



Innovate  
UK



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



# Innovation Collaboration Framework for Scotland





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# Forewords



Tom Adeyoola,  
Executive Chair, Innovate UK

## Foreword Innovate UK

As we move towards a more innovative and resilient economy, the power of collaboration between government, businesses, and regional partners is undeniable. This Innovation Collaboration Framework between Innovate UK, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Scottish Enterprise (SE), and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) is a crucial step in achieving the shared ambitions of the UK and Scottish Governments.

At Innovate UK, our vision is clear: to enable high potential businesses of all sizes to innovate, scale, and compete globally, providing positive benefit for the UK economy. Innovation is not only a driver of economic growth but also a key to addressing societal challenges. This aligns closely with Scotland's National Innovation Strategy, which aims to position Scotland as one of the most innovative small nations, leveraging its world-class research, natural resources, and entrepreneurial spirit to create a fairer, greener, and more prosperous future.

In partnership with HIE, Scottish Enterprise, and SOSE, we are aligning our efforts with Scotland's innovation goals. Together, we will provide a more cohesive, place-based support system that nurtures regional

innovation ecosystems. This collaboration will empower businesses across Scotland from the Highlands and Islands to the South of Scotland, to thrive by leveraging local strengths and global opportunities.

Through this framework, we will focus on driving real impact by enhancing the customer journey from idea to commercial reality, supporting high-growth sectors like energy transition, advanced manufacturing, and health and life sciences. Our work will also reflect the principles of the UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy, which calls for strategic collaboration between industry, academia, and government to foster long-term economic growth.

The development of Regional Innovation Action Plans will provide tailored support to businesses at various stages of growth. By building on successful initiatives like the Glasgow Innovation Accelerator and the Innovate UK Launchpad programme, we will help Scotland's businesses stay at the forefront of global innovation challenges and opportunities.

**Tom Adeyoola**  
Executive Chair, Innovate UK



Stuart Black  
Highlands & Islands Enterprise

## Foreword by Stakeholders

We are delighted to present this Innovation Collaboration Framework for Scotland, setting out how key agencies responsible for supporting innovation in Scotland will work together with Innovate UK.

The Scottish Government has presented a vision through the **Innovation Strategy for 2023-2033** for Scotland to become one of the most innovative small nations in the world. Scotland has a proud innovation heritage with an astonishing number of firsts hailing from this northerly nation.

Innovation drives economic growth and productivity through the development of new products, services, and technologies. Whilst the prowess of university-driven research and development is rightly held in high international esteem, the challenges faced by our business community today to invest in innovation, collaborate with others, and remain competitive in global markets, are significant.

Achieving the ambitious vision set out by the Scottish Government requires us to take a different approach; one which is



Adrian Gillespie  
Scottish Enterprise



Jane Morrison-Ross  
South of Scotland Enterprise

fully aligned and complementary in each of our support offerings.

It's about connecting our local business innovators and key growth sectors to the national agenda by setting out where Scotland contributes and leads.

It's about aligning our collective innovation services to support regions with their innovation ambitions.

It's about improving the customer journey to make referrals between agencies seamless.

By taking these steps to align all our innovation ambitions we can improve our innovation services and in turn the number of businesses looking to innovate in Scotland.

**Stuart Black**  
Highlands and Islands Enterprise

**Adrian Gillespie**  
Scottish Enterprise

**Jane Morrison-Ross**  
South of Scotland Enterprise



# Introduction

This Innovation Collaboration Framework sets out the basis of a working partnership between Innovate UK, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, and South of Scotland Enterprise. This partnership aims to co-create regional place-based opportunities for innovators across Scotland in line with the mutual innovation priorities of the UK and Scottish Governments.

Together, we will identify common priorities for the future economy, working with places to further develop and align our support for research commercialisation, business innovation and growth.

In recognition of the unique capabilities at regional level, we have purposely set out this framework to guide the development and delivery of regional action plans and the co-ordination of collaboration activities with partners at a national level. In doing so, we will identify and grow local innovation capacity and best leverage the underpinning research and knowledge exchange talent.

