Connecting Scotland – how Scottish organisations engage internationally

University of Aberdeen

Introduction to University of Aberdeen internationalisation activities

1. The University of Aberdeen is ranked in the World Top 150 universities. Our strategic priority is to develop international research networks and teaching partnerships and embed a culture of internationalisation across all our activities to further enhance our reputation as a global university.

2. We plan to do this through increased international student recruitment and research collaboration and a greater presence in transnational higher education. There are six core elements to the Internationalisation Strategy: i. Institutional profile and reputation; ii. Student recruitment and experience; iii. Transnational education; iv. Research networks; v. Staff recruitment and mobility; and vi. Alumni and donors.

3. We have extensive partnerships throughout the world and we aim to: develop the intellectual profiles of research scholars by collaborating with international colleagues; grow our international student population; and provide opportunities for students at all levels to study overseas.

4. For the purpose of this evidence submission the University of Aberdeen was requested specifically to focus on its work in international development and the efforts it has made to influence the Scottish and global response.

Contribution of the University of Aberdeen to International Development

5. Universities traditionally have played a major role in international development. From generating and exchanging knowledge, skills and technologies to forming partnerships, building capacity and disseminating information for the public good. Now more than ever the role of the academia is critical as we move from implementing the eight Millennium Development Goals to a broader based integrated global development agenda known as the Sustainable Development Goals. Agreement on these will be reached in September 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly. The current proposal is for 17 goals and 169 targets that all countries should sign up to. The key elements of this integrated programme are: dignity; justice; people; planet; partnerships; and prosperity. The overarching emphasis is on the eradication of poverty, but attention is now being drawn to the increasing inequalities in consumption (of food, energy, water), access to essential health and education services, housing, land and to decent productive work.
6. The University of Aberdeen has been playing a significant part in supporting the international development agenda. Through partnerships with Universities in the global South, Scotland and elsewhere, with business and civil society, we contribute to research, innovation, capacity building, policy formation and evaluation in international development. This includes interdisciplinary work to:

**Develop technologies and effective interventions for:** drought resistant crops; water security; renewable energy; disease prevention and treatment (novel anti-infectives and anti-parasites, treatments for fungal infections); livelihoods and forest conservation; biogas digester up-scale; alternative carbon investments in ecosystems for poverty alleviation.

**Improve measurement systems for:** maternal deaths and maternity record linkage systems; modelling climate disruption; monitoring the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the extent to which inequalities and social exclusion are being reduced.

**Build capacity in:** Sustainable Development; Contract Law; Oil and Gas for Good; competency based Public health; skills of rural midwives; infection control; gender equality and supporting girls into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects; conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

**Conduct evaluations on:** country level progress towards the Millennium Development Goals; global HIV prevention interventions; country reproductive health services; interventions for essential maternal health care; access to quality primary education; violence against women.

**Synthesise and disseminate evidence of:** what works in international development; inequalities and social exclusion in development programmes; environmental and socio-economic drivers of risk from disease.

**Shape policy and practice:** The University of Aberdeen was the only University in Scotland to provide evidence to the UK International Development Select Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals (October 2013) and is the only University in Scotland to be part of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (there are two others in the UK - Cambridge and Southampton).

**Case study: University of Aberdeen Centre for Sustainable International Development**

7. The University of Aberdeen has been engaged in international activities since the 1860s when it welcomed its first student (Nathaniel King) from West Africa. During the 1960s through to the mid-1990s there was a strong African Studies
Centre which largely focused on collaboration with West Africa through a historical perspective.

8. In 2010 the University established a Centre for Sustainable International Development (CSID) to bring together all research and teaching in international development across the University. It is the only Centre in Scotland that focuses on sustainable international development.

9. As a first step the Centre developed an interactive data base (CSIDInfo) of who was working where in international development and the nature of their activity (Research, teaching, consultancy). Based on this, a Strategic Plan was development and aligned with the University Strategic Plan (2011 to 2015). In the first Strategic Plan we identified the core strengths of the University in: 1. Energy for development through research into bio-energy, renewable energy, the World Energy Cities Partnership and the Centre for Energy Law; 2. Environmental sustainability/living with environmental change (climate disruption, deforestation, desertification, drought resistant crops, ecosystems services, urbanisation and water security); 3. Global health (especially adolescent, maternal and reproductive health and HIV).

