

Cross-Party Group on USA

26th January 2023 6-7.30pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Daniel Johnson MSP, Convener CPG USA
Emma Harper MSP
Fiona Hyslop MSP
Murdo Fraser MSP

Invited guests

Brad Mackay, Professor of Strategic Management, University of St Andrews
Frank Cogliano, Professor of American History, University of Edinburgh
Fraser Grier, Scottish Business Network
Jack Hillmeyer, Consul General, US Department of State in Edinburgh,
Lorraine Bell, Scottish Business Network
Russell Dalgleish, Co-Founder, Scottish Business Network

Non-MSP Group Members

Alan Johnston
Allan Hogarth
Anna Stella
Frances Johnson
Jacqui Watt
Kenneth Shand
Laurence Heron
Nicole Lombardo
Nora Rothrock
Rebecca Groundwater
Rob Lang
Scott Johnstone
Steve Kerr

Apologies

Daniel Cohen
Jackie Baillie MSP
Jim Fox
Kat Brogan

Rachael Hamilton MSP
Seona Shand

1. Welcome and introductions

Daniel Johnson MSP (DJ MSP) opens the meeting, presents the agenda and welcomes all attendees to the first meeting of 2023. He thanks the US consulate for joining us. DJ thanks Dean Lockhart, who recently stepped down as an MSP, for his work in establishing this cross party group.

2. Extraordinary General Meeting to elect new Chair

DJ MSP starts by noting that we now need to elect a new Chair and Vice-Chairs. DJ MSP asks for expressions of interest. There are three expressions of interest: one from DJ MSP for Chair, and two from Michelle Thomson MSP (MT MSP) and Emma Harper MSP (EH MSP) for Vice-Chairs. There are no other nominations. Murdo Fraser MSP (MF MSP) seconds DJ MSP as Chair, and MT MSP and EH MSP as joint Vice-Chairs.

DJ MSP notes that he and the two new vice-Chairs have had a brief discussion on themes and ways of working going forward, and will bring this to the next meeting of the Cross Party Group.

3. Talk by Professor Brad Mackay from St Andrews University

DJ MSP highlights that this meeting will be focusing on academic links with the US and their wider benefits. International collaboration in Higher Education (HE) is incredibly important, and our academic links are vital to society, the economy, and innovation.

Professor Brad Mackay (BM) is Professor of Strategic Management and Vice Principal International Strategy and External Relations at St Andrews University. He is also Vice-Convenor for the Universities Scotland International Committee. BM gives an overview of academic links between Scotland and the USA: there are 68,000 international students studying at HE Institutions in Scotland, and in the 2019 graduate outcomes survey, 91% of international graduates said that they were satisfied with their learning experience in Scotland and 78% were satisfied with their career thanks the degree that they pursued in Scotland. BM notes that the survey also showed that, in regards to professional relationships, 74% of international graduates said they were more likely to do business with Scotland having studied here – BM highlights this as a really powerful statement of the role that universities play in Scotland's global connectivity, and the economic contribution that the sector makes. BM also highlights the academic excellence of Scotland's HE institutions, every one of which is shown to carry out world-leading research.

In the present day, BM notes that the US is the second-largest recruitment market for Scottish Higher Education institutions, with 7.7% of all international students in Scotland coming from the USA. The USA is also the top country for international academic staff outside of the EU. The research collaboration connections between our two countries are also extensive.

BM then addresses the question of how we can boost links with the US – he notes that there isn't a central database of all our academic collaborations with the US, although this would be extremely useful. Each HE institution has their own international strategy, all have some sort of link with US universities, and 7 have overseas office and staff based in the US.

Given this, BM feels that there are some broad areas where the Scottish Government could help to intensify and extend our existing links:

Supporting mobility is key, such as mutual funding schemes for research, post-doctoral students and PhD students, to strengthen research collaborations and links. Mapping post-graduate frameworks and progression routes would also be useful. For example, Scottish HE could look to recognise equivalence of the initial taught years of PhD in the US and look at opening up potential for joint doctoral programmes. Also key would be strengthening, rather than winding down, the Saltire Scholarship Scheme. There may also be value in engaging more with external organisations like the Fulbright, potentially looking at joint award schemes. Funding for inward visits from US academics would help to showcase our HE. BM emphasises that continuing to advocate at a UK-Government level for an open and efficient visa and immigration regime for both students and researchers would be of huge benefit. Promoting what Scotland has on offer would also be useful, such as highlighting successful research outputs, and facilitating opportunities for industry in the US and the universities to come together to pitch for funding. BM finishes by noting that other countries of a similar size have been investing really heavily in HE over the past decade, whilst the funding for Scottish HE has declined in real terms.

DJ MSP comments that it's interesting that there's quite a bias amongst US students towards humanities and social science – should we be looking to grow the relationship in sciences?

