

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD
23rd MAY 2017 AT 2:00PM AT EDINBURGH CENTRE FOR CARBON INNOVATION**

PRESENT:

Professor Pete Downes (Chair), Alistair Cameron, Jo Bisset, Donna Chisholm, Marc Crothall, Dr. Siobhán Jordan, Dr. Stuart Fancey, Prof Donald MacRae, Jim Watson, and Dr. George Baxter

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

1 APOLOGIES

Andrew Bissell, Professor Andrea Nolan, Dr. John Rogers, Lynn Mann, Bill McBride, Gary Bannon

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

3. ORAL UPDATES

Dr Siobhán Jordan updated the Board on the following:

- The **Scottish Knowledge Exchange awards** were held on 21st February 2017. They were well received by all those attending. Planning has already commenced for the 2018 event, with a working group drawn from stakeholders including Universities Scotland. RBS have confirmed their ongoing commitment to the event.
- A visit by **Minister for Further & Higher education, Ms. Shirley Anne Somerville** to Interface offices on 2nd May provided a great opportunity for her to hear from Edinburgh based Bright Red Publishing who are collaborating with Edinburgh Napier University brokered by Interface. A wide ranging discussion was held and included: impacts, inclusion (more children accessing education), cross disciplinary collaborations: [publishing company accessing digital technologies and gaming research] and the role of academia/colleges in supporting business led R&D.
- **Ongoing work to support innovation agenda in Colleges** including promotion of Innovation Vouchers, access to specialist facilities and industry sector engagement.
- **Sector engagement funding** has informally been confirmed for year 2 of pilot by SFC. In line with new food and drink strategy which was launched by the First Minister in March 2017, we are organising a workshop with Scotland food and drink for academics to discuss how their research can support the key innovation priorities for the industry. The workshop has been over-subscribed within 2 days of promotion highlighting the keen interest by academia in supporting this sector.
- Considerable resources are being expended to support ongoing developments including University Innovation Fund outcomes, Innovation Scotland Forum action plan (due to be completed by July 2017 and the two external evaluations.
- In line with our digital strategy, a new **CRM system** will support the Interface team to undertake their roles more efficiently and effectively. Phase One implementation is underway and includes migration of existing CRM data to the new system. Phase Two, post August, will seek to develop additional tools for enhanced digital engagement with external partners.

Professor Pete Downes provided the following updates:

- **Growing value Scotland legacy** held the first meeting of its advisory group to prioritise the areas of focus:
 - i. The role of fundamental research in disruptive innovation
 - ii. Stimulate genuine step change from businesses with respect to innovation
 - iii. Role of arts, humanities and social sciences in supporting innovation

- **Enterprise & Skills review** is progressing with a recognition that there needs to be smooth connectivity of all actors in the innovation system. The Board acknowledged the importance of partnership working.
- **Strategic meeting with Scottish Funding Council** which included discussion on Interface's support to Colleges.

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 2nd February 2017.

The action tracker [Appendix One] was reviewed with the following updates: -

- The Board noted that discussions were still ongoing with respect to the Edinburgh City Deal and a decision is unlikely until after the UK General election.
- Jim Watson confirmed the ongoing commitment from Scottish Enterprise for referrals to Interface from across the organisation.

5. TEN-YEAR VISION FOR INTERFACE (PAPER 2)

The Board noted Paper 2 which provided an introduction to a lengthy discussion. Dr. Stuart Fancey outlined the context and rationale for the Board to consider Interface's ten-year ambition in light of a changing landscape.

The Board held a wide-ranging discussion on the key attributes of Interface and the strategic rationale for ongoing intervention in this area.

The **six key points** are summarised as follows

- Important to maintain the core purpose of Interface- impartial facilitation of productive partnerships between industry and academia.
- Interface plays a key role in stimulating and uncovering latent demand for innovation through its support for SMEs. This requires considerable effort to persuade companies to invest time and resources for innovation.
- Interface brokerage enables more businesses to take their first step in developing innovative products, processes and services. This helps to de-risk early stage industry led concepts through R&D partnerships with Universities and Colleges.
- Interface is important and viewed as a valued partner to Scottish Universities and Colleges in identifying potentially high value industry collaborators through translating the needs of businesses into opportunities for academic groups.
- Partnership approaches, working with SE, HIE, Business Gateway and other public and private sector organisations are important to enable collective outcomes and impacts. The role of Interface is one aspect of an overall business journey.
- In looking ahead to the next ten years, Interface can build on its key attributes of reputation, trust and knowledge to scale exponentially.