This is an enabling document, and whilst not legally binding, we are committed to work together on these priorities which are adaptable to reflect changes in government priorities as these in turn adapt to changes in the global context.

We will collaborate within areas of shared ambition to jointly convene and align our resources as needed. Key focus areas for this Innovation Collaboration Framework are:

1. **Supporting the customer journey from idea to commercial reality**
2. **Targeting our collective support to build and connect local business innovation capacity, prioritising alignment with regional and national priorities, while remaining open to new transformative, cutting-edge innovations**
3. **Improved and new place-based innovation support.**



# Innovate UK in Scotland



Innovate UK supports business innovation across the UK, investing over £60 million annually in Scotland. It is committed to expanding opportunities through programmes that improve access for Scottish innovators. We have a strong presence in Scotland, with a dedicated Manager, Scale and Growth Advisers embedded in Scottish Enterprise, and a team of Knowledge Transfer Managers based at its Edinburgh hub. Scottish Knowledge Transfer Advisers work closely with universities to grow uptake of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) programme. Innovate UK also collaborates with Universities Scotland, its Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, and the Scottish Funding Council to ensure the research base is fully engaged in business-focused innovation.

Across the UK we are building Regional Innovation Action Plans, co-created plans that support the alignment and delivery of UK, Scottish and local innovation strategies by identifying shared priorities and enabling targeted support for business-led innovation. The first of these in Scotland was in Glasgow City Region, then Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region with Aberdeen City Region in development and others to follow.

A key component of Innovate UK's offer is the Catapult Network, state-of-the-art R&D centres with facilities such as labs, factories, and testbeds. These centres, bridge the gap between research and industry, helping businesses, especially SMEs, develop and commercialise innovation by providing infrastructure, expertise, and collaboration support. Scotland is home to several, such as the High Value Manufacturing Catapult at **the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland** (NMIS), and the **Medicines Manufacturing Innovation Centre** (MMIC) both in Renfrewshire. The **Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult** is Headquartered in Glasgow with its Levenmouth demonstrator and The National Floating Wind Innovation Centre a collaboration within the Aberdeen Energy Transition Zone (ETZ) and the **Cell & Gene Therapy Catapult** within the Edinburgh BioQuarter.

Innovate UK also support a UK-wide network of four Agri-Tech Centres, including one based in Edinburgh with sites across Scotland and in the rural communities within Highlands and Islands and South of Scotland. These centres work closely with local institutions and businesses to deliver tailored support aligned with regional strengths and priorities.

Inclusive growth and support for remote regions is also part of our activities in Scotland, such as Project REFLEX in Orkney, a pioneering smart energy demonstration aiming to decarbonise power, heat, and transport within remote communities. The European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) also in Orkney supported through Innovate UK programmes, remains a world-leading marine energy test facility. Further funding through the Strength in Places Fund has supported three large projects in Scotland one of which is Digital Dairy Chain, which is transforming dairy supply chains through digital innovation across Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire. Innovate UK has also supported the Mountain Bike Innovation Centre in the Tweed Valley, developing a globally competitive cluster in cycling, engineering, and tourism.

Other major investments include the Glasgow **Innovation Accelerator** pilot and the Innovate UK Launchpad programme, that is aimed at supporting emerging SME innovation clusters across the UK. The Innovation Accelerator is a locally led model empowering city regions to align innovation with local strengths, supported by Innovate UK's national and international networks. Glasgow's aim is to boost venture capital

in sectors like advanced manufacturing, space, and precision medicine. To date, the pilot has secured £30 million, plus £10 million in follow-on funding to drive regional innovation and economic growth. This pilot will be expanded from 2026, with at least an additional £30m through the new **UKRI Local Innovation Partnerships Fund**. We will work with colleagues across the UKRI system and with partners such as the British Business Bank, to further unlock opportunities for Scottish innovation clusters of the highest potential.

The **Innovate UK Launchpad** programme 2022-26 has been aimed at supporting emerging clusters of small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK. Through the programme, Innovate UK has invested up to £80 million into 11 launchpads across the UK. One of these Launchpads has committed over £7 million into bio-based manufacturing in Scotland. Each unique Launchpad has been co developed with the local leadership in the area, and this Launchpad is being delivered in partnership with Scottish Enterprise. We will continue to work with the Enterprise Agencies across Scotland to ensure we connect businesses in this cluster to wider national and global opportunities.



