Connecting Scotland - How the Scottish Government and its agencies engage internationally

British Council Scotland

Preamble

1. British Council Scotland's mission, simply put, is to connect Scotland to the world. Since establishment in Edinburgh in 1947, it has promoted the best of Scottish culture and learning abroad and brought many thousands of people to Scotland for the exchange of knowledge, information and ideas. Drawing on the contacts, professional networks and local insights and understanding of our staff in over 200 offices across more than 100 countries, British Council Scotland has access to an unparalleled fund of overseas knowledge that can support Scotland's international ambitions and deliver tangible benefits for the nation.

2. British Council Scotland concentrates its efforts in two business areas: the arts and education. Within the education sector we focus on higher education and schools, holding shared posts with Universities Scotland and Education Scotland to catalyse and take forward their international agenda in areas of joint interest. In the arts, we particularly recognise Scottish excellence in literature, music and visual arts (noting that Edinburgh is designated UNESCO City of Literature, Glasgow is designated UNESCO City of Music, and the visual arts are pre-eminent across Scotland), and hold a shared post with Creative Scotland to further key international partnerships.

3. We are mindful of the Scottish Government's international priorities, as set out in its Framework for International Engagement, and we aim to align our purpose with that of the Government and its agencies wherever possible. The shared posts with Education Scotland and Creative Scotland exemplify this approach.

4. There are, as would be expected, differences in geographical prioritisation. Alongside the BRIC countries (India and China in particular) and Europe, the Scottish Government prioritises those countries where there is a Diaspora (USA, Canada) and those where it engages through international development policy, such as Malawi, Pakistan and Bangladesh. British Council concentrates resources across emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, but also Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey) and fragile states, determined through a combination of political, social and economic indicators. Our main instrument for engagement in Europe is through our role as the UK National Agency for Erasmus+ in partnership with Ecorys.

5. It should be noted that the British Council has three high-level objectives for engagement with the four countries of the UK, which are derived from our Royal Charter. They are:

• To help UK education and cultural organisations to develop through international relationships and cooperation
• To help UK young people and professionals gain intercultural skills, understanding and opportunities
• To create economic, social and political value for all parts of the UK from our work around the world

**Q1. Is there a clear coherent and well-resourced strategy for European and international engagement within the Scottish Government and its agencies**

6. The Framework for International Engagement has been successful in bringing greater focus to the international work of the Government and thereby guiding the international strategies of its agencies. The 2012 update to the Framework further refines the focus of international efforts in support of sustainable economic growth and developing a distinctive and effective approach to international development. The individual country plans that sit below this Framework add important flesh to the bones by setting out specific objectives and sectors of interest. The Framework is an important reference document for British Council Scotland, informing discussions with Scottish stakeholders and our network of overseas offices.

7. The Framework specifically notes the intention to 'engage directly with the British Council, so that we can effectively showcase Scotland's cultural and educational excellence abroad', and in the last year alone, British Council has helped more than 120 Scottish cultural and educational bodies develop international partnerships. Here we list six recent examples:

• Building on the Government’s Pakistan Plan and an existing twinning arrangement between Glasgow and Lahore, we worked with British Council Pakistan to arrange a visit to Lahore by five Scottish poets, and a visit to Scotland by a high-level group of educationalists from Punjab.

• In partnership with Creative Scotland and National Galleries Scotland, we manage Scotland’s exhibition at the Venice Arts Biennale. The work of three young Scottish artists was shown in 2013 in an exhibition opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs. In alternate years we support Scotland’s presence at the Venice Architecture Biennale in partnership with Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government.

