

BIF summary 24.10.23

1. Introductions

The Chair and Minister Freeman welcomed attendees and introduced a new member (Oonagh McGill).

2. Interactive Clusters map

Officials gave a demonstration of the interactive Clusters map and thanked members for their feedback from March which, alongside other external views, has supported the development of the tool. Minister Freeman outlined his goals for the map: to help promote UK Clusters internationally, to act as a local leadership tool and to support policy. Members shared their reflections:

- It is an excellent tool for encouraging Clusters by design, not chance.
- The tool will support local innovation champions to drive investment into their Cluster.
- There is clear value for policymaking, particularly infrastructure planning, but it is important to ensure the tool has cross-Government engagement to maximise impact.
- It would be good to increase firm-level data, for example information on maturity and size of firms, as well as including the biggest companies in each Cluster.

To maximise opportunities for international investment, having a representative for each cluster could be helpful. Members agreed to provide further feedback after the meeting.

3. Secretary of State (SoS) priorities for DSIT

SoS thanked members for their excellent contributions to DSIT's priority areas. This type of engagement is critical to achieving DSIT's objectives. Progress has already been made on a number of BIF priority areas, e.g. [Expert Exchange Programme](#), the [Frontier AI taskforce](#) and the [spinouts review](#).

SoS asked BIF members for their views on three important policy areas: Skills, scale up and Regulation. Members shared their reflections:

- It is essential that large enterprises interact with SMEs to support their commercialisation and leadership capabilities.
- It is important to ensure the UK has a unique scale up offer including access to capital and behavioural incentives for innovation.
- There needs to be more support and resourcing for smaller regulators.
- Regulatory sandboxes should be rolled out at pace.
- We need to incentivise talented students to continue in the deep tech science fields (e.g. through PhDs) to ensure there is a talent pipeline.
- Many companies struggle with the transition from launching a single product to a portfolio of products (e.g. in the Pharmaceuticals Sector) and not having the support to innovate and commercialise successfully.

- Government should take a systems-wide view of innovation and re-communicate what the innovation offer is for different audiences, such as via a playbook mechanism.

4. Regulation and Innovation Procurement

a. Regulation

The chair of the Regulatory Horizons Council (RHC) provided background on the Council and asked members to share their thoughts on how and when to regulate for emerging technologies as part of a current RHC project. Members shared their reflections:

- We can identify and act upon new opportunities and approaches through regulating emerging technologies well.
- Concerns were raised over how IP will be protected in these new technologies.
- There have been issues with regulation and resourcing on the development of clean technologies, MedTech, life sciences, renewable materials and animal testing which should be considered.
- We should learn from best practice in industries and sectors that excel with pro-innovation regulation.
- We could use task and finish groups to create tangible outcomes in specific areas of regulation development.
- It is important to understand and capture how the public perceives regulation.

The Chair's response included:

- Agreement on needing a space to allow the views of industry, the public and regulators to be shared.
- The RHC aims to facilitate dialogues between a range of stakeholders (including academia, industry, regulators and government) to provide advice on where regulatory reform can support innovation and is happy to engage with the BIF membership.

The Minister added:

- That it would be important to focus on tangible outcomes, alongside sandboxes that would allow more agility in this space. This forum can act as a sounding board for the development of these approaches.

b. Innovation Procurement

The Deputy Director for Innovation Systems introduced the item, stating that the [Government's Science Capability Review](#) (SCR) (2019) and [Science and Technology Framework](#) (2023) both emphasise the need to improve government pull-through of technologies into procurement/public sector supply chains. DSIT and the Government Office for Science (GO-Science) provided an update on the work they are doing to bolster innovation procurement capability in departments.

The Minister raised that procurement sits alongside regulation and the importance of understanding the barriers to pulling innovation through, even when we have best practice in the UK via the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) led by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Members shared their reflections on the two policy work strands presented, including:

- Getting innovative partners on board can be difficult and separate gateways are needed to co-incentivise procurement, science and R&D.
- Government needs to have a way to filter ideas early on in the process to maximise efficiency.
- It is important for companies to have clear guidance and support on the full procurement cycle.
- The importance of piloting innovation procurement methods in focused areas, rather than trying to achieve systemic change all at once.
- Taking learning from current process models that have positive cultures to give the work an extra chance of success and value for money.

5. Introduction to Dr Dave Smith, National Technology Advisor

- Dr Dave Smith introduced himself as the UK's National Technology Adviser, where his focus will be on integrating academic and industry expertise with government to boost UK's superpower ambitions.
- Welcomed the [Science & Technology Framework](#) and his interest in the procurement strand as an enabler for innovation.
- Set out his desire to work with the BIF in the future.

6: Next steps and AOB (Chair)

The Chair summarised the key points from the meeting, actions to take forward and thanked members for attending.