

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

SRUC agrees that the 2011-2016 **strategic priorities remain robust and relevant** for the new period 2016-20.

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

SRUC agrees that the **‘enabling principles’ set the right context**, although we feel that **exchanging knowledge is too passively described**. In our view, knowledge exchange is needed to define and commit to impacts, and then the science required works towards this. Impacts will not be maximised if a more passive approach is taken whereby the science is undertaken, then the knowledge exchange and then impacts are sought.

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

SRUC believes that **the high level outcomes would benefit from some minor revision**.

Two themes - ‘integrated pest and disease management’ and ‘sustainable intensification’ – seem more like means rather than ends in their respective themes. We suggest that ‘integrated pest and disease management’ could be dropped and ‘healthy crops’ added. We also suggest that ‘sustainable intensification’ could be dropped as this is implicit in sustainable agriculture, or it could be changed to ‘food security through sustainable intensification’.

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

SRUC would like to make a number of comments relating to the three broad themes identified.

The document places emphasis on a ‘systems approach’ and on joined up approaches. At the same time, it recognises the importance of supporting scientific resilience. However, **it is not clear from the document where there is ‘space’ for the strategic science to develop in its own right**. For example, animal welfare is mentioned under the Theme ‘Productive and Viable Land Use’. In the current (and the previous) programme there was a Work Package on Livestock Welfare, where welfare scientists essentially framed the questions, in consultation

with policy, and where there was some opportunity to develop welfare science. This work then linked with other Themes to add value (e.g. ecosystems services). It is noteworthy that between the first and second Programmes the opportunity to carry out strategic research in welfare had been reduced. There perhaps needs to be some greater clarity over how strategic science will be supported in this new programme otherwise there is a risk of it being diluted by the need to directly address policy questions.

It is hard to see a clear distinction between Theme 2 'Productive and Viable Land Use' and Theme 3 'Ecosystems Services'. Both include outcomes of sustainable food production. There is a **danger that this leads to confusion and duplication of effort rather than integrated systems working**. In line with the previous comment, there needs to be a clear focus within the system for the components. This will be outlined later in the detail, but a clearer distinction between Themes will be required if so few Themes are adopted.

At the same time as ensuring clearer distinctions between the Themes to reduce confusion and duplication, **there also needs to be sound mechanisms for cross-Theme linkages to avoid silo thinking and working**. For example, we have some concerns about continuing to separate healthy and sustainable diets from food production/environment. Building on opportunities to link these will capitalise on expertise across the Programme. Similarly, it is not possible to achieve sustainability in 'Productive and Viable Land Use' without integrating work on 'Ecosystem Services' or understanding the outcomes, drivers and behaviours inherent in 'Health and Wellbeing'.

It is possible that the 'Health and Wellbeing' Theme is misnamed or somehow conflates the meanings of the terms, given much of the proposed content. More thought needs to be given to **how the structure and management of the themes can enable genuine cross-cutting and interdisciplinary work**. One way to do this might be to encourage distinct cross-Theme research projects that have some independence from Theme structure. At the very least, there needs to be clear signposting and a requirement in the new Programme for cross-thematic working which will clearly add value and impact to each Programme. This cross-linking needs to be based on truly cross-institutional working with buy-in from all levels across the institutions, including on a day-to-day basis at the level of scientific teams.

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?

There is **considerable potential to achieve greater coordination between the SG, MRPs and RCUK**. Possibilities exist within the animal sciences, in particular, to more closely align the RESAS and BBSRC programmes in this area. This is relevant to SRUC's proposed closer strategic alignment with the University of Edinburgh, but also in other disciplines too.

Ensuring **greater alignment with Horizon 2020** also offers opportunities, bringing greater coherence between national and European programmes and the potential for more joint initiatives to add value to the science base in Scotland, the UK and wider afield. However, it is worth noting that there are some policy uncertainties regarding acting on this in a positive manner in Scotland at present.

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?

SRUC's **experience of involvement in the current CoEs is generally good** and we are aware of a considerable body of **positive feedback** relating to them. Our experience in EPIC, for example, has been extremely positive, with this CoE responding effectively to a clear demand.

However, we are also aware of **(perceived) barriers** in some areas where institutions are not involved in a designated CoE which may perpetuate silo thinking and encourage the 'delineation of territories'. The CoEs were also somewhat slow to develop in the current Programme.

The availability of **call down funding** through CoEs seems to be, in principle, a useful mechanism for easing tensions between strategic research and policy responsiveness. However, we are also aware that this hasn't always worked well in practice. A more proactive approach has been taken by SRUC's Rural Policy Centre, for example, to facilitate closer dialogue and working between researchers and policy-makers through Roadshows and other events. It may be useful to build on this in the future Programme.

It may be useful to undertake a **review of all current CoEs** to determine if their current operation is too complex, whether the reasons for their continued existence remain valid and whether they may need some reorganisation, including opening up opportunities for other partners to join.

However, we believe that EPIC, CXC and CREW are now working well, and that they should continue in the next programme.

