development of a more transparent system for evaluating the standard of science funded under the RESAS strategy. This could be based on publication record, external funding awards and collaborative working (e.g. similar to the RAE system applied to HEIs).

Question 10: Do you have any views regarding the performance and use of the Contract Research Fund including how it could be improved?

Comments The contract research fund is a good model and it could be beneficial for more funding to go through this route to provide a more reactive means of commissioning work and addressing short term projects to address immediate policy questions and real-time data collection. This could also provide a potential route by which funds could be accessed for supporting joint projects identified via Cameras.

Question 11: Could the overall delivery model be further simplified in a way which still enables SG to meet its strategic priorities for the portfolio, if so how?

Comments Consideration could be given to setting up frameworks of research providers outwith the MRP network which could be used as a resource for rapid access to expertise required to address short-term projects.

Question 12: Do you have specific suggestions as to how the RESAS research strategy can contribute to the delivery of the objectives of the CAMERAS partnership?

Comments There is significant cross-over between the evidence priorities identified by Cameras for Rural Affairs and the Terrestrial Environment and the RESAS research strategy. It would seem appropriate that RESAS and MRP representatives take a leading role in the development of Cameras evidence plans to ensure that the work is properly aligned and that best value is achieved from collaborations with other Cameras partners.

Question 13: Do you have any suggestions for developing the partnership with other research funders?

Comments There is a need for continual structured dialogue and engagement between RESAS and other funders to ensure strategic planning cycles are aligned and duplication of effort is avoided. In particular, it will be critical that RESAS develops strong linkages with the New Food Body as it is developing its research strategy to ensure programmes are complementary and make best use of resources. Consideration could be given to the development of joint funding initiatives with the NFB to support policy outcomes in relation to the foodchain, and initiatives for co-ordinating the dissemination of RESAS and NFB research outputs such as co-hosted conferences and horizon scanning events.

Question 14: Do you have any particular suggestions as to how greater engagement with the HEI sector might be achieved?

Comments Collaborative working between MRPs and the HEIs should not be forced, but there is perhaps scope for more strategic engagement to promote the systems thinking approach and generate new ideas for multi-disciplinary projects. This could be facilitated through conferences and horizon scanning events to raise greater awareness of active research programmes across Scotland and initiatives aimed at identifying where external funding opportunities could be used to develop new collaborations.

Question 15: Are the research outputs from the RESAS portfolio of research readily accessible or can this be further improved, if so how?

Comments The RESAS research outputs are not readily accessible in a manner which clearly links reports, publications or on-going MRP research programmes to SG funding. It is therefore difficult to evaluate how the

outputs of the strategy are making a difference. Consideration should be given to more regular programme reviews and the development of report repositories and publication listings to improve transparency and generate greater publicity for the outputs of the RESAS portfolio.

Question 16: Is the current performance management approach fit for purpose or can it be improved, if so how?

Comments As highlighted above, there is scope for greater transparency and peer review of performance, which could be achieved through an RAE based system (see answer to Q9) and more structured dissemination of research outputs.