

**A year of connecting
people, accelerating
innovation and creating
impact through business
academic partnerships**

Annual Review 2025-2026



Professor Wayne Powell

Principal and Chief Executive of SRUC and Chair of Interface Strategic Board

We find ourselves in a period of unprecedented change. Across Scotland and the UK, economic pressures, technological advancement, public sector reform and evolving policy priorities are reshaping the innovation landscape. Expectations of how businesses, universities, colleges, and public sector organisations work together are changing, placing greater emphasis on collaboration, regional growth, productivity and delivering tangible economic and societal impact.

While periods of change can create uncertainty, they also present significant opportunities. Scotland is rich in world-class research, entrepreneurial ambition, and innovative thinking. The challenge and opportunity lie in bringing these strengths together in ways that create lasting value.

Interface is uniquely positioned. As a national connector for innovation, Interface continues to play a vital role in helping organisations access the expertise, facilities and talent within our universities and colleges. Our strength lies not only in our national reach but also in our deep understanding of regional priorities and our ability to build trusted partnerships that translate ideas into impact.

Over the past year, we have seen continued demand for collaboration and an increasing recognition that innovation is best achieved through partnership. Whether supporting business growth, tackling sector challenges, attracting inward investment or enabling knowledge exchange, Interface remains focused on creating the connections that help organisations innovate with confidence.

As we look ahead, the opportunities are significant. By continuing to strengthen partnerships, champion collaboration, and respond to the evolving needs of Scotland's innovation ecosystem, Interface is well placed to drive inclusive and sustainable growth.





Laura Goodfellow

Director of Interface

Having been part of the Interface journey from the beginning, it is a privilege to reflect on the significant contribution the organisation has made as we celebrated our 20th anniversary in 2025. During that time, we have connected more than 2,300 businesses with academic expertise and supported almost 4,000 collaborative projects, helping turn ideas into innovations and opportunities into impact.

Our vision is to help unlock and accelerate the full potential of Scotland's innovation ecosystem by fostering strong, collaborative partnerships between academia and industry, driving sustained growth and global competitiveness.

All that we do is undertaken with this ambition at the core.

This annual review looks at the first of a three-year funding cycle and our broader strategy. Alongside our core role in connecting businesses with academic expertise, we have expanded activity that supports academic engagement, entrepreneurship, regional innovation, student knowledge exchange, early career researcher development and innovation capacity-building across both universities and colleges. We have also continued to convene and engage stakeholders around shared challenges, helping shape collaborative approaches to inward investment, tourism innovation, data-driven innovation, net zero ambitions and place-based economic growth.

Central to our approach is the belief that innovation should be accessible to all. Interface is committed to supporting SMEs, strengthening college engagement and ensuring that innovation activity contributes to wider equality, inclusion and sustainability outcomes. By widening access to Scotland's knowledge base and supporting collaboration across institutional and sectoral boundaries, we aim to maximise the return on public investment in research, innovation and knowledge exchange.

I invite you to explore the projects, partnerships and programmes featured in this review and the impact they have delivered. Together, they show the power of collaboration to translate knowledge into innovation, creating economic, social and environmental impact across Scotland and beyond.

Innovation Engagement

Our team supports businesses and Scotland’s academic community to connect, collaborate and innovate. By helping organisations to access the right expertise, facilities, technologies, funding and partners, we reduce the time, complexity and risk involved in developing successful collaborations.

A key focus this year has been for us to strengthen and expand our academic engagement which we have successfully achieved through academic to business opportunities, student knowledge exchange, sector events and panels, Early Career Researcher engagement and innovation capacity-building initiatives. Colleges are now consistently involved in business-led challenges, signalling a shift in college visibility and capability.

The team enabled **226** projects between businesses and academics, with **125 (55%)** facilitated through Interface’s Innovation Engagement service. This underscores Interface’s significant role in stimulating business-academic engagement, acting as the catalyst for more than half of the collaborative projects. The additional **101** projects accessed Interface managed funding directly through the academic institution demonstrating the wider reach and impact of Interface investment across Scotland’s innovation ecosystem.

