Is there a clear, coherent and well-resourced strategy for European and international engagement within the Scottish Government and its agencies?

It is important that the Connecting Scotland strategy recognises that different higher education institutions are at different stages of internationalisation, and that there is considerable variation between the strategic approaches adopted by HEIs across Scotland.

What has the Scottish Government’s international strategy achieved since its refresh in October 2012, and what has the EU Action Plan achieved since it was first published in 2009? Has the international strategy enabled “Scotland to flourish on the international stage, thus increasing economic growth for Scotland”?

We would identify the capacity of Connecting Scotland to open doors at a high level in government and funding agencies as the most substantial benefit of the CS platform. This would be a feature of the Strategy going forward that we would like to see strengthened and built upon.

In particular, the Research Pools are working well. The work done in relation to Hong Kong for the Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA) and the Energy Technology Partnership (ETP) is particularly promising. There has been a suggestion that something similar may be initiated in relation to Brazil for the Scottish Alliance for Geosciences and Society (SAGES)/Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MASTS). We look forward to hearing the responses to this proposal.

In terms of EU engagement, there is scope for more coordination at mid-level. By this we mean bringing together groups of people with common interest (which may, for example, be the Research Pools, or HEIs with similar research areas to develop) to engage with the EU via Connecting Scotland. Rather than taking place at the high level, it would be most valuable if this were to involve the people who will lead the grants and who understand the research areas.

There is scope for greater clarity on the part of the Scottish Government in signing off EU contracts where it is a stakeholder. The process has sometimes been excessively complicated and a simpler and clearer process would strengthen the capacity of HEIs in Scotland to engage in EU initiatives.

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January 2015