

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

The strategic priorities are very broad, and so it is hard for them to not remain – in a vague sense - relevant. However, it might be argued that this vagueness means that they are not particularly strategic. In addition, and from the perspective of delivering the SBS, it is not clear whether the first priority – supporting policy and practice – delivers a clear focus on the goals of biodiversity strategy from the global (CBD Nagoya and the Aichi targets, to European (EU Biodiversity Strategy) to national (2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity). This will be critical if 2020 targets are to be met.

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

The principles seem reasonable, but with respect to principle 2 it needs also to be recognised that innovation can occur within a research discipline and can stem from scientific excellence within a field, as well as from interdisciplinary work. This comment relates to other sections in the draft strategy which may have unrealistic expectations as to what inter-disciplinary research can deliver; although inter-disciplinarity needs to be fostered and supported, to address the challenges posed by the implementation of the SBS there needs to be a balance between inter-disciplinary cooperation and promotion of excellence *within* disciplines. In addition, none of the principles really focus on the delivery of impacts; it is mentioned as a sub-component of principle 2, but with respect to achieving 2020 biodiversity targets, a fourth could be added – ‘Delivering Impact’ (or something similar)

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

The high level outcomes lack explicit mention of the protection of the natural environment. It might be assumed that this is implicit within the ecosystem service concept, but there is a risk that with vague terminology such as “key ecosystem services” (which ones are considered key, by whom, and where?) biodiversity might lose out once again in the competition between policy sectors. From the perspective of promoting the research work needed to support the SBS, it would be reassuring to see explicit mention of biodiversity conservation – perhaps couched as conservation of Natural Capital (see response to Q4) – within this document. Overall, the terminology used here, and arguably elsewhere in the document, begs numerous questions. For example what is meant by ‘systems thinking’? What is meant by the adjective ‘sustainable’ in this document, and what, in particular, is meant by the term ‘sustainable intensification’? Clarifying these terms – which may be understood differently between different policy sectors and actors – is essential to guarantee joined-up thinking.

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

This seems a reasonable structure but again detail is lacking and many questions are begged in relation to biodiversity policy objectives, including:

- To what extent has the biological/productive condition of the land/sea been degraded, and what are the potential for efforts directed at its restoration for the manifold benefit of people and economy?
Answering such a question would provide an explicit focus on improving the state of the environment rather than maintaining the (potentially degraded) *status quo*.
- Will sustainability of land use and agriculture be measured by delivery of biodiversity objectives?
- How can we manage the tension between the decentralising factors which benefit flourishing rural communities and the centralising tendencies of the SG's over-arching emphasis on Economic Growth; might this balance need a fresh interpretation of 'efficiency' to allow for much more than macro-economic measures?

Overall, we suggest that the third theme should be retitled to Ecosystems Services and Natural Capital. As we have seen from some intensively managed environments, ecosystem service delivery can be maintained whilst natural capital continues to be eroded. Similarly a focus on only ecosystem services does not necessarily lead to the protection and conservation of biodiversity, especially as some biodiversity may contribute little to many of what might be considered the “key” ecosystem services. Consequently this theme should mention *explicitly* the need to *protect and restore* biodiversity and other components of natural capital, and to deliver the research needed to enable this. We note that natural capital is mentioned, but only with respect to its potential exploitation; the ecosystem service focus of the document implicitly assumes that the only value in natural capital is to provide services to humans. However, simple changes to the text could address this, for example “Developing a framework that helps ensure that the integrity, health and functionality of our natural capital and the key ecosystem services are maintained and where necessary restored while at the same time...”. Finally, delivering the objectives of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity could be incorporated as a high-level outcome under the ecosystem services (and natural capital) theme.

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?

No comments.

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?

Some of the existing CoEs suffered at the outset from a lack of clarity as to

what was included within the remit of a CoE, i.e. what kind of work could be done and who were legitimate parts of the policy audience. Any new CoEs need to have this information clarified from the outset. Natural capital/biodiversity and ecosystem services is an area that would certainly benefit from a CoE. There is very considerable demand for work and information in this field but the research “doers” are dispersed and often disconnected from the policy environment (being based, for example, in HEIs). Biodiversity has been a cross-cutting theme in previous Strategic Research Programmes but these cross-cutting themes were not well integrated into the research programme structures and really had limited impact. In the current Programme, biodiversity and ecosystem service research is spread across multiple Themes and Work packages, such that synthesis and coordination seems again to be worthwhile, and a CoE would provide a mechanism to deliver this.

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?

No comments

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

No comments

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

No comments

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

No comments

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?

No comments

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?

It would seem sensible to check that the RESAS strategy addresses

evidence gaps and priorities as identified by CAMERAS (for example through their current Evidence Plans process).

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

No comments

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

No comments

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

No, research outputs are not readily available, although this is not a problem which affects only the RESAS-related research; it covers many areas where the findings of research need to be communicated to practitioners and other end users. However, there are some aspects of the current situation with respect to the RESAS research portfolio that could be improved. In particular there are no dedicated web pages for the current Strategic Research Programme (in contrast to the previous one) and these can be very important as a focal point for communication. In addition it is not simply an issue of making research outputs accessible: there can be a considerable need for translational activity and we need far better communication simply about the KE process – clarity is needed in terms of which information needs to be communicated to which target audiences, as well as the likely best mode of communication. Much of this could be improved through constructive and open dialogue but this necessitates commitment from both sides of any communication process and constraints on time are currently considerable across the board.

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

No comments