

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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

Yes

The strategic principles remain relevant but care must be exercised when funding multidisciplinary research. Allowing imaginative proposals to emerge from naturally occurring collaborations has a much greater likelihood of success than planned top-down attempts to manage research.

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

Yes

The enabling principles represent a sound basis for underpinning research activity but the need for focus and high quality science has to be the essential criteria in funding decisions. Dissemination of partial knowledge or poorly interpreted science carries inherent dangers. The importance of maintaining capacity is essential and our history of sustained investment is a major factor in Scotland's very strong position in the rural and animal science sector. It is all too easy to threaten or dilute our long term provision by short sighted cost saving measures such as mergers, closures or overall contraction of the science base.

The current mixed provision offered by both the MRPs and the HEIs is essential in order to maintain national and international capacity. Each has their strengths with regard to responding to short and long term threats but our ability to respond to major challenges would be greatly diminished if the MRPs weakened.

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

Yes

The outcomes are clear but taken together the coverage is very broad and there is no clear prioritisation indicated.

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

Yes

The three broad themes are a reasonable approach.

**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?**

Whilst supporting the approach for 2016-2021 section 8.2 makes some criticisms relating to compartmentalisation. However the evidence base for

reduced effectiveness is not provided.

The ongoing investment into the MRPs are fully support as they have served Scotland well over many years; such assets are hard won but easily lost or diminished. Continued investment of independent MRPs is viewed as essential to maintain Scotland's current preminent position in the sector.

Strong collaboration between MRPs and HEIs can yield important benefits due to naturally occurring research synergies. This is most fruitful when working together as equal partners. In delivering their objectives the MRPs have been successful through their independence, clear sighted leadership and agility in in responding to funding initiatives. This can only be achieved and sustained through underpinning funding.

It is difficult to encourage further collaboration unless additional funding is made available, redirecting existing funding inevitably damages current objectives and this needs to be balanced against the perceived added value of more proscribed approaches. In order to encourage collaborative efforts funding joint positions between MRPs and HEIs in priority areas could be considered. Equal access to RCUK funding across the MRPs would enhance collaboration as well as the quality and impact of outputs.

**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?**

Although there is always room for improvement the CoEs appear to have been successful and have the potential to deliver more.

**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?**

In general yes. SPs were a missed opportunity. The animal science one was put together on the back of a proposed research pooling exercise in animal science. MRP buy in was unclear, as funding was diced very finely. Seemed rather badly set up in very short time frame. Annex B suggests that research under SPs should be of special relevance to business sectors but this is not how they were set up. Funding might be better utilised for key joint positions.

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

This is already done well by some MRPs and HEIs.

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

Without being aware of all details it is essential that appropriate infrastructure is maintained. Primary data accumulated through main SG funding streams including those underpinning capacity should be made readily available to other researchers and a wider group of stakeholders. Certain institutes remain over-protective of raw data derived from hypothecated funding.

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

No

**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 proposed structure seems reasonable. However an important improvement here would be to simplify funding streams so that individual effort in MRPs is not chopped into multiple bits (e.g. on SPASE there are individuals with 2% or 3% of their time allocated to a project).

**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 specific suggestions.

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

The MRPs have been very successful at leveraging additional funding on the back of core SG funding. However not to have equal access to BBSRC funding handicaps some MRPs. The SG might think about increasing the pot of funding that permits MRPs to apply for BBSRC funding? Collaboration is not encouraged when they can only apply as sub-contractors to a University and BBSRC have very strict conditions limiting the role and impact of a sub-contractor.

With respect to the other comments, it is not likely that SG could fund MRPs in the same way as BBSRC Institutes as the latter receive a much higher proportion of their total expenditure from their primary funder.

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

The simplest and most direct method of achieving this aim is to release additional response mode funding specifically supporting collaborative applications from HEIs and MRPs. More funding could be made available for joint posts, joint PhDs, joint facilities.

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

Yes. Moredun's longstanding policy of mounting road shows and accessible publications are a good example effective knowledge exchange with the farming community. There are examples of excellent practical research that has become standard practice on well managed farms.

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

Whilst all parties support excellence in research the current focus in near market impact has the hidden disadvantage of underfunding high quality basic research that ultimately drives innovation and science based policy.