# Scotland's Perspective

As set out in its 10-year **National Innovation Strategy**, the Scottish Government envisions Scotland becoming one of the most innovative small nations in the world, with innovation referenced as a key tool to make Scotland a fairer, more equal, wealthier and greener country. Key components of the Scottish Innovation Strategy include:

- **Entrepreneurship and Commercialisation Programme** aims to position Scotland as a world-class hotbed of start-up creation and scaling by ensuring late-stage R&D ecosystem investment.
- **National cluster building approach** including a new Scottish Cluster Scheme designed specifically to support Scotland's priority sectors to grow and scale.
- **National Productivity Programme** for innovation adoption and diffusion.



The Innovation Strategy identifies four key sectoral priorities, each encompassing several priority sub-sectors crucial for Scotland's development.

**1. Energy Transition** Harnessing Scotland's natural capital, regional expertise, internationally leading energy research and innovation capabilities and business activity within energy transition, with a particular focus on Hydrogen Generation, Storage and Transport, Floating Offshore Wind, Built Environment Transition, and the Decarbonisation of Transport.

**2. Health & Life Sciences** Capitalising on one of the biggest life sciences clusters in Europe and a track record of research excellence and cross sector collaboration, prioritising opportunities in Digital Health, Future Medicines Manufacturing and Precision Medicine. Scotland's abundant natural assets also present innovation opportunities within the Industrial Biotechnology, Animal Health, AgriTech and Aquaculture sectors.

**3. Advanced Manufacturing** Working through Scottish infrastructure of support including the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland, the Medicines Manufacturing Innovation Centre and the National Robotarium to promote innovation across our manufacturing base and focus on highly innovative opportunities such as Small Satellite Space, Robotics and Autonomous Systems.

**4. Data & Digital Technologies** Building on the impetus of the Scottish Technology Ecosystem Review and national Techscaler network to support horizontal innovation of Digital, Data and Artificial Intelligence in areas such as FemTech and GovTech, with a particular future focus on Quantum Technologies, Photonics and FinTech / Financial Services.



We will also align with the UK Government's Invest 2035 Industrial Strategy to support Scotland's highest potential businesses, ensuring access to UK-wide innovation and investment. Our approach reinforces Scotland's four national priorities identified in the Scottish National Innovation Strategy, and engages with growth sectors like creative industries, leveraging both existing and emerging strengths. By connecting Scottish and UK strategies, we aim to boost innovation, business growth, and competitiveness through a unified support system, working closely with local partners.



# Scotland's Enterprise Agencies



**Scottish Enterprise** is Scotland's national economic development agency.

It supports businesses to innovate and scale to transform the Scottish economy by focusing on new market opportunities through targeted investment, innovation and internationalisation.

We deliver this by working with partners and by taking a mission approach on three major opportunities which we believe will have the biggest impact in transforming Scotland's economy:

- Creating an internationally competitive energy transition economy in Scotland.
- Scaling the impact of Scotland's innovation strengths into high-growth industries of the future.
- Driving capital investment to deliver a step-change in Scotland's productivity.

Our future and priority industries for scaling innovation are life sciences, industrial biotech, critical technologies, space, digital technologies, advanced and high value manufacturing, offshore wind, hydrogen and clean heat.

We work with companies across Scotland and offer account management support in the areas not covered by SOSE and HIE.



Innovation is at the heart of **Highlands and Islands Enterprise's** (HIE's) mission to support businesses and communities across a diverse region that covers half of Scotland's land mass.

Stretching from Shetland to Argyll and from the Outer Hebrides to Moray, the Highlands and Islands is currently developing transformational opportunities in sectors that are vital to Scotland's future, including renewable energy, life sciences and space.

More established sectors, including tourism, food and drink and creative industries, continue to play essential roles and benefit from HIE support not only in innovation, but with specialist advice, investment, and access to international markets.



