

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERFACE STRATEGIC BOARD
26TH November 2020 AT 2PM, HELD ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:

Professor Andrea Nolan (Chair), Professor Donald MacRae, Dr Siobhán Jordan, Johnny Mone, Dr George Baxter, Gillian Galloway, Dr Colin Cooper, Liz Connolly, Professor Russel Griggs, Jim Watson, Marc Crothall, Stuart Bain, Yekemi Otaru.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Gary Bannon (SFC), Shelley Breckenridge, Howell Davies, Heather Rattray, Nicola Brooks, Lorraine Thomson and Laura Goodfellow (Interface).

Mary Jarvie and Graeme Blackett (BiGGAR Economics Ltd) joined for item 7.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

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

2. APOLOGIES

The Chair noted apologies from the following: Dr Stuart Fancey, Brian Brown, Jo Bisset, and that Marc Crothall would leave at 3pm

3. ORAL UPDATES

Professor Andrea Nolan (AN) provided an update to the Board on the University sector which continues to deliver teaching for students, noting that the majority of research is up and running again at Edinburgh Napier University. She highlighted the continued high performance from Interface with respect to supporting businesses to collaborate with academic teams.

George Baxter (GB) highlighted that Edinburgh Innovations Ltd / University of Edinburgh were also delivering a record number of licences, disclosures and research collaborations. Research laboratories were operating at 60-70% capacity and there was a wide variety of businesses engagement; many brokered by the Interface team.

Donald MacRae (DMacR) questioned the origins of the significant and sustained demand from businesses. Laura Goodfellow (LG) noted the proactivity undertaken by all team members to inspire new businesses alongside deeper engagement with businesses already known to Interface. Yekemi Otaru (YO) agreed that businesses have been focusing on where they can get support. Virtual events have provided an excellent way to reach many businesses. She noted that persistence and consistency around messaging was key as individuals need to hear and see a brand 19 times before taking action.

Jim Watson (JW) highlighted that there was no shortage of demand for innovation at this time; businesses have no choice but to innovate. However, in parallel a significant amount of people resource across agencies had been diverted to enable allocation of business support grants. Stuart Bain (SB) noted that Interface's unique selling points are knowledge, relationships, efficiency and independence. He also questioned online efficiencies versus the effectiveness of human interaction.

Dr. Siobhán Jordan (SJ) updated the Board that the team remain well and resilient notwithstanding the intense workloads. The recent Annual review and “15 faces of Interface” campaign to mark the 15 years of delivery had been well received. The ongoing development of the CRM system had delivered enhanced efficiencies and streamlined the ability to track company impacts from inception to completion of collaborative projects.

The Scottish Knowledge exchange awards 2021 are being launched in early December 2020 with the virtual awards ceremony on **21st April 2021**, coinciding with World Creativity and Innovation Day.

4. 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 20th August 2020. They noted progress against the actions as outlined in the table (Appendix 1).

5. PROGRESS REPORT INCLUDING Q1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDERS (PAPER 2)

LG introduced Paper 2 noting that operational activity in Q1 was significantly up on the previous 12 months with “collaborative projects” over target by 63%. A significant number of high value projects had been facilitated including leverage of KTPs and Innovate UK funding. The Board acknowledged the impressive results, noting that it is difficult to predict whether the level of company commitment to R&D is sustainable in the currently dynamic business environment.

Gillian Galloway (GG) requested further information regarding the emerging trends and themes from the business led challenges – for example low carbon, artificial intelligence etc to help inform Interface’s future strategy.

ACTION: Provide further breakdown of industrial sectors and themes of expertise searches and collaborative projects in H&I region compared to other regions **LT/LG**

6. SUPPORTING ECONOMIC RECOVERY – RECENT REPORTS (PAPER 3)

SJ introduced Paper 3 outlining the many recent publications that were of relevance to the innovation ecosystem in which Interface operated.

7. THE VALUE OF INTERFACE IN THE SCOTTISH ECONOMY AND ITS FUTURE ROLE (PAPER 4)

Mary Jarvie (MJ) and Graeme Blackett (GB) from BiGGAR Economics provided a short presentation to the Board to support a more in depth discussion on the strategic development of Interface by members. A copy of the presentation is appended to this document.

A wide-ranging discussion followed with Board members noting:

- GVA and jobs are important measures, but consideration needs to be given to a broader range of outputs and impacts from Interface’s support to businesses and communities.
- Between recovery from COVID-19 and Brexit, there is a need for innovation support (including that of Interface) to flex in a dynamic environment. Therefore, continuing to review where priorities should lie in the next twelve months will be necessary.
- The reports re-emphasise how successful the Interface service is in delivering impact for businesses and provides compelling evidence that scale up is required.

- The BiGGAR team clarified that the economic benefits realised are evident across all aspects of Interface’s activity and not from a small sample of projects. The impacts were distributed geographically across Scotland, including rural and urban settings. There are impacts across the key growth sectors identified by Scottish Government.

FOR INFORMATION (as recommended by RG) – video of the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon at the TED Summit in Edinburgh outlining a focus on policies that promote wellbeing, and not just economic growth [The First Minister's TED Talk - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/First-Minister-Talk-2020-09-23.pdf)

The Board were split into breakout rooms to discuss the following questions in more depth to help inform the development of the future strategic case for Interface:-

1. Interface should have a central place in the innovation system - who we need to influence to make this happen and how, over the next 6 months?
2. Interface should expand to play a role in attracting companies to Scotland from the rest of the UK and overseas. What does this expansion look like?
3. Assuming income is no object, what does success look like for Interface in 10 years’ time?

ACTION: Interface team to prepare an action plan from the recommendations in the BiGGAR Economics reports for discussion at the next meeting **SJ/LG**

8. AOB

Donald MacRae (DMacR) highlighted the need to look back and learn lessons from the significant uplift in business engagement during the past few months that can help inform the evolving business model.

ACTION: Working group to be set up to discuss lessons learnt from past few months **SJ/DMacR**

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair then closed the meeting after reminding the Board that the date of the next meeting is **16th February 2021 – 2pm - 4pm** and will be held online.