

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Yes. The three priorities are appropriate. Whether it is to support (i) policy and practice (*priority 1*) or (ii) innovation and the economy (*priority 2*) a strong and resilient scientific base (*priority 3*) is key to the development and delivery of the evidence needs and advances in knowledge required by both the policy in Government and the wider enterprise communities.

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

Yes. These enabling principles relate directly to, and underpin, the 3 strategic priorities. Maintaining National and International Capability is vitally important to supporting scientific resilience as it recognises that while research must be sensitive to the latest ideas and trends, it is still important to maintain a long-term view of research, which buffers against a focus on solely short-term or in vogue needs. Nonetheless the outcome of research whether it is long or short term should be about making a difference. In that regard ensuring that knowledge exchange between the research community and potential end-users is maximised is clearly an important principle. This has to be a two way process whereby stakeholders can influence the research agenda and conversely the research community provide outputs and outcomes that are of benefit to end-users. Equally the value added of having a resilient and stable research base is the ability to establish long term relationships which help to facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations, which can be catalytic in developing novel ideas and promote innovation.

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

The high level outcomes under each of the three themes are all appropriate towards supporting the development and delivery of policies related to the rural and environmental sectors. Inevitably some of the outcomes are relevant to more than one theme. For example 'A profitable and sustainable food and drink industry' could also be an outcome for the Health and Well being theme. The triangular and venn diagram helpfully captures the potential for overlap of the outcomes under each of the themes. Exploring these overlaps will be important to maximising the benefits arising from these high level outcomes.

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

The themes are a really useful way to capture the main reasons for the research. Namely to understand the integrative capacity, resilience and vulnerability of the natural resources at the heart of rural Scotland (Ecosystem Services), which underpins the use of land and associated natural resources for food production (Productive and Viable Land Use) leading to healthy, safe and sustainable food and diets (Health and Well-being). A key to this is the simplicity of the concept. It makes it an easy to understand why the research is being done.

The interconnected nature of the themes, which spans from soil and land use through to human diet and health is a particular strength. This builds on one of the major advances of the current RESAS programme, which has been the development of integrated cross MRP interdisciplinary research. Given these positive developments towards a more holistic and integrated approach to research by the MRPs funded by RESAS, any proposals that might seek to fragment the programme would be a backward step.

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?

Interactions with the HEIs will be mutually beneficial to the MRPs and HEIs. Thus funding mechanisms that will facilitate collaborations will help such interactions. For MRPs embedded in Universities, like the Rowett, access to RCUK funding is a great help. At the same time, RESAS could provide funding to promote collaborations specifically between the MRPs and HEIs, such as a flexible fund mentioned below.

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?

In general these seem to have worked well, although the expectation of the CoEs by Government policy makers may have been out of synchrony with the capabilities of the CoEs on some occasions. It is therefore important to ensure that the scope and remits of any CoE are made clear so that expectations are appropriately managed.

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?

Yes. The SPs were set up to strengthen engagement of the research base with industry. These are important aims. However by limiting the research in the SPs to only a sub-set of the work being undertaken within the MRPs limits the potential benefits for industry. A better approach would be not to pre-determine which research is thought to be applicable to industry. Instead it would be preferable to provide mechanisms through which all industry-relevant research can be channelled. In that regard, in the Food

and Drink area, the existence of 3 vehicles for interaction with industry, namely the Scottish Food and Health Innovation Service (SFHIS) funded by Scottish Enterprise, Interface Food and Drink funded by Scottish Funding Council, and the SP in Food and Drink funded by RESAS made the knowledge exchange unnecessarily complicated. While these 3 vehicles have distinct and important functions, any future mechanisms aiming to link investment in research with the food and drink industry should seek to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to these activities.

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 SFHIS provides a good front door for the Food and Drink industry to access research from the MRPs and HEI sectors. SFHIS should continue in providing this role, albeit without being limited to only health issues as it is currently configured. It could then act as a portal for other mechanisms of research delivery to the food and drink industry. This could include Interface Food and Drink, although this would require some re-negotiation of respective roles and responsibilities between SFHIS and Interface Food and Drink. SFHIS and Interface Food and Drink could also act as brokers for engagement between more strategic research arising from whole investment made by RESAS in its MRPs. Such an arrangement would not only streamline the interactions between the Food and Drink industry and the HEI and MRPs sectors, but it would facilitate more research sponsored by RESAS being taken up by industry.

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

Underpinning capacity is an essential element of funding to the MRPs. As it is separate from the main funding for the specific programmes of research it provides the Directors with flexibility to identify and develop new project ideas and take a few risks. The money is important for the development of new projects either at a post-doctoral research or PhD training level. In that respect it provides an important opportunity to develop the scientific talent for the future. It also provides a mechanism to explore new collaborations, most often with the HEI sector. In this sense it is a key element of the scientific resilience of the MRPs.

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

It is important that RESAS has some residual capacity to procure research for its immediate research and policy needs, which may not be covered in the longer-term strategic research programmes.

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?

The current delivery model is overly complex, which means that it is cumbersome to manage and deliver. A more simplified delivery model composed of fewer elements would increase the efficiency of delivery of the research and ensure maximum return on the investment in research by Government.

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 RESAS research strategy covers many of the areas of evidence needs identified by the CAMERAS partners, so the research undertaken by the MRPs as part of the strategy should make a significant contribution towards the delivery of the objectives of the CAMERAS partners. At the same time it is important to emphasise that RESAS's research strategy goes beyond the needs of solely the CAMERAS partners and there are other stakeholders whose research needs are being addressed (e.g. industry, farmers, nutrition and health policy makers). As a result there will be aspects of the research strategy, which will fall outside the interests of CAMERAs. Active dialogue between the CAMERAS partners would be helpful to ensure there is clear mutual understanding of the scope of work of the MRPs and the evidence needs of the CAMERAs partners. Likewise it would be equally important to ensure that a similar dialogue and understanding with other stakeholders is captured.

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

It is vitally important that there is joined up thinking between other funders and RESAS. This is particularly the case for RCUK (BBSRC, MRC and NERC) and DEFRA, where there are common research interests. There is a need to ensure that RESAS is represented on key committees in other funders and vice versa. While this happens to an extent, representation has probably become patchy of late. It is a role the Programme Advisors could take on as a stronger part of their responsibilities. From this it is likely that co-funding of some specific initiatives would result.

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

The HEIs can inject new ideas and skills to complement and add to the research capabilities available in the MRPs. Collaboration between the HEIs and the MRPs can therefore be mutually beneficial. Some form of flexible fund to facilitate such collaborations, e.g through studentships or short-term projects (3yr) would be helpful. In the last programme the SPs were a

vehicle to fund such joint collaborative projects. It would be preferable to design collaborations round areas that reflect research strength in the Universities and also to complement and expand the core work of RESAS

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

Increasingly there is a move towards open access publishing, so this should not be a problem. However, RESAS should be aware that there is cost implication in delivering this.

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

There is no ideal mechanism to capture the benefits of publicly funded research. The current system of performance management provides a useful snapshot of activity related to the research funded by RESAS over each year. Nevertheless the area that requires improvement is to ensure that the outcomes of research are realistically matched to the expectations of end-users of research (policy makers).