• The Edinburgh Festival International Delegate Programme, known as Momentum, brought over 100 leading cultural figures from 15 countries to Edinburgh in 2014. Momentum provides a bespoke, first-hand experience of the festivals during August; encouraging conversations and networking that will lead to Scotland as a key destination to showcase work and as the place to develop professional expertise around cultural policy and festival models. By creating an exchange of ideas and knowledge between Scotland and other countries, it also opens up international opportunities for Scottish artists and cultural organisations.
• Future News 2014, a project that was part of our Commonwealth Games 2014 cultural programme, saw 300 aspiring young journalists from Scotland and across the Commonwealth take part in an international conference in April, with master classes from some of the world’s leading journalists. This was followed in July by the Live Games Newsroom, where 40 of those young people from Glasgow and the Commonwealth worked on Games-related stories. The project was a partnership with Glasgow Life’s Mitchell Library, the Herald & Times Group, Tinopolis, Reuters and others, and British Council’s role was to bring an international dimension by recruiting participants from Commonwealth countries.

• Currently we support over 1,000 international school partnerships across more than 25% of Scottish schools through a range of schools programmes including Connecting Classrooms, Erasmus+ and e-Twinning. Actions include linking schools in Scotland and overseas by internet and supplying materials for teachers’ professional development. We support language learning, including the Government’s 1+2 approach to language teaching and cultural exchange in schools by managing the Language Assistants programme (funded by the Scottish Government). We work in partnership with Education Scotland to support Curriculum for Excellence by providing a global context for pupils’ learning that is both relevant and motivating. We jointly design and deliver information, events and support for teachers to demonstrate how our international programmes can help deliver Curriculum for Excellence and contribute to the Scottish Government’s educational outcomes.

• We are an active member of the 'Connected Scotland' partnership, alongside Universities Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Development International, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Scottish Government. Connected Scotland aims to use the complementary and collective expertise of individual partners to position Scotland’s higher education sector in priority markets. Currently we are working on initiatives to strengthen engagement with Brazil and China, and a mission to Brazil promoting the research strengths of Scottish universities will take place in Spring 2015, with the aim of identifying collaborative research links. In addition, desk research is underway to create a series of focused initiatives to strengthen the higher education sector’s engagement with China.

8. No information on budgets or allocation of resources is published in the Framework, so it is difficult to know the relative importance of a given country, sector or action. However, the publication of geographical priorities is to be welcomed in general, and the primacy of trade and investment objectives is noted.

9. That said, with a budget of £17.6m for external affairs, British Council Scotland realises that the Scottish Government's ability to achieve significant impact across the portfolio of actions encompassed by the International Framework is restricted. We also note that the 2015-16 draft budget will target further strategic links with the Nordic and
Baltic States, Ireland, France, Germany, Poland, in addition to USA, Canada, Pakistan, India and China.

10. There is always a risk of spreading resource too thinly to achieve the levels of impact desired. In this context we would point to the success of 'Connected Scotland', a partnership between organisations interested in the internationalisation of higher education. By pooling resources to achieve common objectives, the partner organisations in Connected Scotland aim to:

- Amplify a message in target markets about the quality and scope of the sector’s offering which rests on excellence in teaching, research and knowledge exchange;
- Enhance the sector’s success through sharing resources and networks, utilising joint outward missions and collaborative responses to inward missions, be this in emerging or more established markets;
- Develop new collaborative operational strands that can contribute significantly to the growth of the sector’s exports and overall contribution to the Scottish Government’s Export Ambition in the areas of transnational education, collaborative research and knowledge exchange and student recruitment and mobility;
- Provide enhanced, collaborative support to institutions in strengthening their existing international links and plans; and
- Facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships with other key Scottish sectors and organisations in developing international links.

Q2. What has the Scottish Government's international strategy achieved since its refresh in October 2012 and what has the EU Action Plan achieved since it was first published in 2009? Has the international strategy enabled 'Scotland to flourish on the international stage, thus increasing economic growth for Scotland'?

11. 2014 was an important year for Scotland, with the eyes of the world on it for the XX Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, the Edinburgh International Culture Summit, the Edinburgh Festivals, the Ryder Cup and the Scottish Referendum on Independence. A hectic year placed Scotland firmly in the spotlight on the international stage. But equally important have been the many international links that these major events helped to catalyse.

