Interface

ANNUAL REVIEW

2023/2024

Funded by:

Scottish Funding Council
Promoting further and higher education

Hosted by:

EDINBURGH
INNOVATIONS

Bringing business and academia together.
Collaborate. Innovate. Impact.

Welcome

As we look ahead to new opportunities, it's equally important to reflect on the significant achievements of the past year. Interface continues to be a Scotland-wide service, with a dedicated local team supporting academic institutions and businesses alike. Our network has now grown to over 3,500 innovation-active businesses, reflecting our ongoing commitment to ensuring businesses have access to the resources and knowledge they need to innovate.

Amelia Whitelaw, Director, Interface

This year, we successfully delivered funding programmes in partnership with the Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Enterprise, and the Scottish Government. Notably, the Innovation Voucher funding increased from £5,000 to £7,500, further supporting early-stage academic-business collaborations between Scottish businesses and universities or colleges.

A key emerging focus for Interface has been strengthening our support for academics and research teams in their efforts to connect with business partners and networks. We are also laying the groundwork to fully integrate colleges into our offering through expertise searches and cross-sector partnerships, expanding their role in addressing business innovation challenges.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Andrea Nolan for her dedicated leadership as Chair of the Interface Strategic Board over the past seven years. I am delighted to welcome Professor Wayne Powell as our new Chair, whose wealth of experience will help steer Interface's ambition to deliver positive change for society and the Scottish economy.

Amelia

Business Innovation

Key facts and figures from the year.

965

Enquiries handled by our team this year from businesses

299

Industry led challenges presented to academic teams
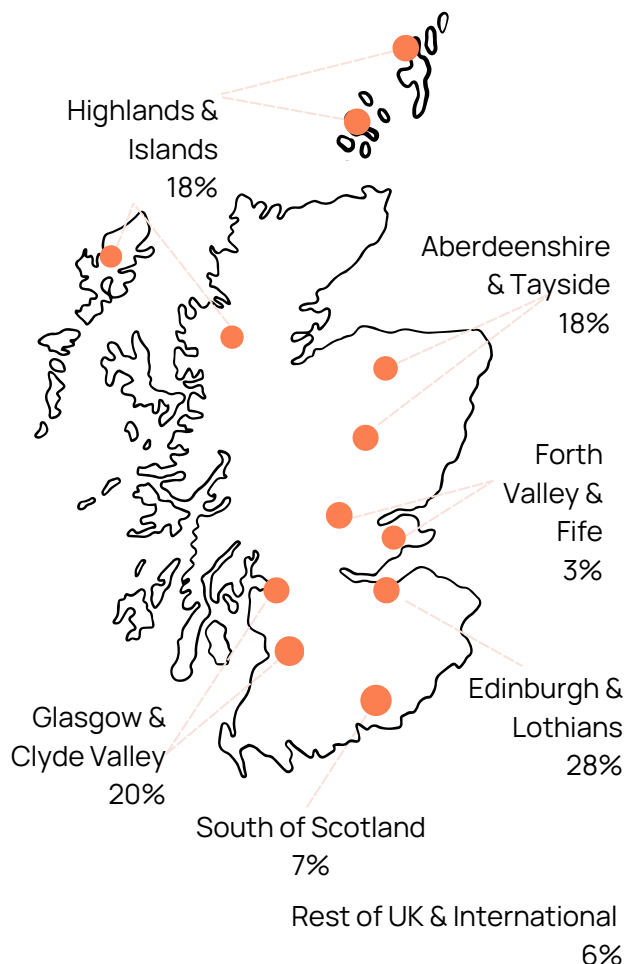
231

Collaborative projects agreed

54% of the collaborative projects involved a business that had previously collaborated with an academic institution.

The total cash value of the 231 collaborative projects was ~£1.7M. Funding was received from a wide variety of sources including Innovate UK, Research Councils and UK Government calls.

Out of 231 collaborative projects, 175 were completed without Interface-managed funding, showing Interface's broader role in supporting business-academic collaborations beyond its own funding programmes.

100%
of companies reported they were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the level of support received from Interface.

