Connecting Scotland – how Scottish organisations engage internationally

British Council Scotland

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?

1.1 British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work in over 100 countries, connecting millions of people with the United Kingdom through programmes and services in the English language, the Arts, Education and Society. We believe these are the most effective means of engaging with others, and we have been doing this work since 1934.

1.2 Our work in English aims to bring high quality language materials to every learner and teacher who wants them. In developing and post-conflict countries we teach English and train teachers through radio, web and TV broadcasts. We offer over three million UK examinations worldwide, helping people gain access to trusted qualifications to support their career and study prospects.

1.3 Our work in Education and Society helps transform national education systems, builds more inclusive and open societies, and increases young people’s opportunities. We encourage international students to come and study in the UK, and British students to experience life abroad. We bring schools around the world together so young people and teachers from different countries can share with and learn from each other.

1.4 Our work in the Arts involves the very best British and international artistic talent. We help increase audiences for international work in the UK and for UK work globally. We bring artists together and support the development of skills and policy in the arts and creative industries. Through this work we ensure that culture in its broadest sense plays a vital role in connecting with and understanding each other.

1.5 In these ways, the British Council builds links between UK people and institutions and those abroad, helping to create trust and lay foundations for prosperity and security around the world.

1.6 British Council Scotland was established in 1946 in Edinburgh, with the purpose of promoting the best of Scottish culture and learning to the rest of the world by bringing foreign academics, students, policymakers and artists to Scotland and taking counterparts abroad.

1.7 Since then, we have enabled thousands of young people from Scotland to study and work abroad, helped schools and higher education institutions to create partnerships with other countries, and supported the professional development of teachers and academics at home and abroad. We have also brought the brightest students from other countries to study, teach and work in Scotland, helping to broaden the cultural horizons of our young people.
1.8 Building trust between the people of Scotland and other countries helps create trade and business links. By broadening people’s horizons and connecting Scots to other countries and cultures, we help boost Scotland’s economic prosperity and security.

1.9 Today, British Council Scotland is highly valued for its global reach. Through offices in over one hundred countries, we pull together overseas knowledge, experience and perspectives, help catalyse relationships, and comment on issues affecting Scotland’s profile and standing in the world. Our overseas offices are also an invaluable source of support and assistance to visiting cultural and educational delegates from Scotland.

1.10 Our work in education is broad-ranging, and involves:
- Working in partnership with universities and schools
- Encouraging participation in education programmes
- Programmes to increase mobility
- Meeting the higher education sector’s needs
- Meeting the needs of Scottish schools

1.11 Our work in the arts centres around three main actions:
- Internationalising major Scottish events
- Promoting Scotland at major international events
- Strengthening cultural diplomacy

1.12 An example of our work to support the internationalisation of a sector concerns higher education. In 2013 we commissioned a ‘Strategic Analysis of the Scottish Higher Education Sector’s Distinctive Assets’ (publ. 2013, British Council). The study mapped out the distinctive assets of the Scottish higher education system as a whole, in order to better promote the sector internationally, and the authors were able to pull out defining characteristics that, collectively, are unique to Scotland. By encouraging transnational connections between academic systems through a dynamic exchange of knowledge, ideas and information, we contribute to building trust and understanding between Scotland and other nations.

1.13 These defining characteristics include:
- Primacy of the learner and a stress on life-long learning
- An integrated and inclusive sector that is internationally active
- A no-fees policy for undergraduates
- High employability rates for graduates
- Strong links with business and industry
- An innovative system of research pooling and research investment
- High levels of research impact including a number of spin-off companies
- Success in winning research income
- String recruitment of international students
- An impressive global ranking

1.14 The report has helped to underpin the formation of ‘Connected Scotland’, a consortium of Scottish organisations with a common interest in positioning Scotland’s higher education sector in priority markets; as described in our earlier submission to EERC.
(January 2015). This in turn has led to mounting overseas fact-finding missions, for example to Brazil and China, to promote the research strengths of Scottish universities and identify collaborative research links.

**Do you think your sector and/or organisation is effective in participating in international activities? If not, what would help you to make improvements? What prevents you from making improvements now?**

2.1 In the autumn of 2014 we published a report that captured the range, depth and impact of British Council Scotland’s work. The data and case studies were gathered by independent researchers and covered our work over a three year period from 2011 to 2014 (‘Connecting Scotland to the World: The value of British Council’s work in Scotland 2011-2014’, pub. 2014, [www.britishcouncil.org/scotland](http://www.britishcouncil.org/scotland)).

2.2 The report demonstrates that using Scotland’s excellent cultural and educational assets to forge transnational connections enables the development of trust between nations and people; creating the necessary conditions for greater security and prosperity.

2.3 The report has enabled us to identify the common beliefs that we share with our partners in Scotland: an ethos of collaboration, a strong desire to engage internationally, a willingness to link with business and commercial partners, and a collective approach to position Scotland as an international partner of choice. As the report demonstrates, British Council endeavours, by using its unique global network and professional expertise across sectors, to secure Scotland’s role as a globally connected nation.

**What should organisations in Scotland do to be effective internationally? Are you aware of any good examples of this from Scotland or another country?**

3.1 The Scottish Government’s economic strategy (March 2015) focuses on increasing competitiveness and tackling inequality, under four broad priority areas: investment, innovation, inclusive growth and internationalisation. The internationalisation agenda concerns (i) creating an environment within Scotland that supports a better understanding of international opportunities, and (ii) influencing the world on issues that matter most in helping Scotland to flourish. Regarding the first of these agenda items, the Government wants to see the development of an international mind set, and is committed to embedding internationalisation across its areas of competence to ensure that Scotland remains internationally competitive.

3.2 British Council Scotland believes it is crucial to instil an international outlook among Scotland’s young people in order to create a better understanding of international opportunities. Results of a survey we commissioned from the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (‘Scotland’s Future Workforce: keeping pace in the global skills race?’ publ. June 2014, SCDI) indicate that businesses cannot find the ‘global’ or transferable skills they need in the labour pool when recruiting new staff in Scotland, and this affects their competitiveness in international markets. The results of this survey were detailed in our earlier submission (January 2015).
3.3 British Council runs a number of programmes that are open to young people in Scotland and which help to instil an international outlook. The Erasmus+, IAESTE and Language Assistants programmes promote outward and inward student mobility and hence the development of individuals’ skill sets; including cultural awareness and confidence in foreign languages.

3.4 The Connecting Classrooms programme provides Scottish schools with funding and advice in order to build relationships with schools around the world, by supporting teacher study visits, professional development and online school linkages. Connecting Classrooms provides pupils with knowledge and insight into the cultures of other countries as well as awareness of issues such as their rights and responsibilities as global citizens, the skills needed to work in a global economy, and the means of building a fairer, more sustainable world.

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