Support for Small Businesses to Trade Internationally

We are pleased to provide this supplementary submission to answer a request from the Committee Clerk. SDI recognises that small companies, in particular, may lack the knowledge and resources to scope out market opportunities abroad. Supporting more companies to export is a key focus for SDI and is a priority within Scotland’s Trade and Investment Strategy.

SDI already has in place services to support small businesses seeking to explore market opportunities. In particular the Smart Exporter programme has been specifically designed to help develop the skills and capacity of SMEs to consider exporting and gain the skills to successful trade internationally. Smart Exporter advisers with specific small company experience are located throughout Scotland and are on hand to provide advice and guidance.

As part of this support ‘lighter’ versions of export services to companies have been developed to be more accessible and relevant to small businesses. SDI provides the international trade expertise to Business Gateway to ensure small businesses have full access to export services. Below is a Business Gateway case study:

**Business Gateway Case Study - Ocean Marine Training (OMT)**
Support from Business Gateway has helped this Glasgow based company to provide health and safety and survival training to the global oil and gas industry. Entrepreneur, Martin White, may only have launched his business in 2010 but already, Ocean Marine Training, is set to make a major impression on the oil and gas industry with a number of contracts at home and overseas.

**International ambitions**
Developed, with help from Business Gateway, OMT specialises in the provision of health and safety and survival training for a number of industry sectors, including oil and gas, marine shipping, aviation and renewables.

'We have developed a number of partnerships in Finland and Denmark, which are proving to be extremely productive,’ says Martin (29). 'In addition Business Gateway put us in touch with Scottish Development International (SDI) which resulted in funding towards a trip to Australia. Consequently we are now looking to launch a Western Australia division later in the year.'

Utilising their extensive experience and contacts in the oil and gas industry, Martin and his business partner, Alaster Morrison, have identified a number of other commercial opportunities including the sub Sahara's first introductory drilling course in Namibia.

**From Glasgow to the world**
Although the business is doing well Martin has his eye on the future development of the company and is currently developing a number of new
services - including a programme of offshore diplomas - in addition to the purchase of new offices in Glasgow. 'With its strong reputation in the renewables sector, maritime heritage and great international transport connections, Glasgow is perfectly suited to our business,' continues Martin.

Specialist support for a specialist business
'It has been hard work to get the business to this stage but I have to say our Business Gateway Adviser has been fantastic and has opened a number of doors for us. Not only did she connect us with SDI but she has helped us with our Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) application and put us in touch with the West of Scotland Loan Fund and Skills Scotland.'

'It was clear from our first contact with OMT that Martin had big plans and would need some very specialist support to help the business achieve its full potential,' says Business Gateway Adviser, Denise O’Connor. 'We encouraged the company to plan then introduced them to the right expertise to help with raising investment and their international ambitions. We are also working with the business to develop their new website.'

In 2012 the SDI website was re-launched to provide a new online, one-stop shop for Scottish companies on exporting and growing their international business. 'Export from Scotland'. This delivers a range of free international trade training modules to all Scottish companies (and individuals) and is particularly useful for small businesses who may not have the time to attend events etc.

The Preparing to Export modules, developed for the Scottish market, provide the first step in training companies to develop their expertise to help realise their export potential. In addition, an export assessment tool provides a snapshot of a business’ current export readiness. The Smart Exporter skills programme is an element of this.

The SDI website is the main source of information for Scottish companies seeking to explore trading internationally. Work has been undertaken to ensure signposting on the SDI website is visible and linked to partners (e.g. Business Gateway, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise).

A separate brochure has been forwarded to the Committee which gives an overview of how this support is promoted to businesses.

Future Plans - Business Portal
Plans are in place to further enhance this as part of the Scottish Business Portal project which has the objective of ensuring a clear customer journey that connects all relevant Government services. The Scottish Business Portal will be an online resource that will make it easier for businesses to access all relevant information they need from the Government and wider public sector.

It will allow companies to search for information and practical advice as well as identify what public sector support is available for their business.
Users will be able to access information and services more quickly without needing to navigate around multiple sites. It will also reduce the need to contact individual organisations, generating significant efficiencies for the Scottish public sector.

Information and services on the Business Portal will be presented in a way that is easy and straightforward, helping to save time and money for both businesses and the wider public sector.

Over time, public sector organisations will increasingly align their web information and services with the Scottish Business Portal so users get a consistent and joined up experience whenever they are trying to access public sector support.