

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD
8th FEBRUARY 2018 AT 2:00PM AT EDINBURGH CENTRE FOR CARBON INNOVATION

PRESENT:

Professor Andrea Nolan (Chair), Alistair Cameron, Dr Siobhán Jordan, Dr Stuart Fancey, Professor Donald MacRae, Lynn Mann, Gary Bannon, Donna Chisholm, George Baxter, John Rogers, Jim Watson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Suzanne Dawson, Interface; Laura Goodfellow, Interface; Laura Hegarty, Interface (minutes).

1. APOLOGIES

Jo Bisset, Marc Crothall, Bill McBride

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair opened the meeting and explained the agenda to the Board. She noted the apologies as above.

3. ORAL UPDATES

Professor Andrea Nolan updated the Board that a process of open recruitment for at least four new Board members will commence in the next few weeks. Following a skills matrix review of current members, identified gaps included knowledge and experience of Further Education Colleges, digital marketing, Professional services and SME end-users of Interface.

All Board members were encouraged to consider potential Board members and promote the open recruitment weblink when it was made available.

Dr Siobhán Jordan updated the Board on the following:

- Scottish Knowledge Exchange awards on 22nd Feb 2018. Around 300 delegates were expected along with Mr. Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy and Dr Mike Cantlay, Chair of SFC. There had been considerable interest in the new category of Social and Environmental impact. The event would be preceded by a joint working session of members of the Universities Scotland Research and Commercialisation Directors group, Enterprise agencies, SFC and Scottish Government on the opportunities for industrial strategy grand challenges in the context of the University Innovation Fund.
- Extensive work is underway by the team to ensure that Interface is compliant with the new GDPR regulations coming into force in May 2018.
- There have been a series of ongoing requests from Colleges to provide intensive support for innovation voucher proposals which has led to several applications in the pipeline.

4. MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING (PAPER 1)

The Board agreed that the minutes (Paper 1) were a true and accurate reflection of the discussions held on 7th November 2017. They noted the progress of the actions on the tracker and that all were now completed.

LM noted that the National Council for Rural Advisors¹ were undertaking a series of stakeholder engagement workshops across rural Scotland. She would welcome input from the Interface team in relation to potential companies that could be invited in specific regions including Dingwall, Orkney, Oban, Kilmarnock and Dumfries.

Action LM/LG

5. UPDATE ON INTERFACE FIVE YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

SJ updated the Board on progress since the last meeting on 7th November 2017 and outlined the considerable consultation that had taken place with key stakeholders which had led to a revised business plan being submitted to funders in mid-December.

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Rural/NationalCouncilofRuralAdvisers>

SF noted that following the clarity around Scottish Government budgets, considerable discussion had taken place between SFC, SE and HIE in relation to the proposal.

The Board noted the following updates from SFC, SE and HIE: -

- the ambitious plans for expansion of the Interface service as outlined in the five-year business plan were not affordable
- the Sector engagement pilot would be funded for the third year of the current pilot with a review in late 2018/early 2019 to determine outcomes and impacts to inform future direction
- Core funding would be maintained in line with current commitments
- Internal approvals of the funding commitment would be concluded by SFC, SE and HIE by end of March 2018 so that the outcome can be communicated to all staff

A sub-group of the Board would be convened in the next few weeks to determine the optimal KPIs and objectives for delivery of the Interface service in the next five years. The discussion would consider how to balance ambition against what can be delivered within the current funding envelope and existing level of resources.

Action: AN, DMacR, JR and AC all agreed to join the sub-group.

Action: SJ and Gary B to consider current cashflow status for Interface in line with decisions being concluded by March 2018 for the longer-term funding

5. DELIVERING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN BUSINESSES AND ACADEMIA (PAPER 2)

SJ introduced Paper 2 to the Board which had arisen from the discussions at the meeting in August 2017 following the BiGGAR Economics Ltd presentation. Several companies interviewed during the review noted that Interface had been a catalyst for deep and long-lasting relationships.

The Board noted that

- the Interface team may not be aware of the extent of the lasting partnerships that result from initial brokerage
- Interface does not exist in isolation and to deliver enhanced innovation the collective resources within the Scottish ecosystem need to be further streamlined
- Additional outcomes facilitated by Interface to deliver long term relationships are really important for HEIs
- The human dimension and importance of having people “on the ground” that are visible to businesses to build and develop trusted relationships
- Interface team stimulate “thinking outside the box” by companies to drive innovation and additional outcomes.

They concluded that a balanced approach between Priorities 1 and 2 as articulated in the business plan was necessary so that both breadth and depth of academic – business relationships could be delivered.

6. PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM EKOS AND BIGGAR REVIEWS (PAPER 3)

LG and SD introduced this paper outlining progress from the two recent evaluations.

The Board in noting progress highlighted how the skills and competencies within the Interface team could help facilitate collaborative groups in Scotland to respond to forthcoming Industrial Strategy Grand Challenge calls from Innovate UK.

The Board noted the ongoing challenges in relation to the availability of funding products for supporting collaborative groups of academics and businesses. They concluded that there is a limit to how far products aimed at individual businesses e.g. Innovation Vouchers could be flexed so as not to distort the overall aims of particular schemes. In conclusion they requested an evidence-based paper outlining the current challenges and recommendations for collaborative group funding products.

Action SD

7. PROGRESS UPDATE (PAPER 4)

The Board noted the progress update as outlined in Paper 4. Progress against Business engagement KPIs was ahead when compared to same period in AY2016-17. The sector engagement KPIs were behind due to the challenges on funding multi-party collaborations as noted in the previous discussion.

8. AOB

AN invited the Board to submit topics for discussion at future meetings. DMacR suggested that Horizon scanning to be added to future agendas.

Action ALL

In conclusion, AN noted that this was Alistair Cameron's last meeting and thanked him for this contribution to the Board over the last three years.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 8th May 2018 2-4pm, Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation.

APPENDIX ONE ACTION TRACKER [as of 8th February 2018]

No.	Date	Agenda Item	Action Agreed	Outcome	Result	Responsible
1	31 st August 2017	INDEPENDENT REVIEWS	Consider what features of University interactions occur most commonly to deliver lasting partnerships with businesses (from BiGGAR economics review and other studies)	Ongoing	Limited data from BiGGAR interviews. Paper on key attributes being prepared for Board meeting in Feb 2018	Executive
2	7 th Nov 2017	RISK REGISTER	Present risk register diagrammatically to demonstrate the reduction in risks through the mitigating actions	Ongoing	See below	Executive
3	7 th Nov 2017	PROGRESS UPDATE	Include dashboard of referrals in future progress reports	Ongoing	See Paper 3	Executive
4	8th Feb 2018	MINUTES AND ACTION POINTS	Welcome input from the Interface team in relation to potential companies that could be invited in specific regions including Dingwall, Orkney, Oban, Kilmarnock and Dumfries.			Executive
5	8th Feb 2018	PROGRESS ON EKOS AND BIGGAR REVIEWS	Produce an evidence-based paper outlining the current challenges and recommendations for collaborative group funding products			Executive
6	8th Feb 2018	AOB	Submit topics for discussion at future meetings			Board