Connecting Scotland – how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Project Trust

Summary
Project Trust believe that long-term structured volunteering placements are an extremely effective way of ensuring young Scots learn and engage effectively with a globalising world, and become active global citizens.

Volunteering overseas in a long-term structured placement has numerous positive benefits, both for the individual volunteer and the host community. There are also benefits to the volunteer’s own community and wider society on their return to Scotland.

Introduction
Project Trust has been providing long-term voluntary placements in Africa, Asia and Latin America for young people since 1967, making it the oldest educational charity specialising in overseas volunteering for school-leavers from the UK.

Based on the Hebridean Isle of Coll, we annually select around 300 young people (17 - 19 year olds) from across the UK for eight or 12 month voluntary teaching and social care placements.

Our volunteering experience is open to all young people with the desire, motivation and aptitudes required to succeed. The volunteer selection process involves a four day residential course which takes place at the charity’s purpose-built centre on the Isle of Coll.

Selection gives candidates the chance to get to know Project Trust and gives us enough time to make an informed decision as to whether the candidate would be suitable for a long-term overseas placement.

Working with international partners, overseas projects are carefully chosen to ensure that the volunteers’ skills can be put to good use in their host communities and do not take work away from local people.

Project Trust provides all volunteers with training and support before, during and after their time overseas, to maximise both the educational value of their experience and the positive impact they have in their projects.

After eight or 12 months volunteering overseas, volunteers return home with a greater understanding of a different culture, way of life, as well as first-hand experience of different global issues. They also return with broadened horizons, increased maturity and an impressive range of transferable skills.

All Project Trust volunteers now receive a Level 3 Foundation Year in Global Volunteering and Citizenship, formally accredited by One Awards and many go on to become Global Citizenship Ambassadors – sharing their experiences and knowledge in their local communities in the UK.
Project Trust volunteers are currently working in the following countries:

**Africa:** Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia

**Americas:** Chile, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras, Peru,

**Asia:** Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand,

Current Project Trust volunteers overseas:

- 157 from England
- 91 from Scotland
- 15 from Wales
- 7 from Northern Ireland
- 8 from other European countries

Project Trust responses to Committee Questions

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?

Volunteering and the connection with global citizenship education

Project Trust’s Global Citizenship Programme was launched in 2012 with the aim of ensuring that the impact of our volunteers’ overseas experiences is maximised through their engagement with their home communities on their return.

Project Trust believes in the power of young people to educate and inspire. Having lived and worked within a community overseas for eight or 12 months our returned volunteers are in a unique position to share their experiences with others.

So far we have delivered over 150 global citizenship sessions within primary and secondary schools all rated as either good or outstanding by the respective schools. The sessions range from being focused on a particular international day, like World AIDS or International Women’s Day, to raising awareness of a wider theme such as Fair Trade or language learning.

In Scotland, our Global Citizenship Programme contributes directly to the aims of Curriculum for Excellence – that young people should be successful learners, responsible citizens, effective contributors and confident individuals. In March 2015 Project Trust’s Education Resource Officer and a number of our returned volunteers delivered a focus week of global citizenship sessions in schools in South Lanarkshire which reached an estimated 1,250 pupils.

Language Linking Global Thinking

Project Trust is currently participating in a pilot programme with the Scottish National Centre for Languages (SCILT) and British Council called **Language Linking, Global Thinking.** Through the programme Project Trust volunteers have been linked with primary and secondary schools in Stirlingshire. Project Trust volunteers visited their partner schools pre-departure and then continue to have contact with the schools during their volunteering placement. When they return to Scotland in August/September they
will then make a final visit to their partner school. This supports the development of the Scottish Government’s 1+2 policy which means that all primary schools will have to start teaching a modern language from P1 and another modern language from P5 to P7 by 2020.

**Accreditation of the Project Trust volunteering experience**

Project Trust has now formally accredited our volunteers’ educational journey by entering into a partnership with One Awards. All Project Trust volunteers will now gain a Level 3 *Foundation Year in Global Volunteering and Citizenship* (the equivalent of a Scottish Higher).