12. The British Council’s Commonwealth Games cultural programme was a diverse collection of projects that sought to foster international links. The 14 projects involved 20 writers, 109 aspiring journalists, 132 visual artists and 437 musicians from across the Commonwealth; supported, to varying degrees and in a range of ways, by the British Council along with 81 other partners. The majority of partners felt that the projects successfully reached out to new audiences. Beyond this, most of the projects delivered to a number of stakeholders including the participants (artists, performers or contributors) and the project partners themselves. The context of the Commonwealth Games was seen
as critical by many partners and the theme of the Commonwealth was an important source of inspiration for some.

13. The nature of the projects presented unique logistical and operational challenges and required extensive partnership working. Early planning was identified as a critical success factor, as were communications and shared objectives. It was also recognised that building on existing experience or networks contributed to the success of the work. The project partners and the participants involved in the projects established a range of international ties through the work. The British Council's role in facilitating such international linkages was particularly well received by the partners and often seen as critical to the success of the projects.

14. This was a demanding portfolio of projects that required highly effective partnership working. There were many successful outcomes from the work, with enduring partnerships and international linkages established on many levels that we expect will endure and deliver a fitting legacy from the Commonwealth Games. The Games provided an important catalyst for the success of the projects, and the seeds sown have the potential to go on bearing fruit for some time to come. The British Council's contribution was highly valued by partners, particularly in the context of developing international links, where this contribution was considered pivotal.

15. If the Commonwealth Games presented a major opportunity to explore international connections between Scotland and other countries, so too do the major annual festivals such as Celtic Connections in Glasgow and the Edinburgh Fringe. These events provide British Council Scotland with an opportunity to bring leading overseas cultural (and educational) figures to Scotland to see new works and emerging artists, meet key players, make contacts and friendships and hold conversations about future collaboration and exchange. Such a model is reciprocal in its benefits, leading to innovation, creativity and economic activity on both sides. And the current International Framework is important here, in helping to determine which countries to target with invitations to come to these major events with a view to catalysing future collaboration and exchange.

16. While the Scottish Government's international strategy has been successful in better connecting Scotland to the world in a targeted way with limited resources, there have been some mixed results in encouraging young people in Scotland to study and work abroad. We commissioned a study by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) called ‘Scotland’s Future Workforce: Keeping Pace in the Global Skills Race?’ (June 2014) to establish the value that business employers, educational institutions and young people placed on the acquisition of 'global' or transferable skills and what they saw as the needs, opportunities and barriers to establishing a globally outward-looking labour force. The results of the survey showed that:

- 76% of businesses think that Scotland is in danger of being left behind by emerging countries, and 67% agree or strongly agree we are being left behind by EU economies
• Less than half (42%) of businesses agree that they are able to recruit young people in Scotland with the global skills required by the business, and almost half (47%) think that a lack of young people with the required global skills, in Scotland, may be a constraint on their international business plans over the next five years.

• Many young people hope to work in careers with an international dimension, but confidence and aspiration appear to erode or diminish in line with distance and unfamiliarity of emerging markets. The greatest attraction for those young people expressing an interest in working in international markets is Europe (89%), North America (69%), and Australasia (57%), but only 35% specified China, 28% India, and 18% Russia.

• Financial considerations (78%) and language skills (58%) were cited by young people as the top barriers to working and studying abroad.

• ‘Soft skills’ are highly-prized. The highest priority for businesses, educational institutions and young people is the ability to work well with people from other parts of the world, such as clients, customers and businesses. Educational institutions and young people are especially concerned about languages.

• While the education system in Scotland is doing more to encourage an outward-looking perspective among Scotland’s young people, there is a view - albeit not universal - among a significant number of businesses, educational institutions and young people that additional measures could, and should, be taken.

• The opportunities for joint action are significant and the motivation is present. Many businesses and educational institutions agree that businesses should be taking more of an active role in the education system e.g. a key global skill for businesses is awareness and knowledge of different business cultures in other countries. This is an area in which educational institutions almost universally agree that they could do more to help young people, while businesses are able to contribute unique insights.