BM confirms that those subjects tend to be more popular for US students studying in Scotland, but they are finding that interest is starting to broaden out. The key to this is establishing a reputation in that area – the Saltire Scholarship or similar schemes could be a very powerful tool to help build an alumni base and reputation.

Fiona Hyslop MSP (FH MSP) comments that she was Education Secretary when they expanded the Saltire Scholarships and is very supportive of these. Pre-pandemic the Scottish Government had been looking at pulling together the alumni of the Saltire Scholarships – can the universities work with them on this? BM confirms that he will take this suggestion back to his university and networks.

DJ MSP suggests that, as a Cross Party Group, we could write to Angus Robertson MSP and Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP to ask them to take this forward and to leverage other academic exchange programmes.

MF MSP notes that St Andrews University have done very well in building links with the US, and asks how much that is down to the appeal of St Andrews itself? He also asks if there has been an assessment of the broader economic impact of US students.

BM replies that the process of building up the US market for St Andrews University started in the 90's, when they invested heavily in research. Prince William attending also gave them a lot of helpful publicity. Quite a disproportionate number of US students to the UK come to Scotland anyway. In terms of economic impact, they know that St Andrews contributes approx. half a billion of economic impact in Scotland, and would imagine that international students are a major element of that.

Allan Hogarth (AH) notes that Clarkson University in New York State are bringing a group of business students over to Scotland at the start of summer, and they are keen to engage with businesses and academics. He is helping to set up a number of visits so if anyone is interested please get in touch. AH also highlights that the exchange programme that Scottish HE has to the US is well-established and we could make more of that, for instance by learning from our students' experiences of US universities. Finally, AH shares that he is working on a trade mission to Philadelphia, again get in touch for more detail.

Alan Johnston (AJ) notes that he chairs the board of a University of Edinburgh spin-out company, and their largest single market is the USA. They have formed a very good partnership with an NYSE company in Boston – is there a way for us to get the best of the academic background but also the associated business and find a way of promoting that?

BM responds that we need to make sure we diversify our markets and strengthen our connections.

4. Talk by Professor Frank Cogliano from Edinburgh University

Frank Cogliano (FC) is Professor of American History and International Dean for North America at the University of Edinburgh. FC notes that there are two broad areas where he thinks the Scottish Government could work to boost academic and research links between Scotland and the USA:

Information sharing among Scottish HE institutions and between Scottish HE and the Scottish Government would be constructive. FC notes that there is a lot of great activity going on between Scottish and US HE, and it could be valuable to pool information. For example, when Scottish Government Ministers are visiting the US, they could speak to the universities about what partners they have in the area to make use of. FC highlights that Edinburgh University are currently drafting a strategic plan for the US and Canada and would be happy to share this, in the spirit of greater collaboration and information sharing.

FC notes that many US international students do internships with Scottish Government, and asks whether there may be a way to formalise this and make this a reciprocal opportunity for Scottish students in the US to be offered internships in the US Government.

Investment is another key area for FC, for instance Scottish HE could collaborate with Scottish Government to identify areas of potential for research collaboration with the US, such as big data, health science etc. that could be pump-primed with funding for mutually benefits for both countries. Joint funding with institutions, foundations, and governmental organisations is another area of opportunity. FC notes the example of the French partnership with the University of California, Berkeley, where Berkeley's study centre funds activity related to the study of France and fostering Franco-American relations. FC adds that there is scope for Scotland-wide coordination for research etc. and to identify areas of strength in Scotland that can be leveraged for research opportunities and partnership in the US.

FC adds that there is huge potential for Scottish HE spin-offs to find success in the US, given our reputation in the US. We should explore further commercialisation opportunities.

FC highlights the conversations happening at UK Government level about revoking the graduate visa scheme – this would be a huge own goal and any representations to the UK Government against that would be very helpful.

DJ MSP notes that the mutual recognition of qualifications and information sharing is key. DJ MSP asks if we should be looking at the state level rather than US-wide.

FH MSP notes that if a Minister or other Government official is travelling internationally they often do speak to universities and others ahead of time.

FC responds that it can be very difficult to connect with the HE system in the US, and can be more useful to connect with the state-level system.

EH MSP notes that she used to work in LA on a team working on robotic surgery, which is technology that could really benefit us in Scotland given our remote and rural communities – this is a good example of where there are real opportunities for us to look at what's being done in the US and see where we can learn from that.

DJ MSP – a number of points here that may be worth us, as a cross-party group, raising with Angus Robertson MSP and Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP: exploring opportunities around alumni of schemes like the Saltire Scholarship; looking at where there are elements of the Fulbright scheme that could be expanded; information sharing and mutual recognition. We can also discuss some of these points in more depth at future meetings, including subject-level collaboration, and points around spin-out companies. DJ MSP will circulate points with colleagues before sharing with Ministers.

