Interface

Guide to Collaborating



This short guide is intended to provide you with an introduction to the Interface service and how it supports collaborations between businesses and Scotland's world-leading academic teams.

It is not intended as an exhaustive manual, rather a short checklist of things to be considered to ensure a productive partnership.

1) An Introduction to Interface

2) How it works

3) Benefits of collaboration for businesses

4) Benefits of collaboration for academics

5) Preparing for a collaboration

6) Additional Resources

7) Glossary of Terms

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An Introduction to Interface

We bring together businesses with Scotland's academic communities to accelerate innovation by building strong, collaborative partnerships.

Our impartial, free service helps both businesses and academic partners form the right collaborations quickly and effectively, saving time and money. With national reach and active engagement across all of Scotland's universities, colleges and research institutes, we connect knowledge, expertise, facilities and funding to unlock real-world solutions across all sectors and regions.

We offer support across all industry sectors, including:



Key facts & figures

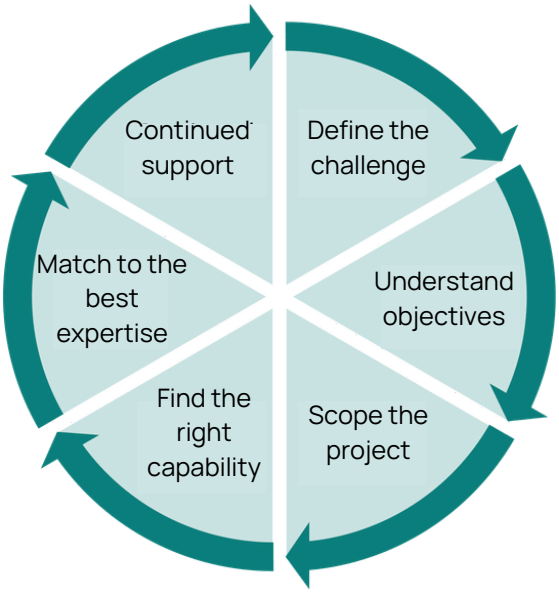
4,475
discussions held between businesses & academics

2,300+
businesses connected with academic expertise

4,007
collaborative business-academic projects initiated

92%
said their project wouldn't have happened/taken longer without our support

How it works



Define the challenge

We will work with you to understand your business needs and the challenges you are seeking to address.

Understand objectives

This includes determining the scope and boundaries of the project, clarifying the goals and objectives, and identifying any constraints or limitations.

Scope the project

This information is collated into a working brief which can be sent to all of Scotland's universities, colleges and research institutes. At this stage the team can also help to identify funding opportunities to support the delivery of the project.

Find the right capability

Academic teams, with the appropriate expertise, respond to the brief with their potential solutions to your business challenge.

Match to the best expertise

We will present the academic responses to you to allow you to choose the best solution for your needs. We will then make the introduction to the chosen academic team to start work on your project

Continued support

The Interface team will remain on hand to provide continuous and follow up support.

Benefits to Businesses



- New or improved products, processes, services
- Increased turnover or profits
- New and safeguarded jobs
- Increased productivity
- Reduced operating costs
- Access to world-leading academics
- Developing relationships with other businesses
- Increased knowledge and expertise
- Support societal and environmental targets

"As a small start-up with little resource, working with Interface was like having my own R&D team, they regularly sent on funding opportunities, opportunities to undertake further engagement with universities, sought connections into other commercial applications for our tech and overall widened our networks both academically and commercially."



Lorenzo Conti
CEO & Founder, Crover Ltd

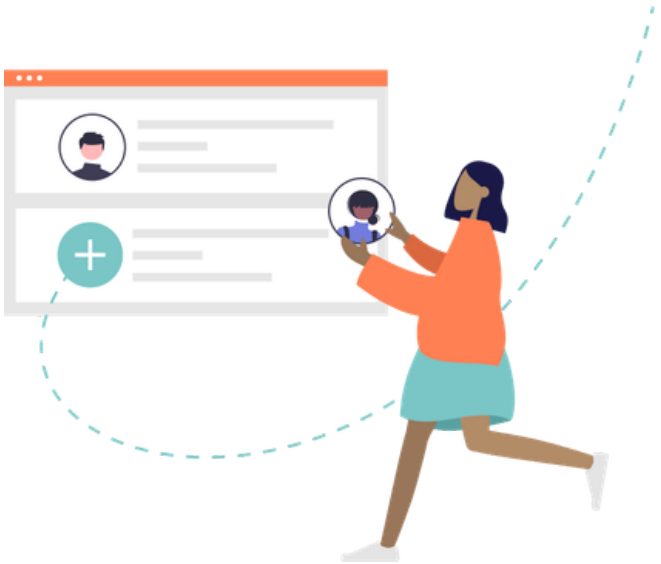
"I feel that working together with RGU and Interface has helped my business to look forward to the future. I cannot thank the team enough for all the support they have given me as a Scottish based business in the Highlands. I would never have been here without the support of those at Interface."



