

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

We welcome the recognition of “support for innovation”, and essential for the economy, and generally believe the priorities remain appropriate. However, we would suggest that the strategic priorities are heavily focused on the benefits to people and sectors while only implicitly referencing the wellbeing of the environment. Given the potential for significant environmental change (IPCC report), it may be that this should be more explicit.

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

The principles are broadly in the right areas but we would suggest could be enhanced such that:

- Knowledge Exchange recognises the importance of a genuine multi-way exchange process rather than simply pushing information out to end users, and
- Instead of “maintaining” capacity we seek to expand and develop to support innovation. We would also suggest that this principle should explicitly include our skills capacity (through postgraduate training opportunities)

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

The outcomes on page 11 appear to be offered as illustration rather than a definitive list. Therefore while the outcomes appear to be broadly in the right area; we express some concern that, as expressed, there is uncertainty about scope and that individually they are strategies rather than outcomes and not measurable. It would be useful to see an outcome which explicitly recognises delivery through inter- and multi-disciplinary working.

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

The three themes are appropriate. However, some clarification/context in relation to the balance within the Health and Wellbeing theme may be necessary. At present it is unclear how much of this theme is focused on the rural environment /communities.

**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?**

The Scottish Government's Environment Biology and Agriculture Main Research Partners (MRPs) have an important role in undertaking strategic research and monitoring in conjunction with Scottish Universities. However, the impact on Scotland's global position could be further enhanced by connecting MRPs to University driven innovation by improved opportunities for co-funding and joint staff arrangements. Co-funded PhD students are supported under the current structures but are relatively transient limiting the possibilities for connectivity with the HEIs.

While there was a real distinction in the past between policy-orientated research undertaken by MRPs and underpinning basic research undertaken by HEIs, UK and EU funding agencies now require research linked to impact. For example, NERC's recent strategy is now realigning its £330m annual spend around societal needs and enabling environmental science to be at the heart of management of our planet. The multi-billion euro EU Horizon2020 funding puts innovation at its core – taking ideas from research to practice. This means that Scottish and other HEIs are undertaking applied research of direct relevance to the Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) portfolio. Better connectivity would be facilitated by opening up more of the strategic research programme to competitive and collaborative tendering from HEIs as well as MRPs.

The Scottish Government's Centres of Excellence (COEs) provide a good example of how opening up a small proportion of the SG research funding to the wider HEI base has had positive results, in terms of delivering high quality expertise to support Scottish policy development and implementation.

**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?**

We believe that the Centres of Excellence have been a positive development – with EPIC and ClimateXChange both significant success stories.

**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. Extensive experience now exists around what works and does not work well in business engagement.

**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 University of Edinburgh is one of the leading institutions in the UK at spinning out new companies, commercialising research and supporting business growth. In the University of Edinburgh, we have developed strong hubs of expertise within which businesses and excellent academic research are co-located and supported; examples include the BioQuarter, Informatics Ventures, and Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation. We are happy to share with the SG the activities and processes that underpin these successes.

Nonetheless there are issues that need to be addressed to enable more of the business community to engage with researchers and vice versa. For example few University staff connect with business. The extent to which linkage can happen also depends on the point at which business must pay full research costs. This is a particular issue for SMEs which depend on public funds from national and regional sources, in order to cover costs.

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

Yes purpose, funding repositories and skills, is clear. We would note however that a commitment to supporting continuous field observation/benchmark sites appears to be missing and is important for monitoring environmental change.

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

The University of Edinburgh has limited visibility on the effectiveness of the Contract Research Fund. Evidence on use of the Fund doesn't appear to be published.

**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 would encourage greater collaboration between MRPs and HEIs.

**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?**

No comments to add.

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

RESAS could use partnership mechanism to promote innovative work on rural topics and leverage co-funding. This would have greatest impact when specific Scottish questions would benefit from specialist expert contribution.

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

Support for research collaboration is essential. Collaboration would open up the pool of expertise engaged with RESAS priorities and enhance research excellence. For example, the Easter Bush Research Consortium (University of Edinburgh, Moredun and SRUC) have a scheme of co-partnered postgraduate training that drives coordinated research.

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

Research outputs are easily accessible. However, it is increasingly important to consider whether outputs are appropriately tailored for the audience and for the medium of communication. New social media potentially offers innovative ventures in this area.

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

It is important that the RESAS performance management systems effectively (and simply) distinguishes and recognises both pure research excellence and the effective use of research insights to support policy outcomes.