5. Update from the US Consulate, US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer

Jack Hillmeyer (JH) thanks Dean Lockhart for his service, and thanks Daniel for picking up the role of Chair. JH updates the group that Michael Feldman, the Consul for Political and Economic Affairs, has stepped down, but a new officer will be replacing

him in March. A 3rd diplomat has since arrived in Edinburgh. There is also a new US Ambassador to the UK, who visited Edinburgh in August.

JH highlights that, from the US perspective, HE is seen as part of the business conversation. They are also working on getting Americans, particularly those working in Government, to update their ideas of Scotland, by pitching Scotland in the context of tech, space industry, etc. JH comments that it's an interesting idea to find a way to tie in the Saltire Scholarship with Fulbright, and would love to facilitate that conversation – Fulbright are always looking for more funding, including really targeted programmes and would welcome involvement from Scottish Government.

JH notes that he discovered that there is a scholarship programme that was set up following the Lockerbie bombing, between Syracuse University and Lockerbie. Some sort of bringing together of these kinds of scholarship programmes would be useful. JH adds that the US HE system is likely to be under significant financial pressures soon, so if Scotland wants to look at where its place could be in the future for American students, the financials of the system is a key piece to consider. Even something as simple as making sure each Scottish university has the US Dept. of Education code to allow American students to pay for their education tax-free, could be really helpful.

Finally, JH notes that education is not a federal government issue, it's a 'devolved' matter, so it's better to look at state or local level.

FH MSP suggests the idea of Space Saltire Scholarships for women.

6. Update from on the latest meeting of the Scottish Affairs Committee and Tartan Week in New York

Russell Dalgleish (RD) is chair of the Scottish Business Network, and they are keen for Scotland to optimise the opportunity presented by Tartan Week. To this end, this year they are rolling out a tech platform to allow us to connect the Scottish diaspora across the globe, to move us forward internationally.

Fraser Grier (FG) highlights that one of the priorities of the Scottish Business Network (SBN) in the US is to identify and connect people who have an affinity or connection with Scotland. LinkedIn data suggests that there are approx. 60,000 alumni of Scottish universities in the US, with 9,000 in New York City alone. SBN are looking at how to connect these individuals with the business community in Scotland.

FG highlights that Tartan Week acts as a focal point for those with emotional ties to Scotland. Last year SBN had their inaugural event in Tartan Week, attended by representatives from the Scottish Government, and others. This year they are running a networking reception in Tartan Week, which is seeing its 25th anniversary this year.

Lorraine Bell (LB) is the current chief of the New Caledonian Club in New York. LB emphasises that Tartan Week has untapped potential for Scotland, and more could

be done to broaden the impact of Tartan Week. This is where SBN are trying to increase the business presence at Tartan Week, and are also assisting with trade missions where they can. SBN can also assist Scottish organisations to find the right links and connections in the US.

RD adds that this year, SBN are sponsoring places for two young entrepreneurs to travel with them to Tartan Week to help them find business opportunities in the US.

DJ MSP notes that we need to constantly think about how we update our image, and could make more use of Tartan Week to do that. He comments that the work that the SBN are doing to make use of alumni networks is really valuable.

FH MSP adds that there have been previous attempts to rename Tartan Week to Scotland Week, but it wasn't really taken up. FH MSP asks if we could get an update after Tartan Week.

MT MSP comments that building a complete, rounded presentation of Scotland's brand should include musicians and other creatives as well as entrepreneurs and business.

LB replies that there is a broad opportunity to expand Tartan Week to include more aspects of Scotland, but they do already try to showcase any Scottish musicians who are attending, as well as ongoing cross-promotion of any Scottish arts organisations who visit the US.

EH MSP asks if there is anything around the Scots language included in Tartan Week?

LB responds that the New Caledonian Club in New York actually teaches Scots language and their Gaelic class last year had a much larger number of students than ever before. LB adds that she's happy to see how they can link with EH MSP on this.

7. Questions and General Discussion

DJ MSP asks what format would be preferred for future meetings.

AH gives his preference as virtual, which is easier for those not based in Edinburgh.

MT MSP notes that hybrid is increasingly the option for other cross-party groups that she is part of. It may be judicious to organise something purely in-person – perhaps have our own Scotland Week during Tartan Week in the Scottish Parliament and invite along our US friends?

DJ MSP agrees that the three of them will discuss this further. For future meetings, he notes that it is important to be able to have people speak from the US, but that it might be good to explore the option of hybrid. He notes that they are considering having

rotating themes for future meetings: business and commerce; culture; science, academia and innovation. He would welcome feedback on these.

Rob Lang (RL) from Edinburgh Airport would like to make the group aware that the Airport is looking at the requirements for US pre-clearance. This is a long-term project but important given the huge growth they've seen in transatlantic demand.

8. Finish

DJ MSP thanks everyone for attending and for the interesting and fruitful discussion.