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Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

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Inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work – summary of written evidence

Introduction

The [Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry looking at how the Scottish Government engages internationally and what it wants to achieve from this work](#). The Committee published its [call for views](#) on 15 September 2021. The call for views closed on 29 October 2021.

21 written submissions were received. 5 of the responses received were from individuals and 16 from organisations.

The Committee asked for views on eight questions which covered the Scottish Government's European and wider international engagement. This paper provides an overall summary followed by an analysis of the views provided under each question.

Overarching themes emerging

The main themes which arose from the written evidence are provided below.

Engagement with the EU

The responses to the call for views supported the view that the Scottish Government should continue to engage with the European Union following the UK's departure from the European Union. Some respondents also suggested that the Scottish

Government should prioritise its EU engagement over its external engagement with the rest of the world.

Whilst it was recognised that the UK's departure from the EU has changed the nature of Scotland's engagement with the bloc, there was agreement that the Scottish Government's focus on engagement with the EU should be targeted at a limited number of policy areas with respondents clear that the Scottish Government should focus its engagement on policy areas of mutual interest such as climate change and energy policy.

The impact of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement

Respondents recognised that following the entry into force of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), a number of the policy areas covered by the TCA (and the Withdrawal Agreement) are areas of devolved competence. As a result, it was agreed that there should be a role for the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament in engaging with the TCA. Responses suggested this engagement should be on the basis of a cross-UK approach to engagement with the EU.

Most respondents said that it was important that the Scottish Parliament continues to scrutinise the operation of the TCA because of the number of areas covered which sit in areas of devolved competence. There was also agreement that parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Government's engagement with the European Union is also important.

External Affairs

Whilst most respondents suggested continued engagement with the EU should be a priority, it was recognised that wider external engagement was also necessary. As with its EU engagement policy, it was suggested that the Scottish Government's external affairs policy should adopt a strategic approach if it is to be effective in its external relations and that this includes ensuring that priorities in external relations are driven by, and match, domestic priorities.

There was general agreement that the Scottish Government should prioritise its international engagement through both a thematic and geographic focus. In addition, most respondents who addressed the question suggested that the Scottish Government should use culture and soft power to promote Scotland internationally.

International Development

Several responses to the call for views were received from organisations working in the international development sector. These responses were clear that international development should be a clear priority for the Scottish Government's external affairs policy.

Respondents also suggested that Scotland's international development policy should be based around developing thematic expertise in areas such as climate change, gender and migration including supporting refugees.

There was no clear consensus on whether the geographic focus of the international development policy should be focussed on a small number of countries or more widely.

Working with the UK Government

There was general agreement amongst those who responded to this question that the Scottish and UK Governments shared many of the same international priorities. It was suggested that with developments to intergovernmental mechanisms, the devolved administrations could play a more significant role in shaping the UK's foreign policies post Brexit.

Issues by question

The next section of this briefing provides more detail on the submissions under each of the questions posed in the call for views.

How should the Scottish Government engage with the EU and what should it seek to achieve from its engagement?

There was a common view amongst the responses that the Scottish Government should continue to engage with the European Union following the UK's departure from the EU. Some respondents also suggested that the Scottish Government should prioritise its EU engagement over its engagement with the rest of the world.

Kirsty Hughes (founder of the Scottish Council on European Relations) wrote:

“Brexit has put many barriers in the way of, and added costs to, the range of ways Scotland relates to the EU and its member states. So, the Scottish government should aim to ensure that Scotland's European relations recover from any negative impacts of Brexit as far as possible and to support wider non-governmental Scotland-EU relations where appropriate.

Good relations with the EU, its member states and regions, are in Scotland's broadest interests – economic, cultural, social and in terms of climate change. So the Scottish government's European strategy should aim to promote and deepen its relations across the EU (within its resource limits). It should focus on policy issues and relationships where EU and Scottish priorities are most aligned and on key priorities for Scotland in the EU context (whether aligned or not).”

Given that the Scottish Government is now seeking to engage with the EU from the outside, a number of respondents highlighted the changed circumstances for engagement. For example, Anthony Salamone wrote:

“Now that Brexit is realised, and Scotland is outside the EU, the Scottish Government faces significant challenges to conducting successful engagement and acquiring actionable influence within the EU. As the author has identified in other work, the Scottish Government is confronted with three principal challenges. First, its access to EU institutions, policies and programmes has been reduced and is dependent on the minimal EU-UK relationship. Second, its relevance in Brussels has decreased given that Scotland is neither part of the EU (with a right to participate in EU affairs) nor part of the EEA (with political legitimacy to participate). Third, it is associated with the UK Government's approach towards the EU to some extent, even though it does not wish to be so, since Scotland is part of the UK. Credible strategy should acknowledge these realities and structure engagement in response to them.”

