

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Yes, although some of the growth sectors identified in The Government Economic Strategy extend beyond a rural economy. Support for inter-disciplinary as well as multi-disciplinary research would be helpful.

Recognising the focus on scientific excellence and resilience we would nonetheless welcome some exploration of inter-disciplinary working between the natural, physical and social sciences and the humanities/arts. We would suggest that there may insights to be gained here in collaborative techniques and disciplines and (public) engagement which could make positive contributions to various themes in the SRP particularly Food, Land and People, as well as developing different 'ways of seeing' and different 'ways of thinking'.

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

Yes, they set the right tone and pick up on some of the comments in the response to question 1 above. We note the inclusion of 'the scientific community' in KE end users. However we suggest that there are likely to be valuable and innovative contributions to the research programme itself from other research providers [ORPs and HEIs] working alongside the MRPs. In any event we would welcome the sharing of physical and intellectual assets with as broad a constituency as possible, not just within the science base.

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

Clear enough albeit the outcomes appear to emphasise production over consumption.

Additionally the focus appears to be on waste management without any apparent recognition of reduced consumption or reuse/symbiosis that are major themes in the development of the circular economy that has emerged from a zero waste philosophy.

Need something that links rural and urban communities around not just the 6 cities but also the regional 'lifeline' towns and their peripheries. This is an important underpinning for the realisation of the Government's

economic strategy.

Further we note that while two (growth) sectors are called out explicitly [Food & Drink and Energy] and one implicitly [Life Sciences], Sustainable Tourism is not mentioned.

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

The relationship between and across the themes is not clear. Perhaps the graphic is an attempt to elaborate.

What do the set intersections in Figure 1 actually mean over and above a symbolic recognition that there are 'effective interface areas'?

What for example is the relationship between Health & Well-being and Ecosystem Services? Is it the inter-dependence on outcomes? There is a clear inter-dependency between 'innovative and competitive rural economy' and 'resilient communities' but is it more than this (or less)?

Indeed there are many co-benefits provided by Cultural Services that are crucial for Health and Well-being but these are not apparent at all.

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?

One approach may be to adopt the commissioning model employed by European Structural Funds and increasingly by the cultural sector. The MRPs become hubs for strategic partnerships with some of their funding available for commissioning specific work or available for competitive tendering.

A gap analysis of capability and capacity and the commissioning of specific projects to address those gaps would provide an opportunity for delivery to be provided by HEIs and other research providers.

For example, one apparent gap would be in the role of transport in resilient communities [health and well-being] and supply chains [health and well-being, land use]. There is considerable expertise at Strathclyde to address this particular gap.

Given the focus on Health and Well-being, it is surprising that strategic partnerships with Health Boards are not included in the same way that strategic partnerships with Food & Drink are. Equally, the role of the aesthetic [and ethics] in Health and Well-Being suggests that Schools of Art & Design and the Humanities Departments at HEIs be included as collaborative partners. Design in particular is important in the reduction of waste and product innovation.

Question 6: What are your views on the performance and operation of the CoEs to date, are there any additional areas that would benefit from such support?

Evidence-based policy is welcomed and the CoE approach fits that remit well.

There is a need though to fund short term research in addition to call down advice, linking that research more with the SRP MRPs as peers, which is to say CoEs should be able to initiate an engagement with MRPs as well as vice versa.

Post-docs with a pure academic career objective find engagement with policy and responding to information requests based on less than complete information difficult. This introduces some challenges in recruitment and retention that needs consideration in the CoE design.

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. In general any partnerships that emerge from this exercise should be broader though representing all of the GES growth sectors not simply Food & Drink and Animal Science.

As ever, the detail of the 'alternative mechanisms' will be the arbiter of success of any replacement model.

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

There may be some insights in the current Horizon 2020 funding model that requires the involvement of at least one commercial entity [SME] in any research programme. There may also be insights - positive and negative - in the way that previous programmes such as Alvey and Esprit were designed and executed

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

The purpose is clear and valuable.

There is potential for overlap between the advisory role and the analytical work that supports it in Underpinning Capacity and the similar role provide by the CoEs. It would be helpful to delineate their respective terms of reference.

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

Not familiar enough with the Contract Research Fund to comment.

It would appear though that there is a potential overlap here too with the remit of the CoEs that needs careful delineation.

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?

Not familiar enough with the Contract Research Fund to comment.

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?

None

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

None

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

See response to Question 5 above

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

No. We would suggest that few non-scientists are aware that the research programmes exist or the MRPs for that matter. The National Indicator on Knowledge Exchange from University research is down. The on-going focus on 'impact' is testament to the need for better engagement.

Public engagement in the three proposed strategic research themes (and the two programmes before them) is crucial but remains a key challenge.

The appointment of someone with specific responsibility for the public understanding of RAE might be one way to address this issue. Public Engagement is covered to some extent by the Office of the Chief Science Advisor but with a relatively small budget. The Low Carbon Scotland : Public Engagement first published in 2010 has not been updated.

Another approach may be a broader view of inter-disciplinary research and

the need to bring in other academic and perhaps even non-academic disciplines.

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

We are unaware of either the metrics or what they say about the performance of the SRP. It is not obvious whether this is even in the public domain.

We note though that the stated objective of the SRP [§2.2] is to support the achievement of the Government's single purpose and the wider objective set out in the National Performance Framework. There are 20 National Indicators that are relevant to the National Outcomes identified in §2.2. The trend in 75% of these is either flat [no change] or downward. From this perspective there is clearly room for improvement, presumably including the contribution that the SRP makes to overall performance nationally. It would be interesting to see how this compares with the SRP performance assessment.