Connecting Scotland – how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Forth Valley College

College International Activity

With a strategic position on Scotland’s landscape, Forth Valley has areas of natural and historic beauty, with thriving industries in which the college plays a pivotal role. Working alongside stakeholders including councils, government agencies and schools, to global employers, universities and awarding bodies, the college is both well positioned, and committed, to delivering the highest quality of learning to make positive contributions to the local and national economy, including the many supporting industries such as Hospitality, Tourism, Manufacturing and Oil & Gas.

For the last four years Forth Valley College has remained relatively inactive in internationally related activities. This has enabled a comprehensive focus on maximising outcomes at a local and national level for our learners, employers and partners. Positively, this has resulted in FVC becoming a leading college in Scotland, recognised for delivering the highest performance indicator levels in both further and higher education for Engineering and helping achieve our most recent accolade, the prestigious Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Award for Innovation in Further Education.

Furthermore, a full international review and opportunity analysis of the potential benefits for Forth Valley College has been carried out and we are now fully committed to embrace internationalisation across the college. We recently appointed our International Development Manager to lead our new international office and manage the college’s international activities and delivery of a newly developed international strategy.

Building on local and national success, we will develop internationalisation across the college – adding value to the curriculum and wider college environment whilst enhancing our position as the business and partner of choice on an international scale.

The aim of our strategy is to provide a clear direction and focus for all international activities towards 2018, focusing on four key strategic objectives including:

- Business Engagement
- Strategic Partnerships
- Student Recruitment
- Staff and Student Mobility.

By engaging in well planned and executed activities, it is expected the college will yield benefit and opportunity, ensuring:

i) Staff and students experience a culturally diverse learning and social environment

ii) Increased student competitiveness and employability
iii) Student and staff experience enhanced with increased mobility and partnership opportunities
iv) A strengthened international reputation and increased brand profile across industry and education (see Annex 1)
v) Additional income from commercial international activity
vi) The creation of a credible international network and partnerships both in Scotland and abroad
vii) Increased opportunity for staff and student international exchange.

Although many of the benefits are clear, the risks of international engagement are in some cases unknown; with that said, there are some clear barriers which we will need to consider including the capacity to deliver and this area may stimulate the need for innovative cross college collaborations in Scotland to maximise the commercial opportunities available in international markets.

**Key Issues and current thinking:**

- Competition of other colleges/universities/private sector.
- Overseas regulations (market dependant e.g. China).
- Limited college international resource.
- Changing immigration and visa policy.
- Capacity to deliver (in-country and on campus).
- Lack of student accommodation.
- Country stability and civil unrest.
- Risk of saturation attached to international recruitment.
- Scotland Colleges – International Profile for FE/TVET.

Andrew Campbell
International Development Manager

May 2015
College's expertise in demand at skills conference

Forth Valley College's Principal Dr Ken Thomson represented the UK's Further Education sector at a prestigious skills conference held in Istanbul recently (Tuesday 5 May).

Dr Thomson was invited to attend 'Turkey's Vision 2023 and Vocational Symposium' at the Turkish capital's Aydin University by the British Council - who helped to organise the event.

As the only current UK college Principal attending the event, he delivered a presentation highlighting the innovative Scottish perspective on skills, especially curriculum development and employer engagement.

Forth Valley College are sector leaders in Great Britain in this field and were presented with a prestigious Association of Colleges' (AOC) Beacon Award for Innovation in Further Education for 2014 – sponsored by OCR - at a national ceremony held at Westminster on 4 February 2015.

The college earned the national award for their innovative leadership model and approach to vocational education and training, which has resulted in a range of positive outcomes for students, staff and partners.

Dr Thomson, said: "I was honoured to give a presentation at this prestigious event on the experience of Forth Valley College in improving skills development, vocational education and employer engagement. Our initiative speaks volumes for the innovative approach we take through our Making Learning Work mission statement."

"The event was very illuminating and a great opportunity for Forth Valley College to forge links with other innovative further education organisations across the world. Hopefully there is now the potential for students and staff exchange visits on the back of this worthwhile experience."

Margaret Jack, Director Turkey for the British Council, who introduced FVC's Principal to the 500 strong audience, said: "Dr Ken Thomson, the Principal of Forth Valley College in Scotland which achieved the prestigious UK Association of Colleges Beacon Award for Innovation in FE, reflected on the whole college's approach to an exciting vision to 'Making Learning Work'. He outlined the skills system in Scotland and shared experiences from his institution in employer engagement and curriculum development."

According to latest official figures, UK youth unemployment (16-24 year-olds) stood at 16.2% and the equivalent Turkish figure was 20.2%. Forth Valley College's experiences may well be invaluable for Turkey as it aims to develop its vocational education and training system in line with its Vision 2023 for the country's transition to a knowledge economy.

To achieve this it aims to focus on four main areas:

- Increasing the availability of lifelong learning
- Improving the quality of Vocational and Technical Education
- Mobilising business and industry to take a more active role in curriculum development and course delivery
- Closer co-operation between government agencies and civil society to reach under-represented groups in the labour market

Dr Thomson added: "Forth Valley College and its staff have worked very hard to create our 'Making Learning Work' whole system approach to further education. We are always looking to improve on what we are doing, but we are also always delighted to share best practice with colleagues and other colleges where we can."