Rebecca Hastings
Owner & Founder, ZAZA & CRUZ

Benefits to academics

- Establish links with businesses relevant to research themes
- Raise profile of your institution
- Economic, social & environmental impacts through applied research
- Provide additional income to fund staff and department
- Support student engagement with industry
- Opportunities for commercial use of specialist facilities
- Research and solve real-world industry challenges
- Build relationships with other universities
- Develop employment opportunities for students
- Grow REF case studies



"It has been a great pleasure to collaborate on this product development. The industrial partners have engaged with enthusiasm and high levels of efficiency throughout. This has resulted in a truly authentic 'co-production' of service development which was strengthened by establishing an excellent working relationship and integrating shared decision-making processes from the outset. This required flexibility, co-operation, and commitment from both partners and resulted in a seamless and enjoyable partnership."



Dr Leah Macaden
Senior Lecturer, University of the Highlands & Islands

"The collaboration with Entergaia has led to fruitful outcomes that informs numerous possibilities ahead in the wireless power transfer area and can be utilised perfectly for the education of our engineers."



Dr. Peng Li
Lecturer, School of Engineering, University of Aberdeen

Preparing for initial discussions

The initial consultation typically brings together the academic, the business, and a business development representative or commercial knowledge exchange contact from the academic institution.

To ensure a fruitful collaboration, it is essential to be well-prepared for this discussion. Here are some useful pointers to consider:



Aims of the project:

Be clear about the aims and consider phased milestones with interim reviews, rather than one long overall project. Although the project scope may develop during discussions, check that the proposed solution matches your original problem statement framed in the Interface project outline.

Duration and expected timescales (taking into account priorities and commitment from both parties)

It's important to be realistic about project feasibility; a short feasibility study typically provides 2-3 days of support. The time frame from initial discussions to project commencement depends on complexity, time commitment, and availability of all parties involved. Consider availability and agree on a realistic start date, factoring in academic priorities and holidays. If the project involves a student assignment, supervision will be necessary.

Communication and project management (who will lead the project to ensure milestones are achieved)

The company should typically handle project management and schedule regular online meetings to keep all parties informed. Agree on call and meeting dates early on, and don't hesitate to reach out if communication becomes insufficient.

Consider confidentiality and intellectual assets from the outset

Utilise Standard Confidential Disclosure Agreements developed by the Scottish universities before project discussions, which can be found here. Agree on IP and confidentiality terms at the outset, as it's often a funding award requirement. Determine if standard confidentiality/Non-Disclosure Agreements are necessary and decide on IP ownership and publication rights for both Background and Foreground IP.

Risks involved

Be prepared for unexpected outcomes in collaborative projects, as not all of them will succeed. Unexpected results can still be valuable in informing the future direction of the project.

Costs and contributions (from both parties)

After agreeing on project scope, the academic team will cost the necessary time and resources, with technical expertise being the typical academic contribution. The company may contribute to consumables and staff time costs and must commit an equivalent amount of time to the project.

Funding options that might help to offset the total cost of the project and reduce your cash contribution

Several funding mechanisms can help offset project costs and reduce cash contributions, depending on the project scale. Discuss funding options with Interface or academic partners, keeping in mind each option's deadlines, eligibility criteria, guidelines, and contracts.

Are you applying for Innovation Voucher funding?

The Scottish Funding Council offer a number of funding programmes, managed by Interface, to help offset the cost for businesses collaborating with Scotland's universities or colleges to develop new products, services and processes through R&D projects. All Scottish small-medium enterprises (SME's) are eligible for these funding streams. SMEs require an academic partner to apply. Visit the website for more information: interface-online.org.uk/funding

Continued engagement

Once you start collaborating with your academic partner, Interface will remain on hand to support your business whether for follow-on projects or to help identify new projects and new academic partners. We're looking forward to hearing about the progress of your project. To help us improve our service, demonstrate impacts and ensure that more businesses like yours get the support they need, six months after your project commences, you will receive an online feedback survey, which we kindly ask you to complete.

