Connecting Scotland – how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Aberdeen City Council

1. What international activities are happening now in your sector and/or organisation? Please describe how and why these activities take place. Are other sectors or organisations involved? What do these activities contribute or achieve?

Aberdeen City Council undertakes international activities focused on the following four main areas:

a) Business, Trade and Investment support for SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises)

b) Culture

c) European Policy and Funding

d) Community Development (twin city links)

Business, Trade and Investment support for SMEs

The economic development service supports SMEs to trade internationally and increase their turnover from exports. It does this by:

- hosting inward business delegations (hosted 24 delegations in 2014)
- organising trade seminars on how to do business in key target markets
- organising overseas trade missions (involved in 7 missions to 5 countries in 2014)
- attending, addressing or hosting industry events and conferences, eg Offshore Europe; Offshore Technology Conference in Houston; Offshore Northern Seas in Stavanger
- promoting the strengths and capabilities of Aberdeen’s businesses at events
- facilitating direct business to business introductions and links
- gathering and disseminating market intelligence
- maintaining strategic international alliances such as Aberdeen’s six Memoranda of Understanding (bilateral economic cooperation agreements) with other key energy cities/regions in Brazil, Canada, Faroe Islands, Kazakhstan and Mexico
- developing new strategic links with emerging or target markets to pave the way for company market entry (eg Mozambique oil and gas; Japan renewable energy)
- being active members of the World Energy Cities Partnership – a 22-strong global network of cities that host energy industries www.energycities.org
- coordinating business support activities with partner organisations through the North East Scotland Trade Group http://www.aberdeeninvestlivevisit.co.uk/Invest/Business-Services/International-Trade/NESTG/North-East-Scotland-Trade-Group.aspx

These activities take place in order to:
• contribute towards local, regional and national objectives to help grow the economy
• build on Aberdeen’s position as a global centre of excellence for the energy industry
• raise awareness among SMEs of the international trade opportunities that exist in key target markets
• open doors into key target markets, especially those where civic, diplomatic, city-to-city or local government links are particularly useful
• help increase the number of SMEs exporting
• help increase SMEs’ % of turnover from exports

Other organisations involved include North East Scotland Trade Group partners:

• Aberdeenshire Council
• Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce
• University of Aberdeen
• Robert Gordon University
• Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Future
• Scottish Development International/Scottish Enterprise
• Scottish Council for Development and Industry
• UK Trade and Investment
• Subsea UK

These activities provide tailored and targeted support to businesses whose continued success underpins Aberdeen’s economic performance.

Culture

Aberdeen City Council’s Education, Culture and Sport service is closely involved in a significant amount of wide-ranging international activity, some examples of which are listed below:

1. Aberdeen International Youth Festival - Aberdeen City Council invests over £130,000 per year in Aberdeen International Youth Festival to bring some of the best young theatre, dance and music performers to Aberdeen from throughout the world each summer. [www.aiyf.org](http://www.aiyf.org)

2. Lively Cities - The Lively Cities Project (LICI) was a 3 year European partnership, supported through the Interreg IVB North West Europe programme. The project looked at alternative ways of strengthening communities by 'reclaiming public space for public use'. Aberdeen along with nine other partner cities including La Louviere, Lille, Eindhoven and Brighton, each developed and piloted collaborative solutions to the challenges of place management within urban settings. Aberdeen City Council, as a project partner, focused on developing the city through public art.

LICI project supported a unique transnational knowledge exchange, alternative insight into analysing public spaces, development of collaborative solutions and to pilot these solutions in order to provide evidence which will inform future policy and
actions. The work undertaken has laid the foundations for on-going cultural exchanges, such as the SPECTRA Light Festival, as well as informing local planning and policy development. Projects such as LICI are essential for Aberdeen, not only to identify collaborative cost-effective solutions but also to be recognised on a bigger platform, for best practice and our unique strengths and assets as a forward-thinking, progressive city.

3. **Energy cities culture partnership** - Aberdeen City Council in partnership with Robert Gordon University has established an ongoing partnership with the cities of Calgary, Houston, Stavanger and Toronto. This partnership is built upon the development of arts and culture within an energy cities context and, in the case of Toronto, learning from a global cultural capital. The collaboration has taken different forms. Firstly, in October 2014 delegates from each of the cities were invited to Aberdeen to participate in an international conference on the role and development of arts and culture in the context of an energy centre. In addition, each delegate spent time with various organisations and attending different sessions including a specific network meeting with the Chamber of Commerce. From this initial visit, we have retained regular communication (through emails and skype calls) as a form of knowledge exchange, while specific joint initiatives are now being developed. This includes a creative exchange programme with Calgary Arts Development which is being launched later this year. This will support young artists to travel and participate in residencies and different programmes to support their development.