There was agreement that the Scottish Government's focus on engagement with the EU should be targeted at a limited number of policy areas with respondents clear that the Scottish Government should focus its engagement on policy areas of mutual interest. For example, the Royal Society of Edinburgh wrote:

“Limited resources should be targeted effectively. Small nations and states, including independent States, are most effective externally when they identify strategic priorities and areas of expertise that will benefit international partners. We note and welcome the intentions set out in the Scottish Government's January 2020 publication, The European Union's Strategic Agenda for 2020-24: Scotland's Perspective . We encourage the Committee to scrutinise how those broad intentions are being implemented, and to elicit more specifically the areas of strategic priority.”

A number of responses highlighted the need for the Scottish Government to continue to engage with the EU in specific policy areas. For example, Murray Pittock representing The Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance wrote that the Scottish Government should work with the EU to promote mobility in areas connected to education, research and cultural and third sector institutions, while promoting Scottish research and innovation in the EU.

The submission from Glasgow Life highlighted the need for continued engagement with the EU by the Scottish Government. Areas highlighted for promoting engagement and developing links include cultural and creative industries, destination and business tourism and conventions, major events, museums, artists, libraries and sport.

Respondents also called for the Scottish Government to support the continued engagement of Scottish civil society organisations with the EU. For example, Scotland's International Development Alliance suggested the Scottish Government should support civil society to maintain strong links with European organisations in the international development policy area.

On a similar theme, Mark Majewsky Anderson representing Glasgow Caledonian University wrote that the Scottish Government should continue its engagement with the EU and seek to find ways to ensure that Scottish organisations and citizens can continue to benefit from EU programmes as much as possible.

Whilst most submissions were positive about the Scottish Government's engagement with the EU, Anthony Salamone of European Merchants suggested that the Scottish Government's engagement with the EU currently lacks strategy:

“The Government presently lacks requisite strategy to undertake successful post-Brexit engagement with the EU and the wider world. In its Programme for Government, the Government commits to producing a new Global Affairs Framework. The creation of that framework is a vital opportunity to establish strategic direction and greater coherence for the Government's European and external relations...”

...The envisaged Global Affairs Framework should define primary principles and objectives for European and external relations which are values-based, ensure alignment between domestic policy and external action, and correspond to Scotland's current constitutional circumstances."

Given the Scottish Government's continuing engagement with the EU in policy areas such as the environment and net-zero along with the implications of the keeping pace power, the Law Society of Scotland highlighted the importance of parliamentary oversight:

"Democratic accountability means that MSPs must be engaged with these decisions and be able to scrutinise what engagement the Scottish Government is undertaking in Brussels and elsewhere to further the government's agenda.

Oversight should also include how EU law and policy continue to influence UK and Scottish law and policy particularly in terms of "keeping pace" but on also the impact on the UK economy or businesses. Importantly, oversight could aim to ensure that the UK, in negotiating future arrangements with the EU, seeks to maintain and improve the many legal frameworks that have been built over the last 46 years, including those governing the provision of legal services across the EU."

Developing formal mechanisms for scrutiny were also proposed by the Law Society of Scotland:

"we feel more formal mechanisms for MSPs to oversee the Scottish Government's international engagement, particularly in relation to the EU where Scottish Ministers could make decisions to remain in lockstep with EU law upon the basis of discussions, would be beneficial. One potential option would be a memorandum of understanding between the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government covering this."

Anthony Salamone also suggested the need for "cross-party engagement with meaningful avenues for all-party cooperation". On the opportunities for parliamentary scrutiny, Anthony Salamone suggested the following approach:

"Given that the Scottish Government aims to increase its European and international engagement, it would be logical for the Scottish Parliament to intensify its scrutiny of the Government in this field. The Parliament could scrutinise the design, content, implementation and evaluation of Government strategy on European and external relations, considering the central role which strategy should occupy. It could review the balance of engagement to ensure that the Government's activity is focused on Europe and does not expand into new geographical areas without a strategic basis. It could assess the extent to which the Government's plans and initiatives accord with its strategy, and the degree to which its bilateral and multilateral engagements align with its principles and objectives. Such scrutiny could be conducted regularly..."

