Queen Margaret University - University Innovation Fund Priorities AY 2016-17

In 2016-17 we will support innovation through collaboration and working with organisations and business to achieve economic and societal transformation, regionally, nationally and internationally. Our focus will continue be on the Scottish Government priority economic sectors of Food and Drink; Creative Industries and Tourism.

In response to Universities Scotland - Making it Happen (2015) we will champion entrepreneurship and enterprise by implementing a programme of activity which will bring about a step-change in the entrepreneurial culture within QMU. We will continue to develop incubation services for the creation of graduate start-ups and support for innovation in local companies through proposals for a QMU Innovation Park (QMUIP), recognising the increasing role of the University as a catalyst for regional innovation led economic growth.

By strengthening our regional and national strategic linkages and synergies with external partners and policy makers we will achieve greater impact through greater demand-led complementary alignments with Government and international policy agendas.

Statement re the Platform Grant Allocation

QMU welcomes the allocation of the Platform Grant. The Grant will be used to underpin the delivery of our Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2015-2020, aligned to the priorities identified above. As these form a core part of our activity we are committed to matching this funding.

1. Promote entrepreneurial opportunities to students during their studies.

We will expand our student incubation space – the Business Innovation Zone (BIZ) with a focus on creative industries and food and drink, building on alliances with our on-campus East Lothian Business Gateway. The Business Gateway’s on-campus location is a strong endorsement of QMU’s entrepreneurial vision, supported by the increased campus presence and hot desking of Enterprise Campus, Converge Challenge, Sporting Chance and the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce.

We will embrace new opportunities arising from a refreshed strategy for Knowledge Exchange in the School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management, in particular feeder opportunities for graduate start-ups from within our Drama and Performance programme and our Film and Media programme – building on the success of our innovative Creative Entrepreneurship modules now taken by these groups of students. A common theme is that demand for start-up space within the BIZ generally maps from start-ups in the Creative Industries from the aforementioned programmes but also from our new MA Culture and Creative Enterprise.

We are committed to continued dialogue with Creative Scotland and the Scottish Institute for Enterprise, recognising that without the kind of support we have put in place, undergraduate students in the arts may still graduate with too little an understanding of how to turn their creative
practice into a business. It is our intention to extend our BIZ facilities, building on a model of start-ups gaining access to the sort of production facilities that they need to do their work after they graduate.

We are engaging in ongoing dialogue with other HEIs including Glasgow School of Art and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to look at specific initiatives around creative start-ups, possibly a summer creative entrepreneurship accelerator programme, where graduates are partnered with industry practitioners and, where appropriate, researchers, from their field of practice and industry. Creative graduate start-ups would also benefit from some form of pan-Scottish initiative, in partnership with Creative Scotland, that would support graduate start-ups in the creative industries in contributing to the development of exhibitions, performances, productions etc. We believe that additional work is also required around funding interventions that support micro enterprises, sole traders and owner/practitioners who form the business model that dominates many of the sectors that define the creative industries.

We would support the expansion of university technology.com to include a broader approach to innovation, focused around creative outputs and service innovation. We welcome the work of the RCDG sub group, chaired by Dr Stephen Broad of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

QMU launched the industry focused Scottish Centre for Food Development & Innovation (SCFDI), building on significant research work achieved in the multi-disciplinary arena of Dietetics, Nutrition and Biological Sciences. The Centre offers state of the art facilities including a ‘white room space’, a development kitchen and a sensory evaluation laboratory. The SCFDI has an increasing portfolio of clients, and responds to demand from Scotland’s SME base for combined R&D and innovation space to support the food and drink sector in accessing export markets in the rapidly expanding global functional and healthy food sector. Recognising the potential for graduate start-up in the Food and Drink sectors we are developing specific entrepreneurial themes around our BSc in Food Science and Nutrition and continue to support industry focused PhD studentships.

2. Increase development opportunities for and uptake of entrepreneurial training and education, and develop institutions’ practitioner-led entrepreneurial training.

We welcome the excellent work of the Scottish Institute for Enterprise in supporting our students in the Creative Industries but would like to increase dialogue with Enterprise Campus and Converge Challenge to develop language that supports innovation in this sector and other service based innovations.

Recognising that a world class student experience and excellence in research and knowledge exchange are mutually illuminating, we have launched a new Graduate School that will deliver a broader programme of education and support to doctoral students, including, entrepreneurship and innovation, seminar programmes and partnership grant writing. Ongoing links will be developed with Vitae, the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities and the Scottish Graduate School for Social Sciences.

We will continue to develop our skills capacity and attract and develop the next generation of researchers, focusing on ensuring our core academic team remain competitive and entrepreneurial while up-skilling and promoting the enhanced employability of our doctoral and contract research staff, including doctoral students.

3. Encouraging mobility of staff between business and universities.

As part as of our Concordat for Contract Research Staff (CRS) we have sought to enhance career development opportunities for CRS to engage in knowledge exchange activities through the translation of research to SMEs in specific Scottish Government priority economic sectors. SME translational skills are included in our new researcher induction programme, and an increasing
number of CRS are engaging in SME activity. We have actively encouraged CRS to take advantage of a number of institutional memberships with industry bodies and many have taken up opportunities to speak at industry events and conferences. Further, we have promoted industry placements/experience as a source of bridging.

