Connecting Scotland: how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Cancer Research UK

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?

Cancer Research UK is the world’s largest cancer charity dedicated to beating cancer through research. Our policy department advocates on issues related to treatments, services, research and public health in the Devolved Nations, at EU and local levels, and in Westminster.

In our organisation’s recently published strategy, increasing our international stature and working with the best people across the world to tackle cancer on a global basis were highlighted as vital for beating cancer sooner. This impetus has renewed efforts within the organisation to bolster our efforts at international level, and draw up a cohesive international strategy that involves all teams from research to fundraising.

Collaborating on research

Cancer Research UK has an established tradition of funding international research. We fund studies across Europe and worldwide and use research to try to understand differences in cancer rates and mortality across Europe and worldwide. International collaboration in research is vital.

We have established teams who participate in international fora to share our progress and share intelligence, and across the organisation we have an established network of contacts with individuals and organisations worldwide.

For research there are clear benefits in sharing expertise and knowledge across different disciplines. Collaboration between funders and across borders is becoming increasingly necessary for all forms of research. Research into rare cancer in particular benefit from international collaboration as the patient population in individual countries are not sufficient to meet recruitment targets of clinical trials.
Case study: International Rare Cancers Initiative (ICRI)

International Rare Cancers Initiative is a joint initiative between Cancer Research UK (CRUK), the National Institute of Health Research Clinical Research Network: Cancer (NIHRCRN: Cancer), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC), the Institut National Du Cancer (INCa) and the National Cancer Institute of Canada Clinical Trials Group (NCIC CTG).

The aim of this initiative is to facilitate the development of international clinical trials for patients with rare cancers in order to boost the progress of new treatments for these patients. The initiative hopes to encourage the use of innovative methodologies to maximise the potential for answering research questions and to identify and overcome barriers to international trials to allow international collaborative trials to run smoothly.

Across cancer international collaborations are crucial a recent report commissioned by Cancer Research UK found that in 2011 43% out of 7,922 cancer publications involved UK institutions collaborating with international institutions.

Although Cancer Research UK’s established status as a charity funded by the UK public remains a consideration in how far we engage internationally beyond research, be it through fundraising or policy and advocacy, surveys carried out to gauge our public’s understanding of the importance of international work have however revealed broad support.

Making international a priority in our organisational strategy has been important in galvanising support and resource for international work, which previously was a barrier to making progress.

Perhaps the broadest barrier to participating in international work is in ensuring focus and identifying discreet, high-impact activities. The international advocacy space can seem vast and discursive, and as an organisation we are keen to ensure that our engagement does actually bring tangible improvements to cancer patients and the fight against cancer.

**Engaging in international policy discussions**

CRUK is also considering how to better engage with international policy discussions.

Beating cancer sooner needs international collaboration. We already demonstrate our understanding of this through our research, and we want our advocacy to mirror these efforts. Ensuring that we are engaged at an international level means that our research and expertise on policy issues can support efforts to beat cancer across the world, while allowing us to understand international best practice.

Until now, our international advocacy efforts have been focused on tobacco control, as we are a leading voice in the UK.
**International Consortium for Action and Research on Tobacco (ICART)**

Increasing investment in international tobacco control research is crucial for cancer control and public health, particularly in Lower and Middle income countries. With this in mind, Cancer Research UK has committed £5 million over five years to ICART – a collaborative endeavour between research funders worldwide. Our funding will be channeled towards:

- New grants programme for research in Lower Middle Income Countries
- Fellowships and capacity building
- Secretariat support for ICART
- Increase investment in tobacco control evidence base
- Build shared understanding of research priorities
- Deliver research that supports action
- Build capacity
- Increase coordination
- Add value
- Champion investment in FCTC implementation

The following organisations are also supporters of ICART.

- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
- Cancer Council Australia
- Cancer Council Victoria
- *Cancer Research UK*
- Institut National du Cancer, France
- Irish Cancer Society
- Latin American & Caribbean Society of Medical Oncology
- McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer
- Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
- National Cancer Institute, USA
- Norwegian Cancer Society
- Singapore Cancer Society
- Union for International Cancer Control
- University of Toronto Centre for Global Health Research

Beyond ICART, the department is scoping out where our existing expertise and know-how could best be harnessed to make an impact at international level in the advocacy space and in the meantime will grow our profile by exploiting opportunities where we can make an impact.

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

Effective engagement internationally requires focus in identifying activities where organisations can best make an impact. For Cancer Research UK, being a leader in tobacco control at UK level obviously positioned us well to extend our efforts internationally, for example.
Knowing when to lead and when to support is also important. Staking out who is doing what internationally, where there are gaps (and where efforts would duplicate existing work) is also important.

Identifying international partners is vital. At EU and international level, we know that our advocacy efforts are bolstered when we speak with one voice through international organisations.

Prioritising international activities internally and ensuring internal support is really important. This includes effective internal communication and communicating with supporters if relevant.

April 2015