... By enhancing its scrutiny of all dimensions of the Scottish Government's European and external relations, the Parliament could ensure that the Government faces more robust and substantive challenge in an area into which it is expanding on the basis of manifest, but often undefined, ambitions.”

How might the EU-UK TCA affect how the Scottish Government engages with the EU and how will that engagement interact with UK government policy in this area?

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), together with the Withdrawal Agreement, has set the main framework for EU-UK relations since the start of 2021. The responses which addressed this question recognised that a number of the policy areas covered by the TCA (and the Withdrawal Agreement) are areas of devolved competence. As a result, it was recognised that there is a role for the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament in engaging with the TCA. The Royal Society of Edinburgh addressed this point:

“The UK Government entered into these agreements on behalf of the UK, exercising its treaty-making powers. But areas of devolved responsibility are affected directly by the TCA and the Withdrawal Agreement. It is imperative that the Scottish Government maximise all available intergovernmental channels to ensure devolved interests are represented in their governance and implementation. We are concerned that previous Joint Ministerial Committees (JMCs) designed to ensure devolved governments could input into UK policy discussions and negotiating positions with respect to the European Union – the JMC (Europe) and the JMC (EU negotiations) – are no longer operational. We await the outcome of the Joint Review on Intergovernmental Relations and underline the importance of a strategic level intergovernmental committee on European matters, alongside portfolio level engagements.

The TCA will be governed by the EU-UK Partnership Council, supported by specialised committees. These arrangements are still to be fully established but are similar to the governance structure set up to oversee implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement. There is no guaranteed representation for the devolved administrations in any of these forums. We believe that the Scottish Government should be represented in EU-UK joint committees where these are focused on devolved policy fields.“

The Law Society of Scotland emphasised the need for a cross-UK approach to engagement with the EU and on the TCA:

“As we have stated elsewhere, we believe it is important to ensure a “whole-of-government” approach in terms of the engagement with the EU. The concept is also of particular relevance to the future governance of the TCA. In this context “whole of government” should be interpreted as “whole of

governance” to include not only the UK Government but also the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Welsh Government and external stakeholders. The Scottish Government’s decision to implement a ‘keeping pace power’ means there will potentially be the desire from Scottish Ministers to engage with the EU outside the Partnership Council to discuss the laws and regulations they are intending to implement which may not be applied across the rest of the UK. It is important that the UK Government and Scottish Government maintain transparency with each other about this engagement and that the UK and Scottish Parliaments scrutinise this where appropriate.”

The Law Society of Scotland added that as a result of the UK’s departure from the EU, Scotland’s relationship with the block will need to be reconsidered:

“For many sectors that are the responsibility of the devolved parliaments and administrations international support from government will become more important as the organisations seek to find new ways to engage with partners. Scotland Europa and the Scottish Government’s offices will need to play an important role and we would like to see further clarity regarding the aims of these institutions going forward.”

What role should the Scottish Parliament have in scrutinising the operation of the TCA and how the TCA influences the Scottish government’s engagement with the EU?

Most respondents said that it was important that the Scottish Parliament continues to scrutinise the operation of the TCA because of the number of areas covered which sit in areas of devolved competence. The Royal Society of Edinburgh proposed a number of ways in which scrutiny of the TCA could be improved:

- By ensuring a role for the Scottish Parliament’s portfolio committees in scrutinising policies affected by the new UK-EU relationship, as well as more strategically by the Constitution, Europe External Affairs and Culture Committee.
- That the Interparliamentary Forum on Brexit should be revived and reoriented into a version suitable to the discussions surrounding the EU-UK TCA.
- That the Written Agreement on Intergovernmental Relations between the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament should be broadened to include reporting on the Scottish Government’s engagement with the European Union.

The European Movement in Scotland wrote that Scottish Parliament should have a distinct role in scrutinising the TCA, since it impacts on a wide range of devolved responsibilities. It added:

“If the democratic mandate is to be maintained, the Scottish Parliament must be able to scrutinise all Scottish Government activity, including its engagement with the EU, through the normal parliamentary processes. EMiS would encourage the Scottish Government to publish routinely details of its engagement with the EU, the actions of its international offices and its approach on all European matters. This is of considerable interest to citizens and demonstrates Scotland’s commitment to openness, international co-operation and an EU future.”