Regional breakdown of projects:

Highlands & Islands
18%

Aberdeenshire & Tayside
18%

Forth Valley & Fife
3%

Edinburgh & Lothians
28%

Glasgow & Clyde Valley
20%

South of Scotland
7%

Rest of UK & International
6%

Case study in driving positive change

Hospitality business Glen Mhor proved its commitment to sustainability, green energy innovation, improved mental health and wellbeing, and diversity, equality, and inclusion through two projects supported by Interface.

Edinburgh College and Glen Mhor devised a new recruitment policy and job advert template prioritising inclusivity and offering a sensory-friendly experience from application to employment. This project was funded through a Workplace Innovation Voucher.

Victoria Erasmus, Glen Mhor

In 2022, the business opened a river water source energy centre – the first of its kind - to decarbonise the hotel's heating and hot water system. Interface connected Glen Mhor to the School of Engineering, Computing and the Built Environment at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). Professor Jim Baird undertook a detailed assessment of the metered energy systems and costs to develop an economic model for the hotel. This project was funded through a Standard Innovation Voucher.

"Collaborating through the Innovation Voucher scheme has been transformative for our business and has not only advanced our operational capabilities but also underscored our commitment to innovation and inclusivity"

Victoria Erasmus, Glen Mhor

Case study in celebrating heritage and technology

The Project Team

In a groundbreaking collaboration for its 900th year, Interface introduced the teams at the world-famous St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh to the University of Glasgow's Games and Gaming Lab and game development studio Education Evolved, for Project HeritAlge, to recreate the cathedral in a captivating historical video game. The game transports visitors through its architectural evolution with the aim of engaging as wide a range of public audiences as possible.
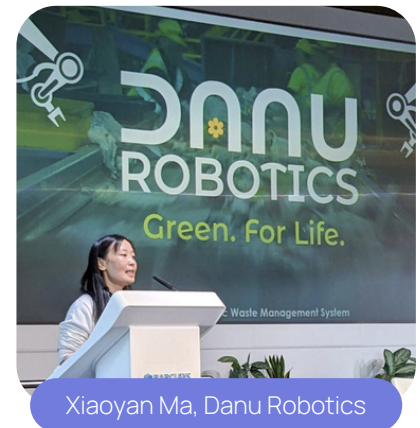
"Louise at Interface, who seems to know the perfect person for everything, put us in touch with Tim at the Games Lab. We knew working with an academic or as it turns out, a whole team of creative practitioners, researchers and developers, was the right path pretty much straight away. Their research combined with their knowledge of completely new ideas means we've ended up with a game that probes new frontiers."

Stephen Preston, Deputy Head of Heritage and Culture at St Giles' Cathedral

Case study in multiple cross disciplinary projects

As a "team of one", Danu Robotics' founder, Xiaoyan Ma, needed help in identifying additional resources to support the development of a robotic picker designed to reduce inefficiencies and high costs in recycling.

Interface connected the clean tech company to a range of Scottish academic partners to support the development of their technology including hardware development and design with the University of Strathclyde, software development and computer vision expertise from University of Edinburgh and engineering expertise from Heriot-Watt University.

Xiaoyan Ma, Danu Robotics

Advanced data analytics and image recognition capability helped develop a more accurate machine learning algorithm and object classification to enable the robotic system to differentiate between recyclable materials and general waste. The benefits of collaborating mean that Danu Robotics' prototype can work at 40 picks per minute, versus trained human operators that work around 10-20 picks per minute. It can reduce the contamination rate from current level of 50%, to below 1%, while saving on operating costs ranging from 30% to 100%.

Case study in college driven innovation

Sara Rae, West College Scotland

Interface introduced The Bettii Pod Ltd, together with their designers Fearsome Ltd, to West College Scotland and, with the help of Innovation Voucher Funding, the project to develop the world's first menstrual cup washer and sanitiser for away-from-home environments was born. The collaboration involved extensive research, design, review of key regulations, and the creation of a lab-based prototype.

The project looked at designing an installable sanitary washer, identifying related infrastructure requirements, and developing installation training. The initial phase delivered the design of a sanitary menstrual cup washer with the potential for global installation. The project was highly commended in this year's Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards in the Making a Social Difference category.
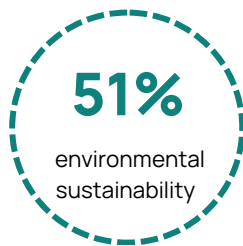
"It was a fantastic experience for the College team to work on a first to market product which positively impacts on a number of societal issues. The real value was in the Bettii Pod Ltd accessing the College technical expertise and equipment to collaborate on prototype development and to test proof of concept."