Additional Resources

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Funding
- Case Studies
- Specialist Facilities
- Intellectual Property Office
- European Patent Office
- Google Patents
- Writing Grant applications

Preparing for Student Work-based Learning project

Student work-based learning projects are a very different exercise to that of working with an academic. Here are some items you may wish to consider to manage expectations of this type of project:



Manage expectations from the start

• Projects should not be viewed as business critical, it is an opportunity to work with enthusiastic students that can bring fresh ideas and insights to your business.
• There is no guarantee that the student will deliver everything that you require. There may be an emphasis in the student course work on desk-based research (e.g. to understand a new market) rather than more practical problem solving.
• It must fit in with the timescales of the student's study, so projects usually start at the beginning of semester one (Sept/Oct time) or semester two (Jan/Feb time).
• They are also credit bearing, many count towards a large proportion of their final mark, so it is in the student's interest to do well and ensure they deliver what is required as part of their coursework.
• In many instances, students pick which company project they want to work on, rather than it being allocated to them, so the company benefits from having an enthusiastic student keen to work with that company, and the student benefits from working on a project they are personally interested in.

Costs and contributions (for both parties)

Most projects costs only cover consumables, if relevant, so they are of no cost to the company. It is important to receive clarification what is required from you for each university/college project, e.g. you might be expected to meet the students online at the start of the project, be available throughout and attend a final presentation.

Consider confidentiality and intellectual assets from the outset

In terms of Intellectual Property that may emerge from the Student Work-based Learning project, it is advised that you check the situation with the university/college directly at the outset to establish the ownership. Generally, contractual arrangements are in place which clarify ownership rights on any Intellectual Property created by the student for projects that involve third parties

Continued engagement and funding

If a company does undertake a student project, they are still eligible to progress to an Innovation Voucher unless the company has an existing relationship with the university and has already worked with academics.

Glossary of Terms

If you are applying for an Innovation Voucher for the first time and if you are unfamiliar with some of the terminology used within the application form, please refer to the table below.

Term	Definition
Commercialisation	For the Company – this means providing an indication of how the company is going to move the project forward after the outcome from the collaborative project with academia. What further work is required for the new/improved product/process/service to be "ready for market" (how is your company thereafter going to produce/market/brand/make use of social media/identify potential customers etc).
Company In-Kind Contribution	This means providing an equivalent match of company resources for the collaboration with the academic institution for a project. This can take the form of: staff time in providing a project brief, attendance at online meetings, examination/testing of prototype, input to final report, other resources required (e.g. provision of equipment or other materials to use in the project).
Company Registration Number	If you do not hold either form of registration, you will require to complete a Pre-Submission Application Form. Please enter either your Scottish Companies House Registration Number which will commence SCO. Otherwise, enter your Charity Registration Number (as Registered with OSCR (Office of Scottish Charity Registration) which will commence SC0 (note - first one is a Letter "O" and the second one is a zero "0").
State Aid - De-Minimis Rules	De minimis aid is the term used for small amounts of state aid that do not require European Commission approval. Standard Innovation Vouchers are considered de minimis payments. For the Company – simply put this means to check that this Innovation Voucher funding (in the case a Standard Innovation Voucher up to £5,000) will not breach the European Commission rules of a maximum of public funding (grants) to your company of 200,000 Euros over the last 3 years.
Economic Impacts	Here the Company should list any benefits that will result from their new product/process/service – for instance – x% increase in anticipated sales, employ x additional staff, y jobs safeguarded, perceived cost efficiency (reduced production costs of x%), anticipate x increase in entry fees/sales to organisation due to new innovative service etc.
Societal Impacts	Detail how the proposed new product/process/service will have an influence on Scottish Society as a whole (if relevant) or on individuals/society (if relevant) i.e. how the project affects overall wellbeing, improved environment, improved healthcare options etc.
Intellectual Property	Refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce. Hence list if you have any registered trademarks etc. (Background Intellectual Property is that which is currently owned by the company and will be required during the project. Foreground Intellectual Property is the new Intellectual Property that will be created as a result of the innovative project)
Milestones	Note any significant stages within the development of the new product/process/service (for instance - Start of Project Consultation, Development of demonstrator/Prototype, Examination of Risks, Assessment of the demonstrator/Prototype, Final Close Out Consultation, Production of Final Report etc).
Turnover in Current Financial Year	Company's Sales Figures for past year. If not relevant – enter as appropriate (e.g. Pre-trading company).