Respondents also highlighted the Scottish Government’s Continuity Act which provides a further reason for continued engagement with developments at EU level. The Law Society of Scotland set out the impact of the Continuity Act and the need for scrutiny of decisions where to and not to align:

“Since Scottish Government ministers will be responsible for applying the TCA it follows that the Scottish Parliament may also play an important role in scrutinising their actions. Any actions in relation to the ‘keeping pace power’ of the Scottish Government’s UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) act [2021] should also be scrutinised and that includes oversight over intergovernmental relations and the Scottish Government’s overseas engagement. There is potentially an issue here in that the Act does not give a clear method for reporting when Scottish Ministers have decided not to use the ‘keeping pace power’ and we would emphasise that we would welcome the Scottish Parliament having oversight of this and any associated engagement.”

Kirsty Hughes highlighted that the TCA presents specific challenges and risks for the Scottish parliament and government post-Brexit in that “TCA governance structures and political and policy dialogue may result in less opportunities for input for devolved institutions than before Brexit”.

“The Scottish Parliament should have an important role in scrutinising the TCA but the feasibility of this is questionable. There are serious questions for both Westminster and Holyrood as to the extent of transparency that is and will be forthcoming from the UK government around the governance structures of the TCA (and the extent to which there will be Scottish representation – and the opportunity for genuine and active Scottish participation in these structures).

The Scottish Parliament should also have a clear overview and role in assessing how the ‘keeping pace’ powers are being used by the Scottish government. This should be across the board and not only where keeping pace is done through the powers of the Continuity Act. The limited provision for parliamentary oversight in the Act is highly regrettable.”

What should the priorities of the Scottish Government be in developing its external affairs work and overseas presence, including its international development policy?

Whilst most respondents suggested continued engagement with the EU should be a priority, it was recognised that wider external engagement was also necessary. For example, Kirsty Hughes wrote:

“Scotland’s trade, cultural links, soft power reputation and more extend globally so prioritising some external affairs work beyond the EU is clearly necessary.”

As with its EU engagement policy, it was suggested that the Scottish Government’s external affairs policy should adopt a strategic approach if it is to be effective in its external relations and that this includes ensuring that priorities in external relations are driven by, and match, domestic priorities. The Royal Society of Edinburgh submission set this out in more detail:

“For example, domestic objectives of promoting a wellbeing economy, the transition to net zero, promoting gender equality and protecting human rights are shaped by international decision making and developments. These priorities can also inform the Scottish Government’s external affairs, by strengthening and deepening ties in issue-based partnerships in the form of expertise-based NGOs and intra-regional networks. Effective external relations also require identifying a few priority areas where Scotland has, and is recognised as having, niche expertise that is of value to strategic partners. The 2017 International Framework does not clearly identify such priorities, partners or courses of action, and we recommend this be revisited.

Murray Pittock representing The Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance suggested the Scottish Government’s policies should focus on “promoting the distinctive culture, produce, tourism, education and research qualities of the Scottish brand”.

Police Scotland expressed support for the Scottish Government’s international development programme and principles and added that:

“Reflecting the diversity of the communities in Scotland, and the interconnectivity between national and international dimensions to poverty, justice, inequality and climate change Police Scotland supports activities and initiatives which contribute towards community safety and wellbeing, both within Scotland and beyond our borders.”

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCJC) response focussed on the impact of Scottish responses to international affairs on the Jewish community in Scotland suggesting that “it is frequently the case that these cause increased fears and feelings of anxiety among people who, in many cases, already feel vulnerable”. The SJCJ highlighted concerns about the Scottish Government’s procurement policy

which “strongly discourages trade with illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories” and also drew attention to the Scottish Parliament writing that during the whole of Session 5 (2016–21), more motions were submitted about Israel than about any other country.

“It is a cause for concern to the Jewish Community that this disproportion on behalf of the Scottish Government and Parliament may indirectly encourage antisemitism from those who conflate the local Jewish community with the State of Israel, especially as there is strong evidence that the situation has worsened since the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities carried out an inquiry during 2012-13, funded by the Scottish Government, into the experience of Being Jewish in Scotland.”

As a consequence, the SCJC suggested that the success of Scottish Government’s international engagement work should be judged “not only by the extent to which it enables Scotland to flourish on the international stage, but also by its impact in Scotland”. The SCJC highlighted the policies of Scottish local authorities and the experience of Jewish students studying in Scotland as areas where the Scottish Government’s international policies have had an adverse impact.

