

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Yes, the priorities remain robust and entirely relevant for this period. It is important that publicly funded science provides benefits to the public through the provision of impartial advice which can inform policy, whilst at the same time providing a conduit for inward and added value investment.

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

Yes. It is essential that SG maintains and develops the capacity within the organisations it funds to address both short term policy goals, but also and potentially more importantly, the longer term issues that can take several funding cycles to come to fruition. At the same time, it is incumbent on the organisations that are in receipt of SG funding that they communicate effectively with appropriate stakeholder groups whilst pursuing all opportunities to maximise the benefit from the platform funding provided.

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

Yes. It is important, however, to emphasise that the list of high level outcomes is not exhaustive and that others such as crop health, although it may be implicit in the document, currently does not appear. Equally, it is important to acknowledge that with a five-year programme, there may be changing priorities as a result of local and global influences that cannot be predicted at the start of the programme.

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

Yes. Some thought might be given to renaming the "Ecosystem Services" Theme as experience over the last 5-year programme has shown that this is a difficult descriptor for all stakeholder groups to understand and, indeed, for scientists to explain. As a concept however, with the additional help of the broad high level outcomes to describe what is needed, it is appropriate that the work is structured in this way. The key principle of sustainability pervades all Themes and more could be made of this.

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?

Very little of the work within the MRPs is done in true isolation and SG already benefits greatly from the MRPs broad range of connections with the wider science base, both nationally and internationally. Some better connections between funding agencies (for example, within government) to recognise the benefits offered by MRP-based research is probably required, but this will also require the MRPs to actively engage with funders.

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?

With the exception of the CoE on animal health which was the successor to EPIC it is probably too soon to assess the performance of the CoEs. With a mixture of operation models in terms of the balance between new science and a “call down service” of experts there is probably some adjustments that are required to meet the policy customers’ needs, but SG are probably best placed to comment on this. Our view is that a CoE on plant/tree health is probably required and some consideration should be given to one on zoonotic infections/disease.

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?

Again, it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of the SPs and to stop them so soon would appear to be hasty. However, we welcome the fact that SG recognise that engagement between research and business is vital to sustainability and that alternative mechanisms will be explored to continue this important area of interaction.

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

The current schemes such as the BBSRCs Industrial Partnership Awards and ‘Research Clubs’ as well as those those run by the “Technology Strategy Board” are excellent and possibly could be extended or mimicked to promote funding opportunities with a particularly Scottish bias. Perhaps, better links could also be established with DEFRA funding streams for research where knowledge and/or policy relevant outputs are obtained that can benefit the business community in terms of, for example, improved practice. There probably also needs to be better engagement with the business community to demonstrate what is offered by the MRPs. The SFC-funded “Innovation Centres” are a very positive move forward, but clarity now needs to be provided as to how MRP involvement in these initiatives will be funded.

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

Yes. Without the underpinning capacity the MRPs would find it difficult to operate efficiently. It supports the basic infrastructure of the MRPs providing the platform for many of the individual research projects and helping to maintain their competitiveness. In justifying expenditure more emphasis could be put on outcomes rather than outputs.

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

The contract research fund has been an important mechanism to provide flexibility in a changing world. It should be retained to ensure that there is a means to address emerging issues. Equally, it has been vitally important in allowing the MRPs to gain access to funding streams not normally accessible and is essential for ensuring that MRP science retains its quality and relevance to the broader science base.

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?

Funding individual MRPs to deliver aspects of the portfolio (in partnership with others) appears to be the most appropriate way forward.

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?

Greater interaction between CAMERAS partners and MRPs is required for improved understanding of needs and capability, but specific funding may be required to deliver science which addresses particular issues. The funding should however not necessarily come from the RESAS budget.

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

Partnerships with other research funders are essential for maintaining and augmenting the science base in the MRPs. It is essential to have access to different funding agencies and that these relationships are fully explored to ensure that it is the best / most relevant science that is funded. Without question, these opportunities provide significant 'added value' to SG funded research and are essential in promoting inter-disciplinary interactions.

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

Much needs to be done to remove the artificial barriers of eligibility to

particular funding streams, which would promote better engagement with the HEI sector. The only criteria that should matter is the quality of the science on offer and the ability to deliver. More formal arrangements and/or opportunities for joint PhD studentships/MScs may be a good first step and would provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that the future capability and capacity of the science base is being assured in Scotland.

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

It is clear that even within SG there is a lack of knowledge as to the outputs from RESAS funded science. This is not due to lack of effort to transmit messages, but possibly more to do with not reaching the right people. A mechanism should be found which would encourage engagement from all sides to better illustrate the successes of RESAS funded science.

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

There is still an over emphasis on the collection of metrics and attribution to specific funding streams. Whilst it is appreciated that this is important, the move towards a more streamlined process, as well as the highlighting of “success stories” and demonstrating impact is welcomed.