The Board acknowledged the key attributes of Interface in growing the ambition which include: -

- Strong brand as the natural "go to place" for identifying capability and capacity within academia
- Nimbleness and speed of response
- Established trust with a range of customers - both businesses and academia

- Extensive knowledge of the resources, expertise and facilities within the wide range of Universities and Research Institutes
- Ability to interpret the complex business – university landscape with multiple funders and support organisations and signpost quickly to other support organisations as and when required. See Appendix Two {Figure 10 Research and Innovation map – 2015 Dowling report¹}

In looking ahead to the next ten years, the Board highlighted

- The need for Interface to remain dynamic, agile and responsive to navigate changes in the Innovation landscape that may emerge.
- The desire that latent demand for Interface services to support innovation is easier to unleash in businesses. Enable the ambition that innovation and working with academia is “hardwired” into businesses like Corporate social responsibility or having a risk register.
- Need to support more businesses facilitating them to undertake business led R&D, but ensuring that the front-end triaging / filtering processes work effectively.
- The key role in fostering long term relationships via higher level/ deeper engagement with individual Scottish businesses. This will support company scale through innovation supported by partnerships with academia drawing on learning to date from the Interface Highlands and Islands Enhanced team.
- Proactively interpreting and promoting strategic funding opportunities to brokered business – academic partnerships to ensure escalation to impactful partnerships e.g. KTPs, Impact Accelerator funding, Innovate UK funding.
- Facilitate clusters of companies and academics to collaborate on impactful R&D programmes that support the collective ambition of key industry sectors e.g. Tourism, food and drink
- Foresight disruptive technologies, knowledge and expertise within Universities and Research Institutions that will impact businesses.
- Facilitate greater involvement of Universities and Research Institutions in supporting projects of scale e.g. supply chain innovation and public sector innovation challenges.
- The need to review how a greater number of businesses can be supported utilising the current level of Interface resources through more efficient technological processes e.g. adoption of digital platforms for 24/7 response and more front end “self-service” without diluting quality and personal service
- The role of Interface in supporting the CAN DO Innovation Action plan for Scotland² and the plans for digital transformation. There was an acknowledgement that Interface should have a seat around the table to share experiences of supporting SMEs in the past ten years.
- Acknowledgement that
 - both supply [Universities, research institutes and colleges] and demand [individual and groups of businesses] all have different needs
 - if there is exponential growth in the number of businesses supported by Interface this will have knock-on effects on other parts of the landscape e.g. ability of Universities and Colleges to service demand
 - requirement to continually monitor and evaluate cumulative outcomes and impacts from Interface support to businesses to demonstrate return on investment to funders

! Action: Prepare half a dozen bullet points for circulation to members of the Board which outline key points which can be shared with their various networks (Executive) – see above

! Action: Prepare business case for detailed discussion at the next Board meeting (Executive)

¹ <http://www.raeng.org.uk/policy/dowling-review>

² <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/01/5181>

6. INDEPENDENT EVALUATIONS OF IMPACT OF INTERFACE (PAPER 3)

The Board noted Paper 3 which provided a summary of the two external evaluations that are currently underway.

LG advised that the review of the economics return from Interface's business engagement and Scottish Funding Council's Innovation Voucher programme will analyse three key areas.

- Business Impacts – from collective survey data and 14 in-depth interviews with companies
- Academic Impacts – 9 in-depth interviews
- Why companies do not progress further – survey of businesses that have stalled following the translation of their requirements to a specification form

SD noted the interim findings from the evaluation of the Interface food and drink multi-party activity. She acknowledged that the final report will provide detailed recommendations to develop the sector engagement pilot.

The Board noted that the outcomes from the studies will provide an excellent platform for discussions by the Board at the next meeting in August and in particular what aspects of Interface are currently valued. In summarising the Chair highlighted that the two evaluations were not just about seeking the next round of funding but about helping to inform ongoing developments and improvements.

7. PROGRESS UPDATE (PAPER 7)

The Board noted the paper outlining operational progress from Feb 2017 – May 2017.