International Development policy

Several responses to the call for views were received from organisations working in the international development sector. These responses were clear that international development should be a clear priority for the Scottish Government’s external affairs policy. For example, Firefly International, a small Scottish NGO wrote:

“International development should be a clear priority and highlighted as such with considerably more prominence in the public domain than currently. This could become a 'niche' area, distinguishing it from rUK despite the relatively small size of Scotland’s international development budget.”

Scotland’s International Development Alliance suggested that the Scottish Government’s external affairs work and overseas presence should prioritise a leadership role on sustainable development including:

- measuring and reporting on Scotland’s global environmental and human impact footprint holistically;
- adopting a headline measure of progress beyond GDP growth that represents the broader concerns of human and ecological wellbeing;
- using public procurement, public policy and leadership on business practice in Scotland to support sustainable development;
- Supporting calls for cancellation of all external debt payments due to be made in the next two years for those countries in need, and most urgently, for 77 of the world’s lowest-income countries as identified by the World Bank; and,

- Championing loss and damage in climate finance, while boosting the quantity of grant-based support in climate finance and ensure more of it is focused on the least developed and most vulnerable countries.

Firefly International added that Scotland should look to establish partnerships with other members of the international development community, especially smaller EU member states such as Ireland, as well as non-EU members such as Norway.

“Through meaningful strategic partnerships with others, small nations can add value to their relatively small scale budgets. The importance of enhancing development effectiveness through development cooperation has long been recognised and encouraged and Scotland would do well to demonstrate its maturity and wisdom as a donor to ensure at least alignment and at best active funding partnerships with one or more international donors who share its priorities.”

The Scotland Malawi Partnership wrote that the Scottish Government should “look to prioritise constructive civic engagement through its international development work, for maximum impact”:

“We feel that this focus on engaging and working through civic society is a bold, innovative and effective approach to international development. Conventional approaches to international development have not delivered all they have promised; they have not offered the transformational change needed on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals. In part this is because, too often, these have been imposed solutions, parachuted from the global north, and disengaged from the realities of life. A community-driven approach, which builds on the myriad civic links which exist, and which empowers the people of both nation, offers a genuinely noteworthy new approach, which is fast gaining global recognition.”

Respondents also suggested that Scotland’s international development policy should be based around developing thematic expertise in areas such as climate change, gender and migration including supporting refugees.

There was no clear consensus on whether the geographic focus of the international development policy should be focussed on a small number of countries or more widely. Some responses highlighted concerns that the policy should not over extend itself and there was a call from the Scotland Malawi Partnership for a continued focus on Malawi.

The Scottish Emergency Medicine -Malawi Project expressed support for the Scottish Government’s international Development policy when it was delivered in conjunction with civic society.

Does the Scottish Government's budget for external affairs deliver value for money?

The Royal Society of Edinburgh stated that the Scottish Government's external affairs budget of £26.6mn in 2021-22, or 0.05% of the portfolio budget was good value for money:

“as exemplified by the growth in exports, the profile of Scotland internationally, the outcomes of targeted investments in international development, and the positive relationship that Scotland continues to have with the European Union and strategic partners, despite Brexit.”

In the context of Brexit, Kirsty Hughes wrote that the Scottish Government's external affairs impacts and effectiveness “look considerable”. She highlighted the Scottish Government's ability to maintain good relations and a positive image for Scotland with EU partners though she added “how this is valued compared to budget is an open question, but it is clearly of value”.

Anthony Salamone of European Merchants emphasised the need for European and international engagement to be subject to assessment and evaluation based on the commitments of the Scottish Government set out in the Programme for Government. Anthony Salamone also set out criteria under which the Scottish Government's overseas offices should be evaluated:

“The Scottish Government's network of representative offices located in the EU and the wider world (sometimes called ‘Innovation and Investment Hubs’) is often the focus of political attention when assessing Government engagement. This network is, however, only one component of its European and external relations. In written evidence to the previous committee, the author defined five criteria for evaluation of the Government's representative offices: (1) the work and performance of each office; (2) relationships and connectivity between the offices; (3) relationships and connectivity between the offices (collectively and individually) and Edinburgh; (4) policy strategy and direction in Edinburgh; and (5) learning and future development, including expansion of the network. The operations of these representative offices should be fully integrated into Government strategy, forming a coherent network.”