10. There are about 50 members of staff who are Associates of the Centre and all have considerable experience of working in developing country contexts to improve development outcomes. They are from a range of disciplines across the University and come from each of the three Colleges: Arts and Social Sciences; Life Sciences and Medicine; and Physical Sciences. In addition there are a number of Fellows of the Centre from outside the University and partners from developing countries. Staff members collaborate on interdisciplinary teaching and research that informs policy making and knowledge exchange.

11. Since 2011 the Centre has run an annual undergraduate interdisciplinary course (with 16 staff members) in Sustainable International Development. The course is based largely on the Millennium Development Goals and focussed specifically on sub-Saharan Africa. It has been extremely popular with the 500 students who have participated to date. According to the External Examiner Dr Phil Clark of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies in London “the course in Sustainable International Development (SX1012) continues to employ an excellent range of innovative teaching methods, including the use of films, novels, music and poetry, and creative assessment techniques such as group presentations and personal learning logbooks. This is an excellent course that clearly stimulates the students to think critically and independently and to connect their learning to ongoing development-related events.”

12. In 2012 the course was selected as an example of good practice to be showcased at the British Council Going Global conference in London and in
2013 the University was awarded *Education Provider of the Year* for its teaching on international development. In 2015 it was decided to modify the undergraduate course to align it with key elements of the *Sustainable Development Goals* to be introduced in January 2016. Therefore a massive online open access six week course entitled *Africa: Sustainable Development for All?* has been developed in partnership with FutureLearn [https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/africa-sustainable-development](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/africa-sustainable-development). Through our international connections we have contributions to the course by the former President of Nigeria (Olesun Obasanjo), a United Nations Secretary-General Special Representative (Zainab Hawa Bangura), the Minister of Health for Rwanda (Dr Agnes Binagwaho) and the former Chair of the UK International Select Committee (Sir Malcolm Bruce). The course will go live on 22nd June and is already well subscribed. It has been singled out for presentation at the June 2015 British Council *Going Global* conference and it is proposed to run it three times a year.

13. One of outcomes of the undergraduate teaching programme is a strong body of CSID student Volunteers who organize an annual International Development week on campus and showcase examples of the work they have done during their course. They also assist the Director of the Centre to run seminars and an annual African Film Series. As a result of their involvement in the work of the Centre many of them have gone on to work in international development at the United Nations, European Commission; Ministries of Foreign Affairs and for international and national civil society organisations such as, the International Centre for Migration Health and Development, the Overseas Development Institute and African Initiatives.

14. Many students from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia come to study at the University of Aberdeen due to its international reputation in oil and gas related subjects. In particular, Geosciences, Energy Economics, Contract Law and most recently a Master’s programme in *Oil and Minerals for Good* which adopts a sustainable development perspective.

15. Research activities in international development at the University of Aberdeen have increased during the past four years and the portfolio has changed slightly. The main grants totalling over £10 million are shown in *Annex 1* along with the partners we are collaborating with. All research and capacity building activities are conducted in a collaborative manner with country partners so that cross country learning takes place.

16. The Centre is active in public engagement activities and has organised a range of cultural events with an international flavour in partnership with local groups such as, Rotary Clubs in Aberdeen, the Nepalese Cultural Organisation. We have a mailing list of over 300 members who are invited to cultural and
educational events such as the May Festival this year when we are organising a panel discussion on Sustainable Development. The Centre has strong links with the United Nations and the Director worked for various UN organisations for 13 years. In May 2013 in conjunction with the Law School we hosted a successful (over 300 attendees) public seminar on ‘Sexual Violence against Women’. The speaker was Madame Zainab Hawa Bangura who is the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Madame Bangura will be receiving an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Aberdeen in the June graduation ceremonies.

What would help you to make improvements?