For the future, we would like to propose an **Animal Welfare CoE**. The EU is currently 'trailing' the concept of Animal Welfare Reference Centres to help develop and implement animal welfare policy. There is an opportunity to set up a CoE relating to animal welfare issues which would in effect serve as an Animal Welfare Reference Centre. SRUC has already had discussions with SG (Andrew Voas) along these lines. This could also be aligned with University of Bristol who have been having similar discussions with Defra.

We would also like to propose a new **CoE in Plant Health**.

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?

SRUC believes that the evidence suggests that SPs have not necessarily worked as originally intended. In particular, they have **not linked to business as effectively as was initially envisaged**. However, in their support (as first conceived), they did allow for the **development of specific (strategic) areas of science** which is to be welcomed. In the welfare field, for example, SRUC was funded (with collaborators) to develop an area of science looking at the effects of early life experience on animal development and health and welfare outcomes.

From an ecosystem services/natural capital perspective there has been recent self-organising by the business, public sector and NGO communities (e.g. Scottish Forum on Natural Capital) which can allow links with MRPs/academia to develop. Support for these initiatives, that allows **flexibility in meeting the diversity of needs** (e.g. small/short term project funding), may be more appropriate than a formal SP.

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

(Please also see our response to Question 3).

SRUC believes that this in itself is a **complex question**, and may deserve some research in its own right.

For some areas, such as animal and plant breeding, there are already excellent examples of how to get science and business working in harmony. So one approach may be to use these as exemplars of how to do it.

In other areas (e.g. ecosystem services, animal welfare) the **alignment between what the science 'says' and business interests can be much more complex**. This complexity may increase in the future (e.g. in animal welfare) if, as is planned, business has a bigger say over development of welfare standards. Working out how we reconcile these more difficult policy areas in terms of the various stakeholders involved is crucial to the future. Perhaps one answer is to develop something along an Innovation Systems approach (as championed by SRUC's Dr Andrew Barnes, for example) that starts with the premise of reconciling different stakeholder perspectives.

In addition to building on the many excellent examples of success from the MRPs, it may be useful to explore and interface with initiatives being led by others, such as the SFC or other funding bodies, to address these issues. For example, **Defra's Sustainable Intensification Research Platform (LM0201)** project aims to build collaborative links with industry to facilitate the translation of research and catalyse new systems-based research in support of more sustainable, productive and profitable agriculture. This mimics much of what has been done in the Strategic

Research Programme and other SG funded work with the MRPs for many years. This suggests that past achievements in this area may need better definition, which can then be built upon in the 2016-21 Strategy.

Another related example is the **Agri-Tech Strategy**. Here the industry link is to developers and manufacturers of information technologies that might be used in agriculture. These technologies offer potentially game changing opportunities to deliver the outcomes listed on page 11 of the Strategy and to alter the research process itself. The Strategy should therefore say more about how it will develop in response to this. For example, 'Integrated Land Management' might be a better outcome in 'Productive and Viable Land Use' than 'Integrated Pest and Disease Management'. It could be the umbrella outcome for this area in systems research.

It may be useful to consider the possibility of creating a **Scottish LINK-type programme**. This would help to join up the Strategic Programme to the shorter term needs of industry. At the pre-development stage such projects could then dovetail to Technology Strategy Board (TSB) projects. This could be an open competition and could replace the SPs. It is anticipated that such a scheme would have the effect of better transferring outcomes into practice.

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

SRUC believes that the purpose of underpinning capacity is clear and that it represents a useful system to help with internal institutional development to aid the main programme.

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

We see significant value in their being a stream of flexible funding available.

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?

We welcome the proposed structure and simplification of the delivery model.

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?

The recent CAMERAS workshop illustrated the need for a closer alignment

between the MRPs and CAMERAS. We hope that the follow-up to the CAMERAS workshop will facilitate this by, for example, getting MRPs involved in helping to develop CAMERAS Evidence Plans.

It may also be useful to consider the usefulness of specific, targeted CAMERAS KE events (which could take many forms, not necessarily workshops), jointly organised by MRPs to illustrate achievements and impacts. This would enable MRPs to 'take the initiative' and would promote better understanding and cross-communication.

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

See our earlier comments relating to funding for animal sciences research and the potential for the greater strategic alignment between SRUC and the University of Edinburgh to serve as a bridge between RESAS and BBSRC support (Question 5).

It would also be helpful if SG can continue to increase its voice in relevant UK funding initiatives (in relation to Agri-Tech and the TSB) for example. The precise mechanism for doing so may need to be determined once the result of the September Referendum is known.

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

Please see our responses to Questions 12 and 13 above.

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

SRUC believes that more emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that there is an evidence base to the 'narratives'. At the moment these are written in such a way as to demonstrate limited, if any, reference to published work. A useful amendment to the reporting structure could be to have a more explicit link between the reported narratives and published work.

Following on from our response to Question 8, more could be done with new technologies and industry collaboration to measure impacts directly and to feed this back to inform research as well as end users.

It may be useful for the future programme to focus on fewer, high profile, high impact events rather than more local disparate initiatives, combined with a stronger narrative that incorporates publications and key messages and outcomes (rather than just outputs).

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

Please see our responses to previous Questions.