Scotland's International Development Alliance wrote that its members welcomed the commitment to increase the International Development Fund to £15m per annum. On scrutiny of the budget, it added:

“To deliver further value for money, a normative approach to international development budgeting would be welcome. This would inflation-proof the budget and drive towards political consensus, over time.

That said, more scrutiny over this spend is essential.

This scrutiny should be led by parliament using a Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) approach, perhaps using a screening tool like the OECD Screening tool.

Such scrutiny might be effectively carried out by a standalone Committee like CEEAC, and this would be a step forward, especially if scrutiny of this kind was built into its remit, and there was a duty to report regularly.

However, we emphasise that a PCSD approach to parliamentary scrutiny should be embedded across all committees to ensure a coherent approach to everything Scottish Government does, as per the PCSD definition below.”

The Scotland Malawi Partnership also welcomed the increase in the International Development Fund to £15 million per year, on achieving value for money, it wrote:

“The Scottish Government achieves greatest value for money where it applies something different and innovates, where it challenges norms and assumptions, and where it looks to work in a collegiate, collective and collaborative manner with civic society. By working with and through civic society, the Scottish Government achieves far greater impact with the funds available. For every pound spent on the Scotland Malawi Partnership, for example, around £200 is levered from Scottish civic society.”

The Scotland Malawi Partnership’s response was critical of the Scottish Government’s move to a having a mix of competitive and non-competitive funding opportunities for the international development fund arguing that:

“we feel competitive calls for applications are the most transparent and effective mode of grant-making, offering best value for money and leveraging maximum wider support and input. We encourage the Scottish Government to prioritise open calls wherever possible and include details within the annual development impact report on the proportion of funds which have been through a competitive process and the proportion that have not.”

It also criticised the Scottish Government’s decision to cancel the Small Grants Programme.

What principles should inform the Scottish Government’s international engagement (e.g. economic, democratic, human rights, climate change or cultural / ‘soft power’ priorities)?

The British Council wrote that in developing its external affairs work, the Scottish Government should include a focus on the benefits of cultural relations and soft power adding that:

“Successful international cultural collaborations are key in building and investing in long term relationships to secure mutually beneficial outcomes.

Particularly as the arts and education sectors develop out of the COVID19 Pandemic.”

The British Council submission included details of its work in promoting Scotland through its work to develop and grow Scotland's international connections and contribution across the arts, education and society sectors. Working in collaboration with other stakeholders such as Creative Scotland and Universities Scotland, the British Council provided details of a number of projects which have sought to keep Scotland's arts and education sectors internationally connected throughout the pandemic and promote Scotland's soft power. On the importance of Soft Power, the British Council submission stated:

“There is a growing body of research evidence that demonstrates the impact of cultural relations and soft power on trade, inward investment, tourism, international study and diplomatic influence. Soft Power Today (October 2017), a report published by the British Council and the University of Edinburgh, found that countries which invest in overseas cultural institutes see significant returns. For example, a 1% increase in the number of locations a cultural institution covers results in a near 0.66% increase in Foreign Direct Investment for the parent country. In 2016, such a rise would have been worth £1.3bn for the UK.”

Glasgow Life's submission highlighted the role of culture, sport and major events as key drivers of the Scottish soft power “brand” and suggested the Scottish Government should prioritise these. Glasgow Life added:

“It may also be helpful to consider developing an explicit soft power strategy integrated with other economic, environmental and social strategies underpinned by the National Performance Framework. This may facilitate improved clarity around objectives and improve planning and outcome delivery. Soft power is difficult to coordinate, so it is important that the development of any strategy or approach involves stakeholders across a wide range of settings and is based on learning from cities such as Glasgow.”

In a joint submission, Professor Kurt Mills (University of Dundee) and Dr Andrea Birdsall (University of Edinburgh) set out that human rights should be embedded in all aspects of the Scottish Government's international engagement. The submission also supported the Scottish Government's commitment to develop a feminist foreign policy and the need to continue to highlight and strengthen initiatives around climate justice, business and human rights and peacebuilding. The submission also cites challenges caused by the Scottish Government's relationships with countries with doubtful commitments to human rights stating the Scottish Government:

“will face many situations where its ambitions and commitment will be challenged as it expands its global reach. Scotland has relationships with a variety of countries, particularly in the area of development, whose commitments to human rights and democracy may be less than firm. The existing practice of providing aid directly to organisations on the ground, rather than through the ruling government, as it does, for instance, in Rwanda, is a positive and innovative way to provide support to the most vulnerable

internationally, while keeping an arm's length from human rights abusing governments. Yet, maintaining a delicate balance between the human rights aspirations of the Government and realities of global diplomacy will always be a challenge.

