As the CEO of an Innovation Centre, I have focused my comments largely on the exploitation of academic activities and the link into economic outcomes for Scotland.

In comparison to England, Scotland's economy is more dependent on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). We have early evidence that, even pre-COVID19, many SMEs were reluctant to hire newly qualified graduates and preferred to recruit more experienced individuals. This is attributable largely to risk and opportunity costs. One approach to mitigate this situation would be for SMEs to offer more undergraduate internships. Performance data from E-Placement Scotland[1] indicate that in excess of 60% of interns they placed, return to work for their original internship provider, or remain in the industry. This could be a method of increasing the number of students who remain in the Scottish economy post-graduation. Scaling the E-Placement Scotland scheme would be a method of increasing the number and accessibility of internship opportunities. Moreover, the Innovation Centre's MEF could be extended to include KPIs on the number of internship, and subsequent employment, opportunities created through our established industrial networks.

As well as creating more opportunities for direct graduate recruitment, greater emphasis should be placed on student entrepreneurship. This could be as part of an undergraduate / postgraduate programme but also creating opportunities for entrepreneurial activity upon graduation, as an alternative to direct employment. Here an exemplar activity is run by the Alacrity Foundation[2]. This has a current activity in South Wales focused on cyber security. The format of this activity is to run a competitive scheme to attract newly qualified graduates. Those selected participate in a 3-month boot camp to develop the individual's entrepreneurial skills. This is followed by a 12-month team project to develop a cyber security proposition. At the end of this period these "teams" are transitioned into fledgling companies with a £250k investment. At the end of the first cohort 18 companies were launched and 17 remain trading. This model is scalable and could be aligned to areas of Scottish strength such as sensing, artificial intelligence etc. Allocation of direct budget to support this activity could be challenging. However, such an activity could be aligned to the city and growth deals and their associated objectives. For example, the Moray deal has an objective to retain young people (18 to 24) in their economy.

Over the past 18-months I have had the opportunity to mentor a number of students personally. Consistently, I have been surprised by the lack of softer skills exhibited by these students, such as professional networking and the value of relationship capital. Additionally, a number of mentees had pursued very specific studies and they initially had difficulty in being able to relate their specific skills and experiences into more generic areas, thereby widening their employment opportunities. More generally, there are opportunities to increase the depth and breadth of graduate and early career mentoring. Scotland is a connected nation with a substantial diaspora. This diaspora could be identified through networks such as Global Scot[3] or the Scottish Business Network[4], through their alma mater,

[1] https://www.e-placementscotland.com/

[2] www.alacrityfoundation.co.uk

[3] www.globalscot.com

to early career individuals from the same institution. This is a scalable, bottom up method of increasing Scotland's reach. My own University, Hull, has established through it's Alumni Association such a mentoring scheme[5]. I have participated in this personally and have found it to be a very rewarding and beneficial activity.

I hope this response is of interest and I am willing to discuss in more detail if required.

Paul Winstanley, CEO CENSIS

[4] https://www.sbn.scot/

[5] https://hullalumni.me/2019/08/22/a-big-thank-you-from-students-to-our-alumni-mentors/