**South of Scotland Enterprise** is the economic and community development agency for the South of Scotland. It provides specialist and tailored innovation and entrepreneurial support, to organisations, irrespective of size, through all stages of the innovation journey. It follows a roadmap approach focused on the key stages of idea generation, activation, commercialisation, acceleration, and scaling. South of Scotland Enterprise's bold and inclusive remit covers the growth and development of the economy, environment, and communities in the South of Scotland.

## Innovation Collaboration Framework for Scotland

This Innovation Collaboration Framework builds on, established relationships and innovative business support strategies, with successful collaborations among development agencies and regional innovation partners. For example, the SMART Scotland innovation programme is delivered nationally by Scottish Enterprise, leveraging collaborative partnerships with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise.

Each agency brings a unique vision and set of priorities. Within this Collaboration Framework, we aim to harmonise these ambitions, identify common ground to enhance opportunities for collaboration and co-creation, and ultimately benefit innovators across Scotland.

Moreover, Innovate UK and Scottish Enterprise are co-delivering the Innovate UK Business Growth innovation support programme. This collaborative framework will pave the way to extending this approach across Scotland.



We will use an evidence-based approach to identify and develop local strengths aligned to the key innovation priorities of the UK and Scottish Governments. Additionally, partners will explore emerging opportunities in areas such as Natural Capital and Blue Economy. These have the potential for Scotland to lead the way in pioneering nature-based solutions which is an area where Scotland is known to have an obvious competitive advantage in rural-led innovation.

One of our delivery mechanisms will be the development and launch of Regional Innovation Action Plans working with regional stakeholders, building upon those already published for **Glasgow City Region** and the **Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region**. For example, discussions are underway with Aberdeen City Region and Highlands and Islands.