Of the 125 Interface facilitated projects:



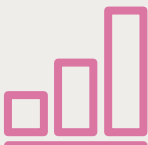
57

were delivered through student knowledge exchange, developing entrepreneurial skills and future talent



52%

involved a business that had previously collaborated with an academic institution, indicating strong repeat engagement and reinforcing the value businesses place on access to academic expertise



£1.25m

funding was leveraged from a variety of sources, including business and national organisations such as Innovate UK, Research Councils and UK Government funding calls



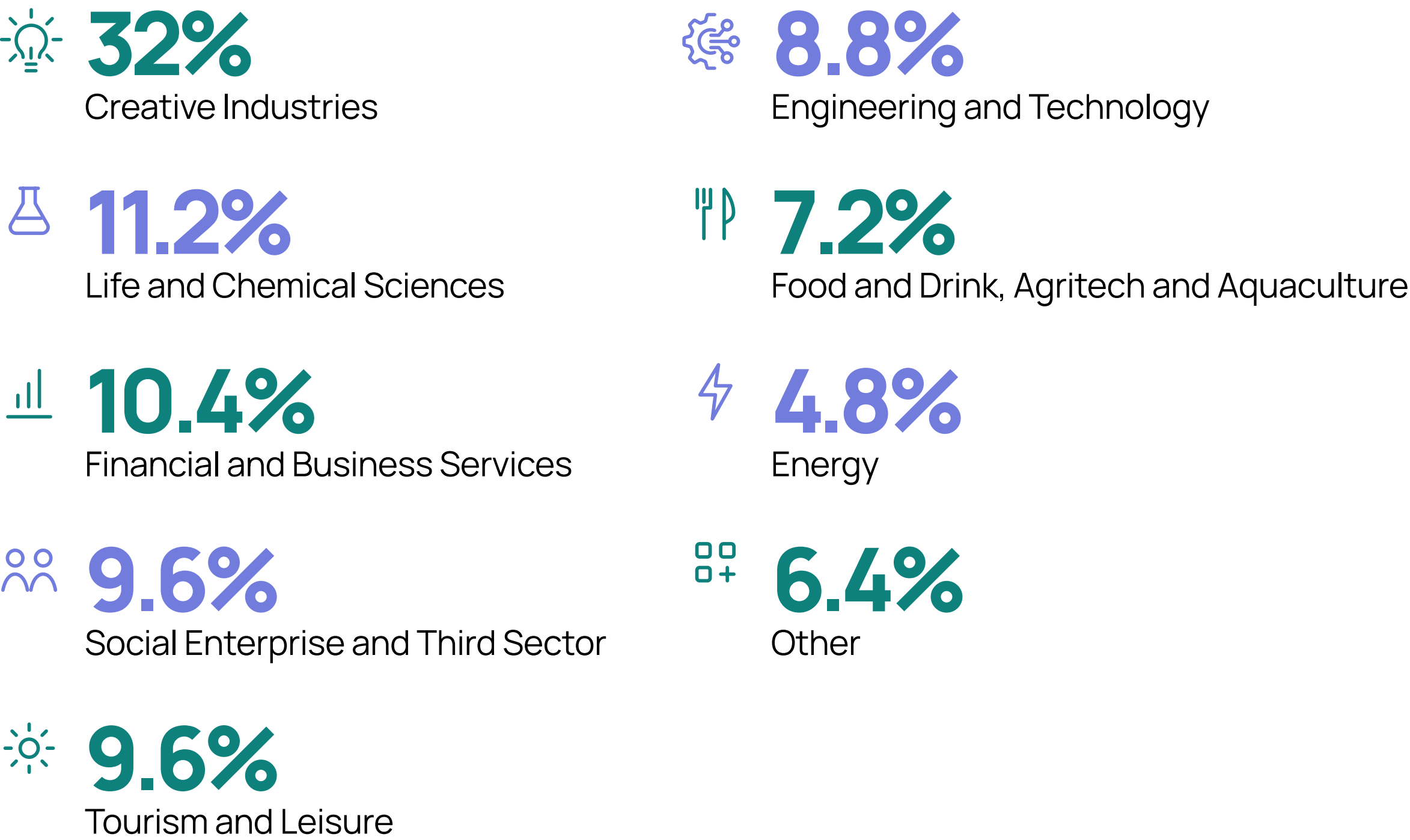
85%

of projects reported sustainability, social inclusion and equality impacts

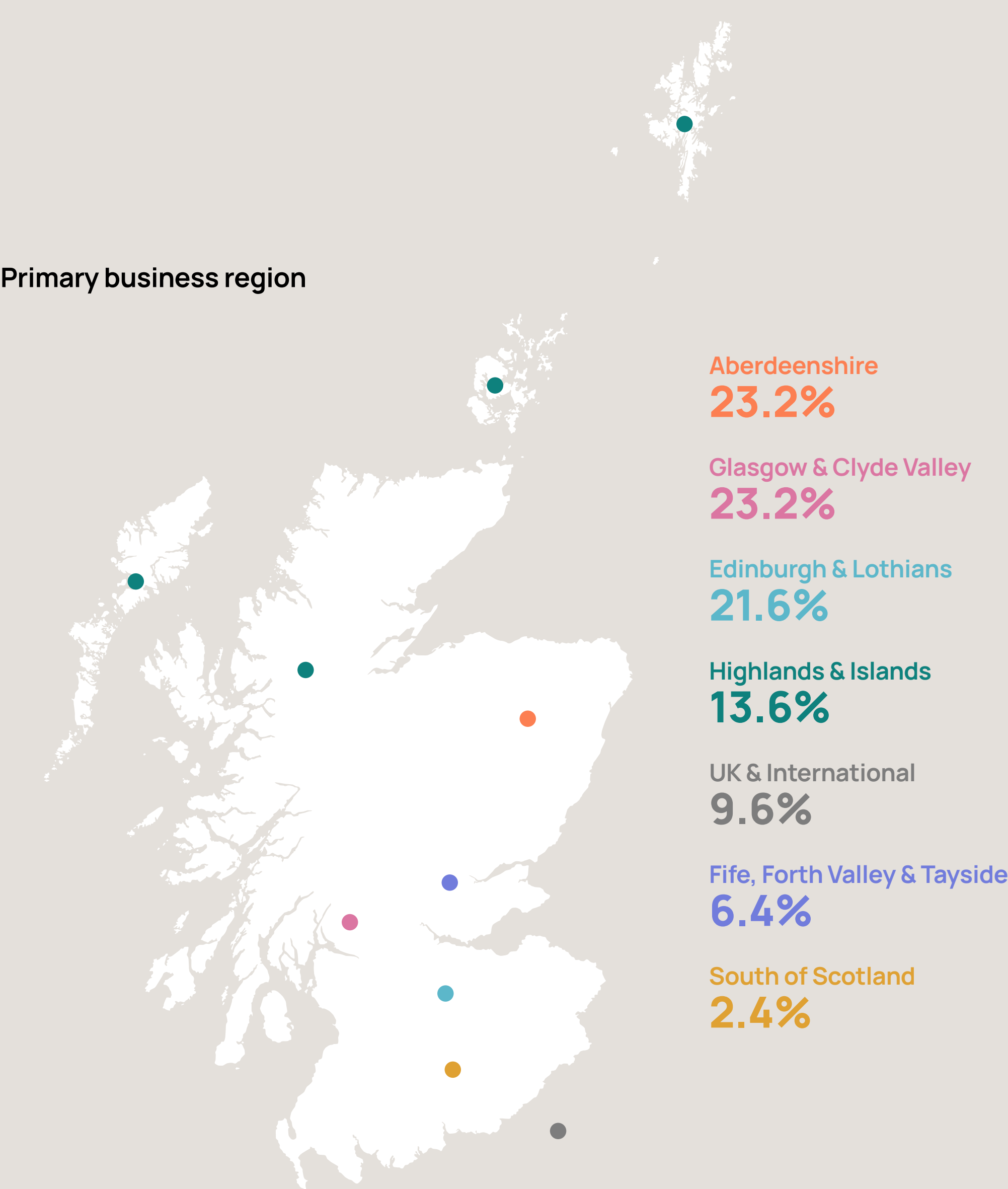
Innovation Engagement

Of the 125 Interface facilitated projects:

Primary business sector



Primary business region



Funding

We delivered over £1.24m in funding this year.

This investment plays a vital role in enabling business academic collaboration. As a trusted partner we have worked closely with stakeholders on identified funding gaps and challenges and have designed, refined, and managed programmes that initiate first-time collaborations, strengthen established partnerships, attract inward investment and drive innovation in priority sectors. During the year 18 universities and 2 colleges accessed Interface managed funding through these programmes.



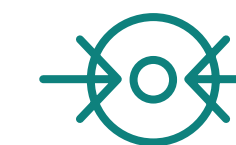
Standard and Student Placement Innovation Vouchers

Funded by the Scottish Funding Council, Standard and Student Placement Innovation Vouchers, with a value of up to £7,500 each, have supported 125 projects across a wide range of sectors and third-sector organisations. There has been particularly strong participation from businesses in Glasgow, Highlands and Islands, and Aberdeenshire.



Advanced Innovation Vouchers

Delivered in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, Advanced Innovation Vouchers fund new or existing partnerships to the value of £20,000 each. The 18 projects supported this year reflected diversity amongst sectors, including life and chemical sciences, engineering and technology, and the creative industries, while also attracting strong participation from businesses in Glasgow, the Highlands and Islands, and Aberdeenshire.