This formal accreditation reflects the commitment and dedication our volunteers contribute to their projects and to their host communities. Our volunteers are exceptional young people doing exceptional work overseas and the accreditation constitutes formal recognition of this, whilst also being something tangible to put onto their CVs and university applications. Our volunteers from 2013/14 were the first cohort to gain the accreditation and a number of them were offered conditional places at Scottish universities based on the accreditation.

**The Volunteering Sector**

Project Trust is a founding member of the Year Out Group, a network of organisations formed in 1998 to promote the concept and benefits of young people volunteering overseas, as well as promoting a code of good practice. A number of the Year Out Group members are also part of the British Government’s International Citizenship Service (ICS) Programme.

Through funding from the Department for International Development (DFID), ICS is currently providing 10 – 12 week overseas volunteering placements for 18 – 25 years old from the UK through a variety of delivery agents including Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), Raleigh International and Lattitude.

ICS volunteers work alongside local volunteers in overseas communities. When the volunteers return home to the UK they are asked to continue their commitment to live as active global citizens.

**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?**

**Logistical challenges overseas**

Project Trust is increasingly facing challenges gaining 12 month visas for some of the countries where we work. We recently had to close our country programme in Uganda after more than twenty years of placing volunteers there due to the difficulties of getting long-term visas. It is possible that the process of gaining long-term visas could be made easier if we had official letters of support from the Scottish and/or British Governments.

**Stereotypes surrounding “Gap Years”**

Negative stereotypes surrounding the term “Gap Year” are increasingly common in the media and public discourse. It is also widely perceived that “Gap Years” or taking a year out is only open to a particular demographic of young people (white middle-class) from the UK.
Project Trust is first and foremost an educational charity and does not actively use the term "Gap Year" to describe our work. Project Trust aims to reflect the diversity of UK society in terms of geographical, social, gender and ethnic background. Our volunteering experience is open to all young people with the desire, motivation and aptitudes required to succeed.

However there are obviously barriers to preventing young people from having the opportunity of volunteering overseas for eight or 12 months, including the costs involved.

Project Trust's current 12 month programme has a fundraising target for each volunteer of £5,900. We have a staff team who support the volunteers with their fundraising activities, and also have a small bursary scheme to help. However Project Trust would like to give even more young people from socio-economically deprived backgrounds the opportunity to volunteer overseas and is currently exploring external funding opportunities.

‘Voluntourism’
It has become increasingly popular for young people to travel further afield. Many UK schools are developing links and partnerships with schools and communities overseas which may see pupils going out for short visits to the partner country/community. This can be a positive experience, but undoubtedly there is damage that can be done (to everyone) by parachuting young people into countries for short periods of time without a clear purpose and structure.

Project Trust has always maintained that the most effective educational experience we can provide young people from the UK with is a long-term structured volunteer placement overseas. The vast majority of our volunteers (approximately 90%) spend a full year living and working in their volunteer placement, in a role which has not taken work away from local people.

Project Trust also carefully selects the 300 volunteers whom we send overseas during a four day residential selection process. Our priority is to match a young persons strengths and abilities with the project and setting we believe is right for everyone concerned.

Project Trust believes that having 300 young people returning from long-term structured overseas placements results in broadened horizons, increased confidence and an impressive range of transferable skills. Through learning about different cultures and ways of life, our volunteers make a significant contribution to global learning and understanding in the UK.

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

Project Trust believes the ICS programme, funded by the UK government, is an interesting approach to youth volunteering overseas. However we believe our approach of long term volunteering placements overseas actually offers a more sustainable and impactful model.
Project Trust would therefore like to propose that a Scottish Government overseas volunteering programme be developed for young Scots which would offer them a unique formative experience of eight or 12 months volunteering overseas.

These young people would develop their own personal skills and abilities as successful learners and confident individuals, in addition to being effective contributors and responsible citizens. Indeed these young global citizens will help to shape Scotland’s future as a responsible global nation.

Project Trust also believes the Scottish Government should improve the linkages between Global Citizenship Education and their current International Development policy to ensure they are mutually supportive. We believe that Global Citizenship and volunteering should feature as a key part of the international development framework and should be a focus for how Scotland connects and engages with a globalising world.

**Project Trust would like to extend a warm invitation to the Committee to visit our centre on the Isle of Coll.**

Ingrid Emerson MBE, Chief Executive

*17 April 2015*