

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD  
25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2020 AT 2:00PM AT ECCI, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

**PRESENT:**

Professor Donald MacRae (Chair), Dr Siobhán Jordan, Dr Stuart Fancey, Dr Colin Cooper, Marc Crothall, Liz Connolly, Stuart Bain, Johnny Mone

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli (Guest Speaker)  
John MacKenzie (HIE), Shelley Breckenridge, Howell Davies, Heather Rattray and Laura Goodfellow (Interface).

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair opened the meeting and explained the agenda to the Board.

**2. APOLOGIES**

The Chair noted the following apologies from Board members: Professor Andrea Nolan, Steven Hutcheon, Jim Watson, Brian Brown, Jo Bisset, Dr George Baxter, Yekemi Otaru, Gary Bannon, Lorraine Thomson and Jane Findlay.

**3. GUEST SPEAKER – PROFESSOR SIR ANTON MUSCATELLI, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW AND MUSCATELLI REPORT [PAPER 3 and Presentation]**

The Chair welcomed the guest speaker Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli from the University of Glasgow and invited him to present his recent report on how Scotland's universities can improve their engagement with industry and boost their contribution to economic growth.

Key points from the presentation were as follows:

- The report, commissioned by Scottish Government was of interest to four Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers drawn from Education and Skills, Finance, Economy and Further Education, Higher Education and Science.
- The views included in the report were personal supported by evidence from a Scottish Government analytical services economist seconded to work on the project. A formal response from Scottish Government is anticipated in due course.
- The report had focused on the research and innovation interface between universities and businesses. However, skills are one of the most important elements of how research is translated into innovation.
- The recommendations cover three broad areas – national mission, focus and the environment.

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli emphasised some points of relevance for the Interface service including:

- The importance of collaboration, collaboration and collaboration – to foster people to people links.
- The importance of understanding the value of the public pound invested in R&D – what evidence do we have of spill over effects including productivity, increase in Scottish tax base and longer-term economic growth?
- Encouraging movement of people (staff and students) between HE and industry, and vice-versa.

A wide-ranging discussion on the report and the learnings for Interface followed. Key points included

- The need for greater co-ordination across all stakeholders (Universities, SFC, Enterprise Agencies) when preparing applications for significant funding so that there is no “wasted energy” e.g. *Strength in Place* calls. SFC could facilitate the engagement of a wider range of SMEs through greater involvement of Interface in the Phase 2 funding applications.
- Greater consideration on how joined up approaches between HE and FE could be established to support businesses. A case example was how Further Education Colleges in Glasgow deliver specialised apprenticeships for quantum and nanotechnology companies in collaboration with University led research.
- Innovation can be defined as “the commercialisation of invention” and the translation undertaken by Interface linking businesses to academia was central to connecting research to productivity.
- The ability to apply research to address common challenges of SME intensive sectors such as tourism can support the national mission - Scotland as a world leading destination.
- The importance in reaching and persuading the “long tail” of SMEs that traditionally may not engage with HEIs for innovation / service improvements. Could this be through greater engagement with professional services? (i.e. banks, accountants, business advisors).
- The key focus on creating the right environment and importance of place – locally, regionally and nationally.

The Chair thanked Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli for his informative presentation and discussion.

#### **4. ORAL UPDATES**

Dr Siobhan Jordan (SJ) provided updates on the Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards (SKEA) which will be held on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020. She noted that through the advocacy of Marc Crothall a small amount of funding had been approved by the Scottish Government policy team to take forward support for clusters of tourism businesses in line with the new tourism strategy.

SJ outlined that Interface had been one of the initial partners to be onboarded to the Single Digital Entry Point (SEP) <https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/> which was formally launched in January 2020. She noted that the Interface team continued to engage with the South of Scotland economic partnership (SoSEP) as it transitioned to the new agency South of Scotland Enterprise. The team had presented to the SoSEP Executive group on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020 which had generated a real interest in case studies and highlighted what more Interface could undertake to support company led innovation in the region.