Inward Investment Catalyst Fund

Attracting companies to invest in Scotland drives innovation, creates employment and strengthens links between industry and academia. The Inward Investment Catalyst Fund (IICF), delivered by Interface in partnership with the Scottish Government, supports businesses not yet based in Scotland to collaborate with universities and colleges, helping to build a pathway towards inward investment. With a value of up to £10,000 each, 10 projects were funded this year delivering benefits for industry, academia and the Scottish economy.



Partnerships and programmes

We play a key role in shaping and delivering programmes that support growth through innovation. Working with a broad range of partners, we bring strategic leadership, programme delivery and coordination to develop entrepreneurial capability and address regional and sector-specific challenges. These activities strengthen Scotland's innovation ecosystem and maximise the economic and societal impact of innovation.

Embedding entrepreneurship in colleges

The Entrepreneurs in Residence (EiRs) network

A Scottish Government funded initiative, shaped and led by Interface in partnership with Connect-Ed, to embed entrepreneurial thinking across Scotland's college sector through Entrepreneurs in Residence. We continue to build on the programme by working with the College Development Network to further embed entrepreneurship within Scotland's colleges with resources, insights and practical tools developed by the EiRs.

ScotCol Accelerator

Boutique Innovation and Interface designed and delivered a six-week innovation programme for college students to develop early-stage business ideas and build confidence in innovation skills. The programme was funded by Scottish Government's Ecosystem Fund.

Spinout Pipeline Project

Funded through the National Innovation Strategy and led by the University of Strathclyde, this project strengthened the national pipeline of spin-outs from universities and colleges. Interface seconded staff into Edinburgh Innovations to help develop commercialisation pathways for Queen Margaret University and Edinburgh College.



Partnerships and programmes

Driving regional innovation

Tay Creative Innovation Partnership

Interface is a partner on the Local Innovation Partnership Programme funded through UKRI and led by Abertay University. The programme delivers growth in value and scale in the creative technology sector in the Tay Cities region. Other partners include the University of Dundee, University of St Andrews, Codebase, Creative Scotland, UK Games Fund and V&A Dundee.

INSPIRE

Working with Glasgow Kelvin College, Glasgow City Region and University of the West of Scotland to pilot the Innovation Skills Framework in Further Education, generating insights and identifying opportunities to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurial skills across regions and sectors.

Innovate UK (IUK) Business Connect Place Team Secondments

Working with the IUK Business Connect Place team, we are developing knowledge, insights and recommendations at local and regional levels to inform future place-based innovation activity and strengthen alignment across Scotland's innovation ecosystem.

Strengthening priority sectors

The CoSTAR Realtime Lab

Interface is working in partnership with Abertay University, the University of Edinburgh, CodeBase and Chroma Developments to drive research, innovation and economic growth in Scotland's screen, games, immersive and performance industries through the CoSTAR Realtime lab funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

Visitor Management National Digital/Data Working Group

Interface leads this Scotland-wide group, supporting regional authorities, public agencies and tourism bodies in their development of data-driven solutions to manage visitor pressures and inform long-term planning; working closely with organisations including National Parks, councils and VisitScotland.

Innovation and Reformulation for Health

Together with The Food & Drink Federation Scotland, Interface hosted a tasting event at the Scottish Parliament to demonstrate how innovation and collaboration are supporting healthier product development across Scotland's food and drink sector.





The Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards 2026

Brought to you by Interface



Championing Knowledge Exchange

Raising the Profile of Business Academic Partnerships

Throughout the year, we organised, attended and contributed to more than 145 events, alongside delivering a range of marketing and communications activity including case studies, blogs, articles, digital campaigns and partnership promotions. Through these activities, we showcased expertise, facilities, technologies and funding opportunities, helping to inspire new partnerships, projects and innovation-led growth.

The Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards

The Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards continued to grow in influence and reach. Returning for an 11th year, this year's Awards saw strong participation across 11 categories, new category sponsors, strong media coverage and representation from a wide range of organisations. The ceremony is a celebration of knowledge exchange excellence with year-on-year growth in profile, reach and impact and has become Scotland's flagship event for the knowledge exchange community.

Case studies

These case studies illustrate the power of collaboration between business and academia. Click on the links below to explore the stories.



Seluna Ltd and University of Glasgow



The Scottish Crannog Centre with multiple academic partners



Inspectahire Instrument Co. Ltd and University of Strathclyde



Ria Living Systems with multiple academic partners



Looking Ahead

Interface remains committed to widening access to innovation, strengthening collaboration between academia and business, and supporting the ambitions of Scotland's innovation ecosystem. Building on over two decades of experience, we will continue to connect expertise, foster partnerships and create opportunities that deliver economic, societal and environmental impact.

Acknowledgements

Our impact is collective. We extend our thanks to our funders, partners, universities, colleges, businesses and the wider innovation ecosystem.