

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS INQUIRY

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Engaging with the European Union

• What principles should inform the focus of the Scottish Government’s external affairs policy with regard to the European Union?

The EU works best when focusing on the policy areas in which it has been given specific competence by the Member States to operate. As such, Scotland’s engagement should be on those specific policy areas where they coincide with devolved powers, and allow wider constitutional matters to be dealt with if and when they arise.

The EU will be renewing its direction in the coming months and years based on:

- The new mandate of the European Parliament;
- The new college of European Commissioners;
- New Presidents of the European Council and Central Bank;
- Agreement on the next Multiannual Financial Framework;
- The financial, political, voting, strategic, and other implications of the United Kingdom’s (presumed) withdrawal;
- The core political objectives of the EU following the 2019 Summit in Sibiu, Romania – particularly climate change and energy diversification, migration – voluntary and forced, the digital economy, the financial single market, global regional trade blocs.

The most recent “As Others See Us” survey (British Council, 2016) of young people across several major European countries showed a decline in the positive perceptions held of the UK. The simple act of declaring an intention to leave the European Union appears to have suggested a lack of interest or engagement with our closest neighbours. It is likely to be through personal, regional and cultural links, rather than political institutions, that relationships are repaired and maintained.

The nuanced view on EU membership, which Scotland promoted both before and after the 2016 vote, is not a matter of political positioning alone. Recent history put the vote in a context discrete from the rest of the UK. The Leave campaign language of excessive immigration and insufficient political and legal control was less resonant north of the border, where migration is an economic necessity and the previous twenty years - since the 1997 referendum - had reminded the electorate that legal authority or political sovereignty had never really rested in one institution or city.

As a result, what lies ahead for Scotland will be built on past actions that demonstrated where Scotland might act distinctively without immediately triggering party political conflict, or without being distracted by it. The relationship in and with the European Union is a case in point – the developments of the past giving a substantial guide to what the future will require.

• Are there examples of best practice for ways in which nations / regions from non-EU Member States engage with and influence the EU?

Scotland House, with Scotland Europa as the original umbrella body since 1992, is one of the most well-established and respected national/regional presences in Brussels and the EU. The multiplier effect of a wide membership base was clear – any information passed down the chain reached several hundred organisations and any interest that the information generated could be conveyed back to the centre of Brussels. It was a Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Lang MP, who established Scotland Europa in 1992, calling it “*a very significant milestone in the development of our links with our partners in the European Community*”.

Scotland Europa has, sensibly, focussed on relevant policy areas and brought public and private interests together, as well as forming physical and virtual partnership with a range of European regions. At the same time, it was able to host the “relaunch” of Scottish EU interests after devolution, highlighting the political representation that reinforced the previous engagement by business groups, local government, NDPBs, separate Scots legal interests, the third sector, key industries and further and higher education.

International networks and groupings are legion within the EU, and require discretion to focus on those few that can influence policy outcomes and promote genuinely productive partnerships. Among these are the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR – which includes geographical Commissions such as the Atlantic Arc and Islands – as well as relevant policy areas such as maritime development, cohesion policy and climate, and energy. Small states and nations can and do influence opinion and decision-making in the European Union and beyond if they are adept and skilful at establishing a clear identity; identifying those few areas of key concern; and accumulating support from the range of other national, regional and sectoral interests represented in Brussels. Support on fisheries issues, for example, may not come from other states that produce, but states that consume.

• What should be the focus of the business plans for the Scottish Government Innovation and Investment Hub offices in Berlin, Brussels, Dublin, London and Paris be?

As above, the focus should be on the areas of economic and social relevance to the regions the offices are located in – such as financial services in London, Berlin and Paris.

In Brussels, for instance, key issues – assuming the UK's withdrawal takes place – will include the future of cohesion/territorial support and partnership, Protected Geographical Status for food and drink, and visa and travel requirements for employment and tourism. These will all be of relevance in bilateral relations in Dublin.