Sara Rae, West College Scotland

Positive Impacts

89% of the collaborative projects demonstrated positive impacts against at least one of the three responsible business themes. Overall figures were as follows:

51%
environmental sustainability

61%
social inclusion

48%
equality and diversity

We take pride in being a responsible business that doesn't just talk the talk – we walk the walk too. Our team members have become Carbon Literate, earned micro-credentials in Impact Strategy, Climate and Measurement and Marketing, while also enhancing their skills across diverse areas such as management and AI.

Funding elevates innovation

We continue to collaborate with the Scottish Funding Council (Innovation Vouchers), Scottish Enterprise (Advanced Innovation Vouchers) and Scottish Government (Inward Investment Catalyst Fund) to deliver funding programmes of **over £1.1M** supporting industry and national strategies to encourage collaborations between businesses and Scottish universities, colleges and research institutes.

108
Standard, Workforce and Student Placement Innovation Vouchers were awarded with a value of over
£738,000

20
Advanced Innovation Vouchers were awarded with a value of over
£288,000

10
Inward Investment Catalyst Fund projects were awarded with a value of over
£98,000

"Our project, funded through the Inward Investment Catalyst Fund, was a unique opportunity to combine innovation seed funding with academic expertise and commercial traction in a way that rarely happens. The University of the West of Scotland's Creative Computing Technologies Research Group allowed us to develop and maintain a healthy balance between commercial objectives, tech capabilities and expertise, building in a way we were never able to do before, and we now have an office and a team in Scotland."

Thanos Kokkiniotis, CEO, Smartify

Networks and partnerships

We've built strategic partnerships to achieve specific innovation goals and foster large-scale impact across sectors and regions. By engaging at the sector level, we collaborate with businesses and academic experts to tackle industry-wide challenges. Some of our key partnerships include:

- **Programme Sponsor for Innovation and Digital Technology for Scotland Food & Drink:** Driving sector-wide innovation and technological advancement.
- **Scottish Visitor Management Digital Group:** Leading on collaborative activity and knowledge exchange to address visitor management challenges, through data and digital technologies, including partnerships with National Parks, the Scottish Tourism Sector and Local Authorities
- **SULSA and Forging Futures:** Co-delivering a programme for PhD and Postdoctoral researchers in life sciences, recently enriched with an entrepreneurial challenge funded by the Scottish Enterprise Ecosystem Fund.

These partnerships exemplify our commitment to driving innovation and collaboration across diverse sectors.

"Long gone are the days when scientists locked themselves in a room working in silo on their research obsessions. Today's researchers are looking at how their work can be applied to the real world, and this isn't possible without a strong network and an understanding of how industry works.
Interface are the perfect partner for this programme as they work across academia and industry and support collaboration between these two worlds. They have a wealth of experience in this space and a vast network that extends beyond just life sciences in Scotland."
Dr Ally Hughes, SULSA Project Manager

Championing Knowledge Exchange

We delivered the 9th annual Scottish Knowledge Exchange Awards at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, where health and the environment themes shone brightly across seven categories. The celebrations of creativity, novel approaches and ingenuity in solving business challenges through collaborative working were marked in style.

Award winners in Glasgow

Look out for exciting announcements this autumn for the 10th anniversary Awards, with not one, but two additional categories! Watch all the shortlisted projects for 2024 here.

Through the year we have promoted Knowledge Exchange through case studies, events and digital platforms, celebrating the projects and people. We have engaged with several important national days and major events through our communications channels, from World IP Day, International Women's Day and Scotland Loves Colleges to Recycle Week, the Royal Highland Show and National Robotics Week. We have also been involved in 185 events as speakers, exhibitors or to network.

Thank you

Strong collaboration has been central to our success. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to our partners and strategic collaborators whose support has been crucial in ensuring innovation reaches every corner of Scotland.

Interface team

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Collaborate. Innovate. Impact.

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