17. The University of Aberdeen through the Centre for Sustainable International Development has been actively supporting the Scottish Government in its work in international development through a range of activities:

17.1 Presentations on *What works in International Development: Evidence-informed policy, partnerships and political commitment* (November 2012) to key government officials (including Minster Yousaf) and development organisations.

17.2 Panel discussion in October 2013 on the post-2015 Development agenda *What world do we want? A fairer future for all?* The panel brought together two Parliamentarians (Minister Yousaf and Sir Malcolm Bruce), academic staff from the University of Aberdeen and Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, and a civil society representative (Gillian Wilson from the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland, NIDOS).

17.3 Participation in the Scottish Government Working Group established in January 2014 to identify the role of Scotland in the post-2015 development agenda.

17.4 Co-organisation with CIFAL and NIDOS of a conference on the post-2015 development agenda in April 2014, CIFAL, CSID and NIDOS.

17.5 Conducting a mapping of what all Scottish Higher Education Institutes were doing in international development. The recommendations from this conference are shown in the following section as they relate to increasing effectiveness. The mapping exercise was further extended through Scottish Government support and the data base will be kept updated by Universities Scotland.

17.6 Participation in the European Union Roundtable discussion in Brussels on *Contributing to the EU Post-2015 Development Agenda*. The meeting was
hosted by Scottish Government Minister for External Affairs and International Development. The Director of the Centre for Sustainable International Development represented Higher Educations Institutes in Scotland and made a presentation based on the outcomes of the April conference.

17.7 Provision of evidence to the Europe and External Relations Committee (EERC) meeting (1st May) on Scotland’s International Development Policy. The key issues discussed were the need for evidence and the role of academia in providing this, sustainability, focus and effectiveness of aid programmes, the principles of to do no harm and gender equality, and challenges of getting evidence into policy and practice.

17.8 Collaboration with government and the UN Sustainable Energy for All initiative on a conference on Energy, Equity and Development timed to precede the Commonwealth Games and maximise representation from Commonwealth dignitaries. The event was formally opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs.

17.9 Participation in government roundtables with Commonwealth Ministers and Ambassadors on Trade and Aid and Sustainable Energy for All.

What would help is to make improvements?

18. The outcome of the mapping exercise contained several recommendations to Scottish Government form Scottish HEIs which have not yet been responded to. The implementation of these recommendations would strengthen the international development capacity of the government in evidence of what works and informing policy and implementation. It would also bring about further collaboration between Higher Education Institutions in Scotland and build our capacity in international development.

18.1 Strengthen the research base through further support/funding for Sustainable Development Research and Policy Hubs in key thematic areas where Scotland has a comparative advantage:

- climate justice
- energy, including renewable energy
- environmental management and climate change
- global health
- governance, equity, social inclusion and social justice
- capacity building and knowledge exchange

18.2 The SD Research and Policy Hubs should include experienced researchers in the thematic area from HEIs in Scotland and be tasked to generate
knowledge and produce evidence-informed policy briefs for the Scottish government.

18.3 Build on existing partnerships and strengths to deepen the research base in the global south, both in terms of new knowledge and of sustainable research capacity.

18.4 Develop a code of conduct for all Scottish agencies (academia, civil society, private sector) working in international development based on the principle of “To do no harm” with demonstrated capacity building and for sustainability.

18.5 Support a small number of partner countries with sustainable long-term programmes for greater impact and not spread support too thinly.

How can we strengthen the role of Scotland in international development?

19. The post-2015 Sustainable Development agenda provides an ideal opportunity for Higher Education Institutes in Scotland to develop a sound evidence base, develop innovative technological responses, build capacity, and disseminate findings of key issues in international development.

20. Some partnerships already exist between HEIs and there is also the Development Studies Association (DSA) Scotland which holds annual meetings of its members. However, we could be more effective if there was a platform and incentives for us to work more closely together.

21. One solution is the proposed Sustainable Development Research and Policy Hubs, but these are suggested along thematic lines. In addition to these though, is the need to demonstrate joined-up work as one of the key challenges in sustainable development is lack of coherence between interventions and policy (see also the NIDOS evidence submitted on policy coherence).