• Young people would like improved careers advice and more personalised pathways to transition from education to employment, including greater international opportunities. Educational institutions believe that they could do more to highlight opportunities with Scottish employers for graduates with global aspirations.

17. Although many young people hope to have careers with a strong international component, they are reticent to study or work abroad in order to strengthen their CVs, and if they do go abroad it tends to be to a country nearby or one that speaks English. This is in line with the finding of the SCDI survey and one carried out by NUS Scotland, that finance and language are the main barriers to outward mobility. Ultimately there is a concern that Scotland could fall behind other countries in having a workforce that is
confident and capable of operating on the international stage, and the Government’s international strategy could do more to address these concerns.

18. Given the importance of language skills in removing a major barrier to outward mobility, British Council Scotland believes that further attention should be given to the 2012 report by the Languages Working Group on the implementation of a 1+2 language learning model. Delivering an uplift in the number of foreign language assistants would allow additional young people to get access to authentic linguistic and cultural knowledge, and inspire them to take their study of languages to the highest levels, helping ensure the next generation of Scots, and Scottish business, have the skills needed to compete globally.

Q3. What can be learnt from the approaches of other sub-state governments? In particular, how do the EU and international offices of other sub-state governments operate and what tangible outcomes do they achieve?

19. British Council tends to work with national governments, structures and systems, holding agreements, memoranda and concordats at national rather than regional or local level. That said, we do work with the State Governments in India, Brazil, Nigeria and Pakistan, for example, and with the individual Lander in Germany and Departments in France.

20. The principle of subsidiarity - that differences should be recognised and tasks carried out at the most appropriate, local level - is an important one in many countries with culturally diverse populations, as it is in the EU. In these countries, matters such as education and arts are frequently devolved away from a central authority so that decisions are taken closer to the citizen. This principle requires British Council to work in partnership at a devolved level. A good example is Brazil, where the State Governments are more important in the policy- and decision-making process than the Federal Government, and better reflect the interests of their communities.

Conclusion

21. The British Council has 80 years’ experience of promoting greater global engagement with Scotland’s world class education and culture; building the connections and trust essential to fostering Scotland’s international reputation and influence and to developing economic links. Having a dedicated team based in Edinburgh with a mission to build international profile and partnerships for Scotland, and a network of offices in over 100 countries, the British Council offers Scottish institutions and creative professionals the overseas knowledge, experience and networks to engage with new audiences and markets, thereby promoting Scotland’s profile and standing in the world as a cultural powerhouse. We continue to work with partners to align our projects and programme with the objectives set out in the Government’s International Strategy and to deliver maximum impact for Scotland.
22. Major programmes like our Commonwealth Games cultural season and the Edinburgh Showcase raise awareness of Scottish arts internationally, building interest in and friendships for Scotland. By working in partnership with the Government and agencies like Creative Scotland and Education Scotland we are able to maximise opportunities to build international connections and develop cultural and trading links. Scotland’s unique strengths in the arts and education exert a powerful attraction to students, businesses and tourists. By sharing those assets internationally the British Council supports the economic prosperity of Scotland, significantly increasing the likelihood students will choose Scottish universities, that international businesses will see Scotland as a good place to invest, and that tourists will want to explore its rich cultural heritage.

23. British Council Scotland provides life-changing opportunities for Scots, for example as students on the Erasmus+ scheme or artists supported to travel overseas to absorb fresh influences and find new audiences. These experiences enrich the culture and economy of Scotland by equipping people with the skills needed to succeed in global markets.

24. More can and should be done to increase young people’s access to the international experience and skills the Scottish economy badly needs in order to be globally competitive. For example we would like to see more schools taking part in our Connecting Classrooms programme and taking up the opportunity to host a language assistant. Businesses, the Government and agencies and institutions like the British Council and Creative Scotland all have a role to play, working with schools and universities to provide young people with the opportunities and confidence to develop the skills for both their personal and the country’s success in the 21st century.

January 2015