SRUC, Scotland’s Rural College

Q1 :- The baseline support offered for core knowledge exchange activities, KE staffing is to be broadly welcomed. However, in our experience such support costs our institution in the region of £450K per year. Therefore we would be required to find significant match funding to enable us to continue to deliver a comprehensive programme of KE to our key audience groups. As a small specialist institution we would find it quite difficult in the current financial climate to fully match this from other resources. We therefore question whether it is entirely fair to have the same level of platform support regardless of size of institution, and whether SFC could consider some form of graded or banded level of support dependent on HEI size to help meet the true costs of such support.

Q2 :- We think that driving transformational change in the way envisaged and encompassed by the 5 point Action plan will be a challenge, not only for SRUC but for the University sector as a whole. This does not imply that transformational change should not be wholeheartedly embraced, rather the contrary, it must be reflected in all our KE work. However, from our perspective it will be important to have sustained dialogue with those in the primary food production industries (which we do (see below), but the action plan suggests should be part of a wider industry dialogue). The current structure of Industry Leadership Groups represents well the secondary food industry but perhaps consults with and embraces the primary food industries less well. SRUC as an small specialist institution (SSI) has a particularly close relationship with the primary food producing industries and therefore we have a very good knowledge of and ongoing dialogue with to identify their priorities. The opportunity to input this knowledge into a wider industry Leadership group would be welcome. The continuing challenge for us is to drive innovative change to a primary food producing industry that in effect comprises thousands of micro businesses, this is best done through a variety of contacts, but our Consulting activities enables us to reach many of these and determine their priorities for innovation and competitiveness. This implies that a flexible approach to consultation is required for some key KE audience groupings than just the framework envisaged by the 5 point action plan. The key for us is that this is recognised and encouraged by SFC in the new KTG arrangements. As stated we fully endorse this plan but need to adapt it for the primary food production industries, while encouraging diversification, new business start up and innovation across our sector.

Q3 :- As noted in Q2 above we feel some flexibility will be required in this approach to ensure key groups such as the primary food producing industries are fully embraced in the plan. Therefore it is important that good linkages are made between food, health, economic development and agriculture as part of that 5 point plan, especially with regard to industry liaison. This is particularly true of the primary food producing industries where the ILO approach may have its limitations as noted
above. SRUC as an small specialist institution (SSI) has a particularly close relationship with the primary food producing industries and therefore we have a very good knowledge of and ongoing dialogue to identify their priorities. We would wish to ensure sufficient flexibility is embedded in the finally agreed proposals to ensure that such a strength is fully exploited for the benefit of these industries.

Q4 :- We feel that such a workshop is probably acceptable to set high level strategic priorities as noted in the examples given in the consultation paper. These broad objectives could be encompassed by all in the sector. One concern is that the activities envisaged to enact these high level objectives, appear to involve a considerable amount of checking, monitoring and co-ordinating which is fine, up to a point. But the focus must be on taking practical actions to achieve uptake of knowledge and innovation into industry sectors with good quality KE from the universities in each particular business sector. Therefore there does need to be a balance between planning and doing. Individual institutions should be given the opportunity working within an agreed framework of high level strategic priorities to do effective KE involving industry in achieving innovative solutions at all steps of the innovation process. This is particularly true in the primary food industries where innovation is introduced by and large into existing systems of production. As noted in Q3 SRUC as a SSI has a particularly close working relationship with these industries. This works by have close contacts with all parts of the production system and with careful implementation using a range of appropriate KE events. In our institution we have those links and work closely with industry, so issues of access to IP, contracts, spin-outs and ILG liaison etc. are less important than taking a collaborative industry/academic approach to implement innovative change into systems of production. Therefore in summary taking a flexible approach, appropriate to the target industry, with balance between national co-ordination and flexibility for institutions to accomplish effective KE is paramount.

Q5 :- Apart from our concern outlined in Q1, we feel the balance is about right, as far as this institution is concerned we feel it is for us to make the best use of opportunities afforded by the provision of this grant.

Q6 :- We are content with what is suggested, as in Q5 we will make best use of this grant for effecting good quality KE.

Q7 :- Where this activity impinges on this then equality and diversity considerations should be paramount. However, for most of our sector provision of good quality KE and innovation activities would not directly involve such issues. Therefore across the HE sector this question needs to be put into context of where different disciplines are starting from and we would suggest that SFC may need to explain potential concerns more explicitly.

Q8 :-