• How can the Scottish Government Innovation and Investment Hub offices best support the Scottish Government's external affairs policy?

By focussing on policy issues of relevance to the Scottish economy and social development, and allowing constitutional issues to be aired elsewhere.

• How can the Scottish Government's Innovation and Investment Hub offices be evaluated effectively?

As per any other government department or Non-Departmental Public Body.

• How should the Innovation and Investment Hub offices most effectively engage with other Scottish organisations such as Scottish Development International and Visit Scotland?

There should be an inclusive approach to representation, branding and presence – recognising that in certain times and locations one agency may have to assist promotion of the work of another to maximise spread and impact.

Engagement with the rest of the world

• What principles should inform the Scottish Government's international engagement? For example, should economic priorities be the key priority or cultural / 'soft power' priorities?

Scotland's own profile, its ability to make friends and influence people, has not in modern times been projected through military or political might except via the United Kingdom. Recent history has shown a greater use of intangible assets such as education, sport and culture, which political administrations can support and defend but not appropriate or define. The relationship, in whatever form, with international partners, neighbours and institutions, will need to be based on these.

The "As Other See Us" report - the title itself a reference to the global reach of Scottish poets - highlighted the characteristics seen as making the UK most attractive, all of which ought to give any body involved in the promotion and commercialisation of Scotland's image and interests abroad some reassurance:

1. Cultural and historic attractions
2. Cities
3. = Arts
3. = Countryside and landscape
4. History.

• How should the Scottish Government prioritise its international engagement – for example, should the locations prioritised be based on a geography or policy focus?

Increasingly, engagement globally will not be dependent on geographical or physical limitations. As such, the justification for presence and activity should, first and foremost, be the ability to engage in areas of mutual interest where Scottish concerns and interests can be represented through the competences of the Scottish Government.

Scotland's oft-quoted focus on education should be a key part of future engagement with the wider world, irrespective of the future of programmes such as Erasmus. That Scotland has four ancient universities amongst nineteen higher education institutions is a key part of the country's image and its international draw, in a world where 25% already speak, or learn, English. Uncertainties over the future of research co-operation alone indicate the importance of Scotland's voice to the UK's eventual deal with its former EU partners, but beyond that education will have to work fast and hard to stay competitive in an increasingly competitive global knowledge economy. School education, as well as further and higher education, offers an additional focus – with Scottish independent schools opening overseas and foreign investors now seeking to follow the influx of international boarding pupils to Scotland

• What should be the key aims of the Scottish Government's international offices in Beijing, Ottawa, Toronto and Washington DC?

As above, the focus should be on the areas of economic and social relevance to the regions the offices are located in.

• Currently, the Scottish Government has international engagement strategies with Canada, China, India, Pakistan and the USA. Do these strategies and their geographic focus remain appropriate post-Brexit?

Yes, particularly for China, India and the USA. The UK and Scotland will need to align with a regulatory environment that has genuine global accessibility – whether in Europe, the USA or China; while India's growth in policy and economic terms will soon come to match its growth in population and financial ones.

• How can the Scottish Government's international engagement be evaluated effectively?

As per any other government department or Non-Departmental Public Body.

• How should the Scottish Government's international offices most effectively engage with other Scottish organisations such as Scottish Development International and Visit Scotland?

There should be an inclusive approach to representation, branding and presence – recognising that in certain times and locations one agency may have to assist promotion of the work of another to maximise spread and impact.

Irrespective of constitutional arrangements, all such bodies will have to ensure an appropriate, proportionate and constructive relationship with UK embassies, consulates, delegations and departments such as the Department for International Development. Scotland hosts some key humanitarian and development bodies such as Mercy Corps' European headquarters and SCIAF, and their presence should be supported by work across relevant institutions – irrespective of individual jurisdictions.

The decision of the UK on EU withdrawal means that the constituent parts of the UK will have to consider where and how to share sovereignty in the most effective way to defend economic, social, cultural and historic interests.