In addition, there will be other situations where such finesse will not be adequate in managing a relationship with a human rights-abusing state. This is particularly the case with China. Scotland obviously wants to have good relations with China. Trade links are important, as are cultural links.”

Bòrd na Gàidhlig wrote that “It is essential that Gaelic language and culture are included within Scottish Government’s external affairs work” because Gaelic is an essential aspect of Scottish identity and it contributes to the Scottish economy.

And should that engagement be based on geographical or policy focus? Please elaborate.

Respondents who answered this question largely agreed that the Scottish Government should prioritise its international engagement through both a thematic and geographic focus.

Anthony Salamone of European Merchants set out his view that the distribution of Scotland’s overseas offices should be based on a defined strategy and that the placing of an office in Warsaw did not necessarily make sense:

“In the Programme for Government, it pledges new offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw. While purposeful expansion of the network is reasonable, in proportion to Scotland’s current constitutional position, it should be based on defined strategy. These new locations were announced before work on the Global Affairs Framework had ostensibly begun. To date, the Scottish Government has offered no substantive rationale for the selection of these locations. If its objective were to build strategic connectivity in the EU, Rome, Madrid and The Hague would be the logical choices. Given that Poland is currently a politically isolated EU Member State in conflict with the EU institutions, the selection of Warsaw is a strange allocation of resources.”

The Royal Society of Edinburgh wrote that the Scottish Government’s engagement should be motivated by both geography and policy concerns, adding that:

“Geographically, partnerships with the near abroad, especially intra-regional partnerships with the Nordic/Baltic countries and Ireland, enable Scotland to enhance its influence in the international arena. Developing relationships with key EU partners, including through the international hubs, can be important to ensuring a cooperative relationship with the EU.”

How do the Scottish Government's EU and international policies interact with UK foreign and diplomatic policy in these areas?

The Royal Society of Edinburgh suggested that post-Brexit there may be opportunities in the intergovernmental arena to enhance the role of devolved governments in shaping what comes next:

“We acknowledge that the political outlook of the two administrations, as well as the relationship between them, may make this difficult in the short term. We contend nonetheless that UK foreign policy ought to reflect the whole of the UK as it is; that implies taking account of views and interests across the territorial system, not just those articulated in Westminster. The legitimate interests of the devolved governments in the UK's European and international policy were recognised in the Memorandum of Understanding and accompanying concordats agreed in the early years of devolution.”

Anthony Salamone proposed that the UK and Scottish Governments should seek to revisit the concordat on international relations:

“Nevertheless, the two governments should strive for better cooperation in this area. A new concordat on international relations could support such efforts. The current international relations concordat dates to 2013 and the EU relations concordat was rendered obsolete with Brexit. A new agreement could broaden the terms of sanctioned engagement to include political dialogue with states, the EU institutions and international organisations, codifying the Scottish Government's actual practice. It could also better delineate the operation of Scottish offices within the premises of UK diplomatic missions.”

The SCJC highlighted the need for a more unified approach to external affairs between the UK and Scottish Governments:

“It is in no-one's interests for the Scottish and UK Governments to be at loggerheads, and while legitimate difference of opinion and debate may help to clarify best policy, claims of “right” on the one hand, and refusals to discuss on the other, can only lead to less-than-best policy, confusion, and reduced feelings of confidence and security for the diverse communities both north and south of the border.”

Kirsty Hughes wrote that “in many ways, there is clear complementarity between Scottish government and UK government policies in external affairs”. She added that in principle, both Governments want to support and promote key areas notably trade, human rights and climate change.

Finally, Professor Kurt Mills (University of Dundee) and Dr Andrea Birdsall (University of Edinburgh highlighted an example of where Scottish and UK Governments have different views on foreign policy related matters:

“Scotland’s international interests and engagements, while perhaps somewhat divergent, are inextricably linked to Westminster. However, the UK Government does not always use Scotland’s unique identity and its existing soft power to its full advantage in the UK’s wider foreign policy. At the same time, where Scotland’s interests and policies do diverge from wider UK policy, it is incumbent upon Scotland to be up front about this.”

Iain McIver, Senior Researcher (Europe and International), SPICe Research

19 November 2021.

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