22. Consideration should therefore be given for a mechanism to bring all Scottish HEIs working in international development together (virtually), in a Scottish Sustainable Development Institute. This would permit more cross-disciplinary learning and build our capacity for research and learning so we are better able to compete on a level playing field with other UK-based international development institutes such as, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Such an institute should also include key players from business, the private sector and civil society so that there is capacity to respond in a meaningful manner to the broad-based post-2015 development agenda. The principles of justice, equity and social inclusion could be
embedded in the Institute to reflect Scotland’s commitment to eradicate poverty and promote fairer and more just societies.

**How can we strengthen the role of Scotland in internationalisation?**

23. The University of Aberdeen welcomes support from the Scottish Government to international development and the wider goal of internationalisation. Areas requiring further support include: i. Opportunities for increased mobility of students, not only across Europe, but also further afield; ii. The creation of Scottish research and policy hubs in key strategic locations to promote Scottish research and policy expertise overseas; and iii. Initiatives to promote collaboration between Scottish businesses and academia to maximise our international efforts and extend the breadth of our work. Such endeavours would showcase Scottish culture and heritage, strengthen our international relationships, and increase Scotland’s attractiveness internationally as a place to study and research.

April 2015
ANNEX 1: Research in International Development at the University of Aberdeen

Energy
1. Capacity Building at Higher Education Institutions in Tanzania in Development of Oil and Gas Sector (European Union).

Environmental Sustainability
1. Alternative Carbon Investments in Ecosystems for Poverty Alleviation (ALTER) in partnership with International Water Management Institute, Ethiopia; Southern Agricultural Research Institute, Ethiopia; Hawassa University, Ethiopia; Carbon Foundation of East Africa, Uganda.

2. Genetic characterisation of traits required for sustainable resource use in West African rice using genome wide association mapping in Benin and Nigeria in partnership with Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Nigeria; National Cereal Research Institute, Nigeria; and Africa Rice in Benin.

3. Conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction – Law School in partnership with Agostinho Neto University in Luanda and the Centre for Economics and Law at the University of Ibadan.

4. Livelihoods and forest conservation in Ethiopia.

5. Adaptation of small-scale biogas digesters in Cameroon, Ethiopia and Uganda in partnership with Makerere University, Uganda, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, Catholic University of Cameroon, Cameroon, Green Heat, Uganda, Institute of Sustainable Development, Ethiopia, Phytobiotechnology Research Foundation, Cameroon (AUC).

Global health
1. Wellcome Trust Strategic Award for Medical Mycology and Fungal Immunology which is building capacity and conducting cross disciplinary research with country partners in Cameroon, India, Nigeria, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda.  
   http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mmfi/

2. Discovery of novel anti infectives and central nervous active compounds from marine bacteria and fungi in partnership with University of Western Cape and 22 other partners (EU FP7).

3. Discovery of novel anti infectives and anti-parasitics from marine, mangrove and arid bacteria in partnership with the University of Ghana, Legon (Royal Society Leverhulme Trust Africa Award).
4. Environmental and socio-economic drivers of risk from rodent-borne diseases in Madagascar in partnership with Insitut Pasteur de Madagascar (Wellcome Trust).

5. Research into safe motherhood and establishment of a maternal death review system in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation in Ethiopia (DfID).

6. Advocacy and capacity building in maternal health in collaboration with WaterAid (Soapbox).

7. An evaluation of UN maternal and neonatal health programmes in Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Zimbabwe with AfricSante and in partnership with ITM, Antwerp (CIDA).


9. Capacity building in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. Two main themes run through the collaborative activities: Review and implementation of a competency-based public health masters curriculum; Development and implementation of a maternal health research agenda (MacArthur Foundation).

10. HEART (Health Education Advice and Resource Team) offers expert advice in policy making for DFID policy advisers and advisers in other organisations. In in partnership with CSID, Oxford Policy Management (OPM), Institute of Development Studies (IDS); CfBT Education Trust; HERA, (Belgium); Nuffield Centre (Leeds); Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and FHI360 (North Carolina).

11. Generating accountability for maternal health outcomes in Nigeria through audit and improvement of maternity record linkage systems (WHARC).