The aim of this collaboration was firstly as a form of learning and knowledge exchange but is now evolving to practical programmes. There are many distinctions between Aberdeen and these cities, however there are also distinct similarities from which we can learn. Aberdeen is in the process of developing a renewed strategy for arts and culture, a process that each of these cities has recently been through and the learning from this has been very beneficial.

4. **Europe Direct Aberdeen** – The Central Library hosts a Europe Direct service that provides:

- Information about the European Union (EU) in any of the official EU languages
- Internet access to EU websites
- EU resources for teachers
- Copies of publications, brochures and guides to take away
- An annual Schools Debate on EU-relevant themes
- A series of leaflets allowing citizens to find out about the role of the European Union and their rights in various key areas of European policy

http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Library/information_service/lib_information_europedirect.asp
5. **Museums and Galleries** - The Museums and Galleries section, a member of the North Sea Museums Network, loans works of art throughout the year to international museums and galleries and also displays both loaned and its own international collections. During the redevelopment of Aberdeen Art Gallery, the City Council’s collections will be exhibited in a number of venues, nationally and internationally. These include a large group of paintings by the “Glasgow Boys” on show at the Drents Museum, Assen in the Netherlands and French Impressionist works by Monet, Renoir and Sisley in ARoS, Kunstsmuseum, Aarhus in Denmark.

Recently, the City Council’s “Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X”, by Francis Bacon was a key part of the exhibition, “Francis Bacon and the Art of the Past” at the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg in Russia. Jointly developed with the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, and University of East Anglia, the exhibition took place within the framework of the UK-Russia Year of Culture in 2014. Aberdeen’s contribution to the exhibition was the only one from a local authority museum or art gallery in the UK.

6. **Arts Development twin city programme** (see also Community Development section below) - Arts Development has an established role developing cultural partnerships with Aberdeen’s twin cities as well as further afield. This work plays a vital role in strengthening the city’s relationships with its European partners and raising the cultural profile of Aberdeen to a wider audience. Recent examples include:

- **Connections** – Inter-generational creative writing, oral story-telling and drama project with Regensburg on memories of the Second World War, resulting in a bilingual publication produced by older people and a play performed in both cities by young people.

- **Fairytales in the Landscape** – This was a £3 million pound project being held as part of Stavanger's European Capital of Culture 2008 programme. The young people in Aberdeen had mainly been taught traditional musical theatre so this project exposed them to new and experimental way of working with theatre professionals. The group of 6 young people spent 2 weeks in Stavanger performing daily in the project, an amazing opportunity which received much media coverage in Stavanger. As part of the legacy of the project, the site where the performance took place has now been bought by the city of Stavanger as a public park, which now stages regular theatre experiences.

7. **ATLAC (Arts as a Tool for Learning Across the Curriculum)** - The Arts Education service has a long-standing partnership with the University of Aberdeen School of Education in the joint delivery of **Arts as a Tool for Learning Across the Curriculum (ATLAC)**, funded by Creative Scotland.
Working on the BEd3 and BEd4 programmes, professional artists and lecturers co-deliver sessions to develop the knowledge, skills and aspirations of student teachers in using creative approaches to teaching and learning across the primary curriculum.

The University of San Andrés in Buenos Aires made an approach to Creative Scotland to learn more about the Aberdeen model. Professor Pete Stollery, Head of the School of Education in Aberdeen, made a research visit to Buenos Aires in 2011 where proposals for professional exchanges and conferences were developed.

A number of exchange visits have taken place on sharing best practice in the field of arts, learning and communities. There is a Memorandum of Understanding between the 2 cities focused on these themes. In addition, partners in Buenos Aires have set up 'ABC Buenos Aires,' an artists' training programme and new ways of working in schools based on the Aberdeen ATLAC model. 'ABC Buenos Aires' is now an official project of the city government and is beginning to expand to other provinces.

**European Policy and Funding**

Aberdeen plays an active role in the North Sea Commission, Energie Cities and other European organisations. Activity includes influencing, participating in and leading trans-national projects and disseminating information about policy and funding.

For further information, please see http://www.aberdeeninvestlivevisit.co.uk/Invest/Aberdeens-Economy/Policy-and-Funding/Policy-and-Funding.aspx

**Community Development**

Aberdeen has very active relationships with its five twin cities (Regensburg, Germany; Clermont-Ferrand, France; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; Gomel, Belarus; and Stavanger, Norway) encompassing sport, education, culture, health, community engagement etc. Some examples are provided in section six above.

For further information, please see http://www.aberdeeninvestlivevisit.co.uk/Visit/TwinningAberdeen/Twinning-Aberdeen.aspx

2. Do you think your sector and/or organisation is effective in participating in international activities?

Aberdeen City Council demonstrates its commitment to international engagement by participating in, leading and driving activities that strengthen Aberdeen’s profile internationally and enhance the city’s quality of life locally. This international presence emphasises that Aberdeen is a highly-attractive location of choice in which to invest, live, work, study or visit.

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