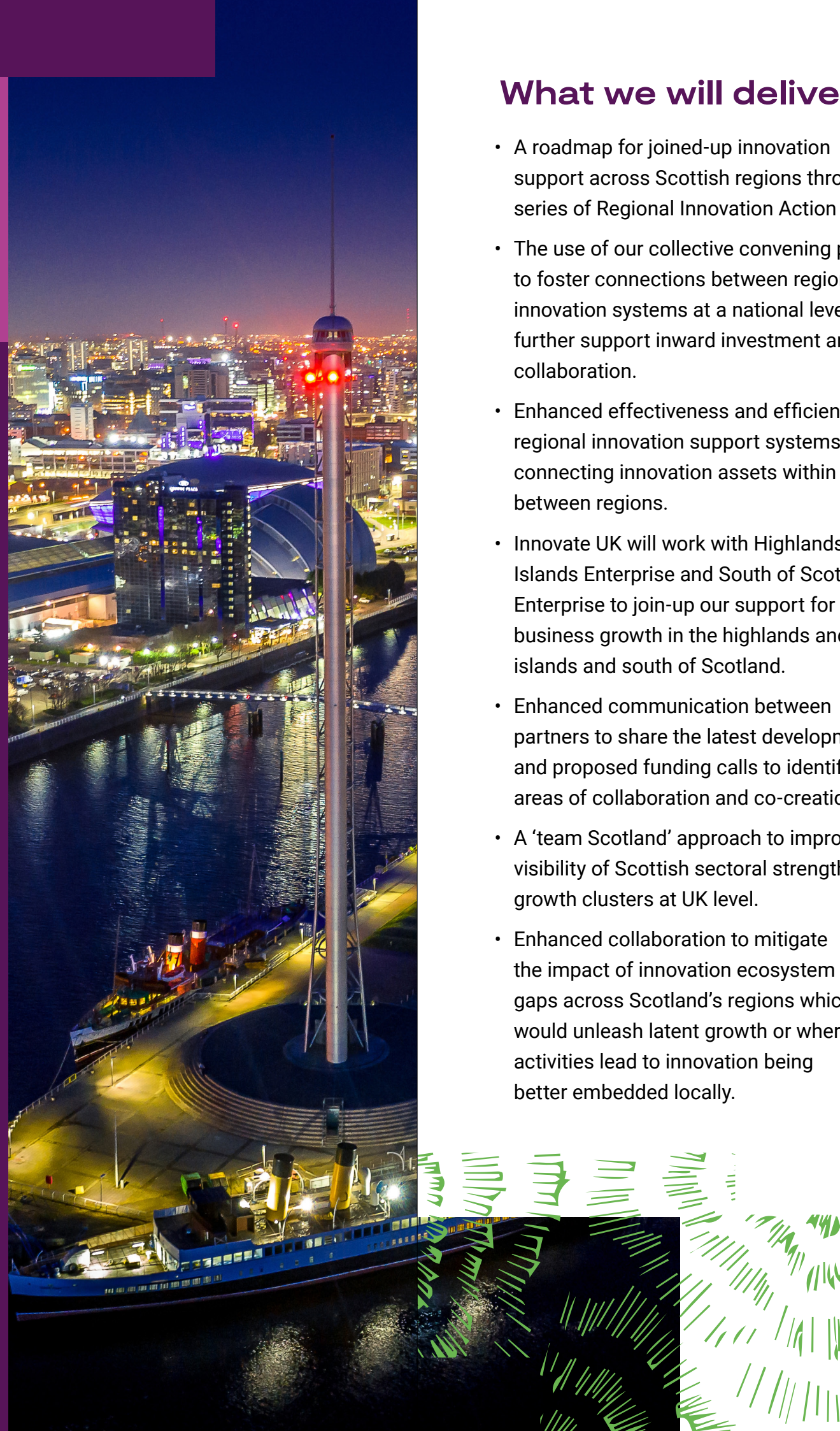
# Core Areas and Actions

Working together our priorities are:

**Supporting the customer journey – from idea to commercial reality:** We aim to align resources, avoid duplication and share knowledge to provide a more coherent and effective support offering to innovators. This will include spin out support, early stage/high growth support, SME and large company support by leveraging our local, Scottish and UK-wide resources.

**Targeting our collective support to build and connect local business innovation capacity where it aligns to regional and national strengths:** We will establish a system for sharing our combined knowledge and resources, aiming to empower more companies to build innovation capabilities. This will enable them to better respond to increased investment in innovation within Scotland, as well as compete more effectively for opportunities locally, nationally, and internationally.

**Improved and new place-based innovation support:** The economic development agencies cover specific geographies in Scotland and Innovate UK provides a wider UK reach. We will collaborate alongside regional partners to identify and develop regional innovation strengths that align with Scottish and UK priorities and develop a more cohesive and efficient innovation support system for businesses.



## What we will deliver

- A roadmap for joined-up innovation support across Scottish regions through a series of Regional Innovation Action Plans.
- The use of our collective convening power to foster connections between regional innovation systems at a national level to further support inward investment and collaboration.
- Enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of regional innovation support systems by connecting innovation assets within and between regions.
- Innovate UK will work with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise to join-up our support for business growth in the highlands and islands and south of Scotland.
- Enhanced communication between partners to share the latest developments and proposed funding calls to identify areas of collaboration and co-creation.
- A 'team Scotland' approach to improving visibility of Scottish sectoral strengths and growth clusters at UK level.
- Enhanced collaboration to mitigate the impact of innovation ecosystem gaps across Scotland's regions which would unleash latent growth or where activities lead to innovation being better embedded locally.

The output of which would be:

- Improved local business innovation capacity and capability that is globally competitive and where a strategic approach could lever better growth and attract higher levels of public and private sector investment.
- The creation of more resilient and innovation active businesses, strengthened through greater diversity and access to skills and talent.
- More innovative businesses developing market ready solutions.

## Monitoring our Impact

Innovate UK, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of this Innovation Collaboration Framework. The Framework is intended to be an enabling document, which looks to the future economy and responds to changing environments such as local needs and economic pressures over the coming years.

Reviews will take place annually. At each review, we will assess progress against a rolling tracker of actions, including measuring impact against national strategies evolving existing and creating new actions as appropriate.





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[ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk](https://ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk)

03003 214357 • [support@iuk.ukri.org](mailto:support@iuk.ukri.org) • [@innovateuk](https://twitter.com/innovateuk)

Innovate UK, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1FL