

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Yes, more or less, although I think it is important that they apply geographically throughout Scotland. Thus, for example, care needs to be taken to ensure that high quality scientific resilience is distributed geographically close to the producers it serves.

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

Yes, with the proviso that the emphasis needs to be on quality and not necessarily on quantity. Considering knowledge exchange specifically, there is danger that too much emphasis falls on the process of doing it and not enough on whether there is an optimum overall amount or capacity to be receptive. Again, distributed capacity and healthy collaboration between intellectual assets is vital to the whole strategy, and care must be taken to ensure that Scotland's intellectual assets continue to be trained, developed and attractive in an international market place. It is therefore vital that these intellectual assets are allowed to focus as far as possible on science (and as little as possible on administration).

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

I think that they are and that they are a very good articulation of what needs to be done. They are ambitious and it will be important that sufficient time is given to allow scientists to give due consideration to the trade-offs and acquire new awareness of other disciplines and aspects to deliver these outcomes.

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

I think that there is still a lot of overlap between them; for example, I would see a lot of health and wellbeing (especially mental health) as an intimate part of ecosystems services. I would see reducing food wastage as an important element of all 3, but it isn't mentioned in any. I can't offer a better structure, but I think it's important that the themes are not too constraining. Furthermore, it would be great if there could be stronger integration with research directed more specifically at human health, as all of these themes are surely relevant there.

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?

I think the critical factor here is time. The overall volume of work and the

commitment of individuals needs to be more carefully managed than currently. Unreasonable workloads affect quality badly, so by whatever means, I think it is important that existing staff concentrate on doing fewer things well, with greater personal attention to detail and less institutional pressure to pursue additional income, and streamlined processes to reduce red tape in audit and reporting.

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?

I have a vested interest in this as one of the EPIC PIs. I think each has been quite different, so it is difficult to comment beyond EPIC. I have relished my involvement in EPIC and found it very instructive and rewarding to work so closely with policy colleagues. I think that the model can be refined to some extent, but that it has been very successful.

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.

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

Some well designed, high quality knowledge exchange events would be a useful component of an alternative approach. Time needs to be dedicated to meaningful follow-up of such events...i.e. the events are just the start (and the easiest bit).

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

I think that this is difficult to comment upon without understanding the details, but not supporting the basic running costs would seem inappropriate.

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

I completely understand the desire to have the flexibility to fund short term policy led projects and I think that these are attractive pieces of work to deliver. However, at least from the perspective of a PI in an HEI, they are almost impossible to respond to, purely through lack of uncommitted time either at a personal level or at a level of other research staff on site. Such short term contracts are impractical, for a number of reasons, for which to recruit additional staff. Thus, the concept of a 'standing reserve capacity', with an agreed programme of work as 'business as usual', but with the flexibility to prioritise new requests over that, seems to me to be a much

more workable solution in principle.

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?

I am not sure that I can see how, without extensive negotiation with senior management of contractors to establish sensible workload models for their staff.

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?

I think it's difficult to comment on that from an HEI. I think that the coordination and cohesion objectives of the CAMERAS partnership are immensely important, but I don't feel very integrated into that.

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

No specific suggestions.

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

I think much of what I have written above is relevant here:

- Securing a defined, sensible proportion of PI's time would be very useful.
- Providing funding that supports attractive periods of employment for non-permanent research staff (i.e. preferably not short-term contracts), in which they can be reactive to policy needs (i.e. not necessarily focussed on one long-term research question).
- Being accommodating of the need to generate academic outputs at the same time as policy outputs.

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

I think they are, and I think a great deal of effort is dedicated to making this happen. Again, I think that quality is variable and I think that volume is not the only metric that matters here. Of course, other metrics are more difficult and perhaps more subjective evidence could be given greater weight here (although I admit that might be problematic). In this sense, from an HEI perspective, partnerships with MRPs are critical here as they currently tend to have more extensive contacts with industry. Nevertheless, the training value of the research and its outputs in HEI courses is perhaps something that is not given sufficient consideration.

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

It is very time consuming and appears to be relatively inflexible. We have tried to make it more of a continuous process internally, and it can be somewhat frustrating to transcribe this into new formats and templates for annual reporting purposes. The administrative burden associated with performance management is a substantial proportion of time spent on the programme and, whilst I fully accept the need to be accountable, any efforts to streamline the process would be very welcome and would, I believe, improve the productivity of the scientists.

I think that focus on impact of applied research is entirely appropriate and laudable and I think that a much greater proportion of all research should be judged in this way. My minor concern is that I am not yet convinced that there are suitable objective metrics to evidence this properly. Perhaps presentations and/or interviews would be a useful component?