Connecting Scotland – how the Scottish Government and its agencies engage internationally

The City of Edinburgh Council

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

Similar to comments made by The City of Edinburgh Council in 2010, there is still scope for the national agencies engaged in international promotion to work more closely together, to draw in more local city level engagement and to develop closer working on longer term initiatives. Edinburgh and the other Scottish cities could contribute more to the Scottish Government’s international strategies through their relationships with other cities in the world, such as formal partner and twinning arrangements, civic diplomatic relations and events, and valuable educational linkages and direct flight routes. An accord with the Scottish Government in recognition of key strategic linkages would allow the cities to draw on the support of the national agencies, would dramatically increase Scotland’s connectivity with the rest of the world and help build and secure long term relationships. This would be particularly valued by the emerging economies, would help secure future talent and skills and position Scotland more effectively in terms of attracting international investment.

Good examples of international work recently include the Commonwealth Games and Legacy and the Ryder Cup. Both demonstrated Scotland’s position on the international stage and also galvanised collaboration opportunities. There continue to be excellent examples of working together on incoming international delegations and engagement with the Consular Corps, and delegations such as the ASEAN and Arab Ambassadors. In 2010 we noted that there were fewer examples of practical cooperation with Edinburgh on overseas projects and outward visits. However, our 2013 / 2014 MOU and China Showcase were supported fully at national level. In addition, in terms of formulating strategy, the consultation event by the Scottish Government on links with China was very helpful. Future opportunities to attend similar events on other geographies would be welcomed. There is still a need to develop closer working on long term initiatives, for example the thematic years. It would be beneficial if local authorities were more engaged in the process to understand how they can link to these initiatives – local projects can make a valuable contribution to such year-long themes. It was difficult to engage in the 2015 Year of Food and Drink and we look forward to consultation in advance of future focus years, in particular the 2016 Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design and the 2017 Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology.
2. 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”?

In our work with China the level of engagement with the Scottish Government and Ministers is well remarked upon. Similarly, the Gulf also has a high level Ministerial profile. Relations with Foreign Embassies are also very strong and Ministers continue to be very well engaged on international matters. Ministerial visits can play a very important in underpinning the inward investment agenda and in other areas, such as attracting talent. We would welcome further engagement by Ministers alongside Skills Development Scotland to ensure the right skills capture to meet the demands of employers and investors. Cultural diplomacy is strong and very much welcomed, exemplified well in terms of support for our Festivals, as is support for international institutes and associations such as the Scotland Asia Institute and the Confucius Institute. Most of our partners in the European stage are with cities and there is always the opportunity, particularly within European bids and partnerships, to exchange experience and ensure information flow with Ministers engaged in European geographies.

3. 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?

The European network, EUROCITIES, is an excellent and active resource for the exchange of good practice on a city level and for establishing city partnerships to draw on EU funds

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