8. AOB

No other matters were raised and the meeting concluded at 4:00pm

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

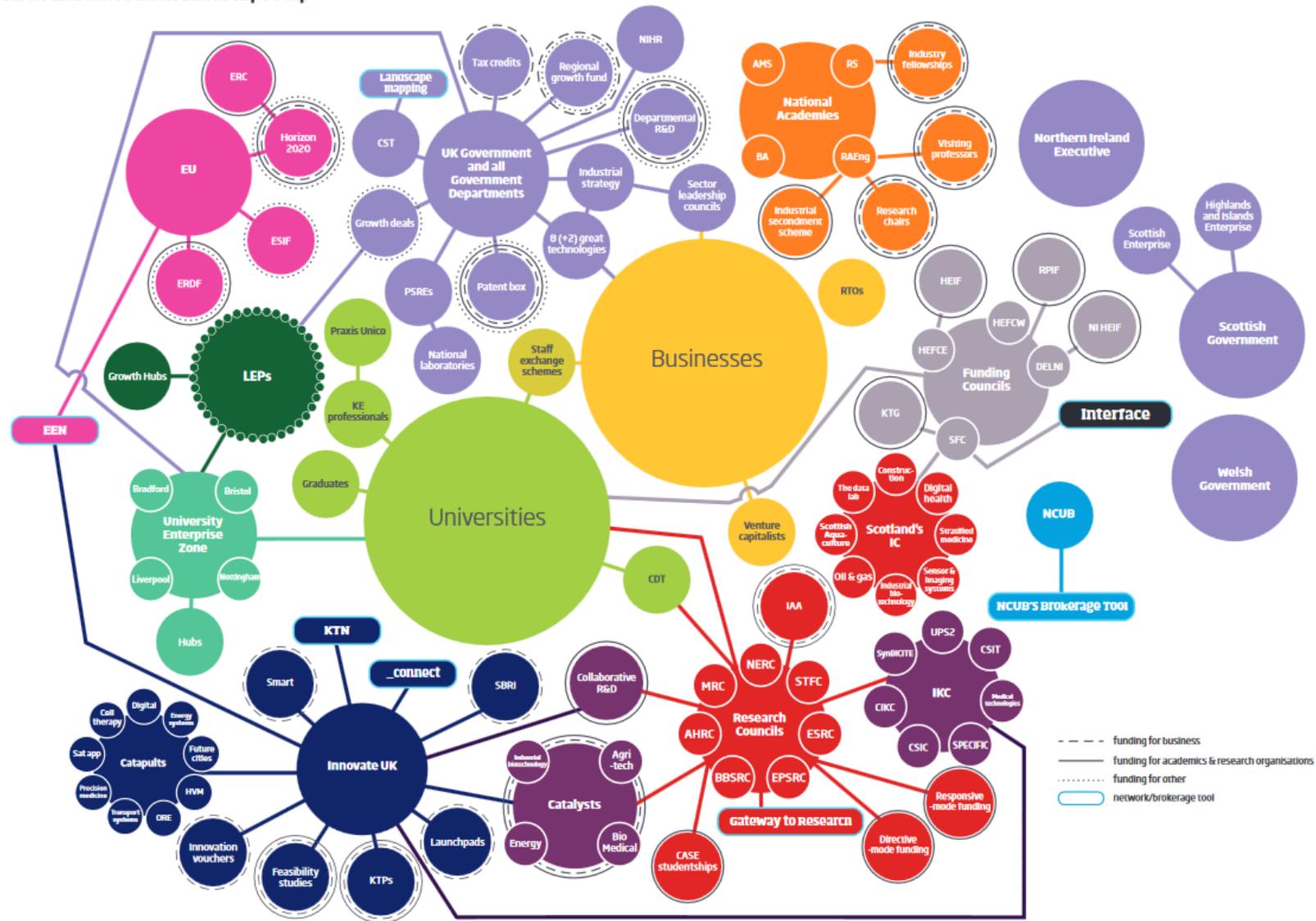
Strategic planning session 31st August 2017 3pm -8pm

APPENDIX ONE ACTION TRACKER [as of 23rd May 2017]

No.	Date	Agenda Item	Action Agreed	Outcome	Result	Responsible
1	1st November 2016	5. TRENDS ARISING FROM INTERFACE SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES	Respond to the reduced levels of referrals from dedicated innovation teams within SE at the next Board meeting	Information provided to SE	Ongoing commitment from Scottish Enterprise for referrals to Interface from across the organisation.	- Jim Watson
2	2nd February 2017	2. ORAL UPDATES	Board members were asked to forward any suggestions for the Growing Value Scotland Legacy Programme to PD	Suggestions sent	Action closed	- All
3	2nd February 2017	2. ORAL UPDATES	Share information links regarding Women's Enterprise Scotland for Growing Value Scotland Legacy Programme		Action closed	- Lynn Mann
4	2nd February 2017	4. INTERFACE DIGITAL STRATEGY (PAPER 2)	Develop a monitoring framework to measure impacts and outcomes emerging from digital activities	Update provided at May meeting in terms of monitoring	Action closed	- Siobhán Jordan
5	2nd February 2017	5. KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH UNIVERSITIES / RESEARCH INSTITUTION PARTNERS (PAPER 3)	Share experiences of pooled innovation vouchers	Information shared which was very helpful	Action closed	- Suzanne Dawson - George Baxter
6	2nd February 2017	5. KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH UNIVERSITIES / RESEARCH INSTITUTION PARTNERS (PAPER 3)	Work with each of the HEIs on the individual actions which emerged from the meetings	Update provided at May meeting	Action closed	- Laura Goodfellow
7	2nd February 2017	8. CITY DEALS AND INNOVATION – IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERFACE (PAPER 5)	Ensure that Interface is included in the early stages of defining City Deal operational processes	Ongoing		- All
8	2nd February 2017	8. CITY DEALS AND INNOVATION – IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERFACE (PAPER 5)	Forward details of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal to PD		Action closed	- Donna Chisholm
9	2nd February 2017	8. CITY DEALS AND INNOVATION – IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERFACE (PAPER 5)	Send details of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal to PD when it becomes available in March 2017	Ongoing	Deal not yet finalised	- George Baxter

APPENDIX TWO

Figure 10
Research and Innovation Landscape Map³⁷



³⁷ Figure 10 is an attempt to capture the major organisations and funding sources, relevant to business-university collaboration, in the UK's research and innovation landscape. Due to the complexity of the landscape there will inevitably be information missing.