We will continue to work with Industry Leadership Groups, Interface and industry bodies such as Scotland Food and Drink to maximise mobility between QMU and industry.

QMU’s proposals for the QMU Innovation Park (QMUIP) will support economic development both locally and nationally. It will create significant numbers of new jobs, specifically in East Lothian and will provide a creative space where productive relationships between businesses, the university sector and the wider community can flourish and where entrepreneurial thinking and action can be nurtured on a local and national basis.

4. Set out breadth and depth of professional development available to University Enterprise & Innovation officers; identify any gaps.

We will continue to work with Vitae, ARMA and AURIL to improve professional development opportunities and are committed to working with Universities Scotland’s RKEC to develop a national approach to professional development for Enterprise and Innovation Officers. Specific areas for development include: European bid development expertise; developing and supporting SME translational skills for researchers; and Equality and Diversity in KE and Entrepreneurship.

5. Enhance skills for effective collaboration within the academic and SME business base.

High growth sectors, dominated by SMEs and microenterprises present untapped potential for innovation and entrepreneurship. We would support new or more flexible interventions that do not assume one size fits all and encourage traction in high growth sectors such as Food and Drink, where R&D spend has historically been low but growth projections are high. A significant opportunity exists for the Scottish Government to address this issue, which is discussed further below.

We have been working in collaboration with other universities and Interface, in response to the development of the Scotland Food and Drink Industry Innovation Response to look at the alignment of resources focused on collaborative academic capacity building. This might take the form of collaborative post-docs focused on key industry challenges and would help link blue skies and market ready research in a sector with a complex supply chain or support inter-sector innovation.

The ongoing development of the BIZ and QMU’s plans for the QMUIP signify QMU’s recognition of the need to extend services beyond the provision of knowledge exchange and to provide an innovative environment where companies, many of whom might be graduate start-ups, can be developed and grow; inspired by a culture of innovation and opportunity from QMU’s research and knowledge exchange.

6. Examine partners current strategies/initiatives, and the government actions, to ascertain how to best support the transition from transactional to strategic relationships between universities and business/industry sectors.

QMUIP will focus on food and drink and particularly on those manufacturers and providers of products and services which promote healthy living and well-being. The Innovation Park will be a national Centre of Excellence for a range of stakeholders in food and drink providing businesses with access to scientific expertise and knowledge transfer experience from relevant academic disciplines based at QMU.
QMU is partnering with East Lothian Council which is working with businesses in the area to create a unique food and drink based Business Improvement District (BID), which would be the first of its kind in the UK. A BID is based on businesses with a shared interest and a common ambition coming together to generate funds and decide how these should be spent locally. The BID framework has been used elsewhere to enhance town centres, tourism and business parks with successful examples bringing a range of improvements such as better promotion and marketing, community events, projects and loyalty schemes, all of which can drive sales and attract more investment. QMU has agreed to be an Associate partner in the BID and will have input into the business plan and have a representative attending the steering group meetings.

Current discussions with the five south east Scotland HEIs, under the umbrella of a City Deal, are focusing on a coherent regional approach to economic development and impact.

We value and will seek to enhance our relationships with the Business Gateway, East Lothian Council, Scottish Enterprise Account Managers, Industry Bodies, Interface and the Chambers of Commerce.

7. **Implement enhanced template contract arrangements for SME’s in all Scottish universities**

We continue to support the collaborative work of RCDG and Interface in this area.

8. **Implement “post-project referral protocol” in all individual HEIs and Innovation Centres.**

We support this activity.

9. **The development of a Framework for monitoring and evaluation of the success of the new UIF approach**

As a university working in sectors not covered by Innovation Centres, we welcome any opportunities for engagement and sharing of good practice and impact. We are committed to developing links with the Aquaculture Innovation Centre around market ready research in food and drink in the area of new product development and functional, healthy foods.

10. **Fundamentally re-thinking the innovation support ecosystem of Scotland.**

We support a broader approach to innovation that goes beyond the commercialisation of science and technology to include innovation in the service based economic priority sectors. High growth sectors, dominated by SMEs and microenterprises present untapped potential for innovation and entrepreneurship. We would support new or more flexible interventions that do not assume one size fits all and encourage traction in high growth sectors such as Food and Drink, Tourism, Financial Services and Creative Industries, where R&D spend has historically been low but growth projections are high.

It is critical that entrepreneurial training and education embraces the appropriate language and understanding of the emerging sectors such as the creative industries, food and drink and service based economies. We strongly advocate a broader and wider definition of innovation that recognises service and creative outputs.

We believe that going forward, there needs to be alignment of resources focused on collaborative academic capacity building rather than supporting a cluttered landscape of third party intermediaries.

We are fully supportive of reform in the innovation support ecosystem and are committed to working with Universities Scotland’s RKEC and RCDG to simplify the current complex and
crowded support environment for innovation to make this easier for businesses to navigate, whilst at the same time extending the focus of efforts beyond the traditional STEM areas to encompass key growth areas such as Food and Drink and Creative Industries.

Reform of the support landscape would elicit significant efficiency gains, and would allow innovation funding to be directed towards areas of potential high-growth, which would thus become a key driver for economic growth in Scotland.