#### **5. MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING (PAPER 1)**

The Board agreed that the minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the discussions held on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019. They noted progress against the actions as outlined in the table (Appendix 1).

#### **6. PROGRESS REPORT INCLUDING Q1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION REPORT FOR FUNDERS (PAPER 2)**

The Board acknowledged the progress by the team in the last three months to deliver against the targets as outlined in Paper 2. They noted the higher rate of conversion from pre-enquiries to outcomes (expertise searches, discussions and collaborative projects) for the quarter which was very encouraging.

## **7. DELIVERING IMPACTS FROM COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS BROKERED BY INTERFACE (PAPER 4)**

Shelley Breckenridge (SB) introduced Paper 4 which mapped the collaboration between HAS Technology Group Ltd and Edinburgh Napier University using the logic diagram developed by Scottish Government to support the development of an evidence framework for the impact of investments in academic research and knowledge exchange.

The Board noted for each company – academic partnership delivers varying outputs and impacts, and the timescales can vary ~2-10 years. They agreed that the case examples provided clear diagrams of the contributions from Interface brokerage acknowledging that although not all the impacts could be directly attributed to Interface engagement, it had been central to enabling the initial R&D partnership.

Dr Stuart Fancey (SF) suggested that a short time-lapse video or film would help to animate the collaborative journey and inspire other businesses to understand the benefits of accessing support from HE/FE through Interface.

**ACTION: Explore creating a short time lapse film demonstrating a collaborative journey** HR

## **8. CATEGORISATION OF COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS (PAPER 5)**

Laura Goodfellow (LG) introduced Paper 5 which summarised extensive analysis of the impacts emerging from the three groupings of collaborative projects as outlined in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF).

The Board discussion focused on the proposed recommendation to change the balance of collaborative projects across the three category segments as originally set out in the agreed MEF in August 2018. The proposal included in Paper 5 recommended a more staggered reduction in the “*Support levered from partner HEI*” category to enable the team to deliver the total number of agreed collaborative projects. This flexibility would be in line with the reality of HEI capability and overall capacity to respond to industry demand observed over the last 18 months.

The Board noted the focus on developing metaskills and enhancing employability by both businesses and universities which can be enabled by student work-based learning projects and post-graduate students. Stuart Bain noted the importance of student work-based learning projects and post-graduate students to scaling his businesses and attracting £10m of private sector investment. Access to students can apply creative thinking and real science to solve technical problems and so providing the fastest route to delivering impacts for businesses. John Mackenzie (JMack) noted the importance of both KTP associates and industry sponsored PhD students in de-risking investment in R&D by companies.

JMack agreed with the recommendation of not changing the overall MEF targets and acknowledged the different levels of capabilities that could be accessed via HEIs (e.g. postgraduate versus undergraduate students).

SF noted the ultimate goal was to encourage companies to invest their own funding in R&D without having to rely on public sector grant funding. Tracking the impacts emerging from “people/skills” in the success of the business was very helpful and demonstrated how businesses were investing in their own futures to sustain relationships with HEIs.

He suggested that the three funders (SFC, SE and HIE) would meet to discuss the recommendation outlined in Paper 5 and communicate their decision to the Board following the meeting. No further information was required from the Interface team in advance of this meeting.

**Action: Funders to meet to discuss recommendations in Paper 5 and communicate outcome to Board.**

## **9. AOB**

JMacK commended the Interface team in Highlands and Islands for increasing the overall number of funded KTP projects in the region and their success in collaborating with the local KTN advisors.

SJ noted the 15-year anniversary of founding Interface in August 2020 and the proposed marketing campaign "*15 faces of Interface*" that would recognise those who had been instrumental in supporting the team over the past 15 years.

As there were no further items to discuss the Chair thanked everyone for attending.

## **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

26th May 2020 - 2:00 - 4:00pm    Cuillin Room, Charles Stewart House, 9-16 Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1HT.