

# Scotland's International Education Strategy

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The Scottish Government (SG), along with Scotland's universities and colleges, warmly welcome international students, staff, and researchers to our world leading institutes.

The publication of this, our first International Education Strategy for Scotland, arrives shortly after we proudly welcomed Going Global to Edinburgh. That international conference for higher education, hosted by the British Council, was a huge success and provided the Scottish Government with invaluable first-hand insights into how Scotland is perceived by global partners in education, research and knowledge exchange. It helped finalise our thinking on the extensive work undertaken in partnership with Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland to develop and agree a vision and set of actions for continued promotion of our universities and colleges globally which aligns with Scotland's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Goals<sup>1[1]</sup> and our National Performance Framework on Education and International Partnerships<sup>2[2]</sup>.

International students, staff, and researchers have an overwhelmingly positive impact in Scotland bringing social and cultural diversity to our communities; enriching the overall learning experience; supporting local economies, businesses, and jobs; and making a substantial contribution to the sustainability of our universities.

A multinational learning environment is beneficial for all students, staff and researchers who participate in it, raising cultural awareness and a global perspective. Students who choose to stay in Scotland to work are appreciated and valued across all sectors of our economy; those who return home or move elsewhere in the world remain valuable friends and ambassadors for Scotland.

Building on the success already achieved, this Strategy sets out our collective aim to create the conditions for our universities and colleges to continue to flourish, ensuring international competitiveness and the resilience to deliver a sector that continues to underpin Scotland's economic prosperity, cultural diversity, and open and welcoming reputation.

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<sup>1</sup>[A review of Scotland's sustainable development goals](#)

<sup>2</sup>[National Performance Framework](#)

In the coming months and years, we will continue to work with our universities and colleges to help them diversify their international student, research, and staff population by enhancing our reputation as a world-leading, safe, and inclusive country with open-minded social policies. We will help maximise the social and economic benefits of international higher education, and we will continue to promote Scotland's world leading research and knowledge exchange sector on the global stage.

We will achieve this by fostering closer collaboration across our further and higher education sectors; by undertaking Ministerial engagements in countries where we know we want to develop educational partnerships; and by fully utilising our soft powers in promoting our distinctly Scottish educational offering internationally.



## Executive Summary

### Vision

The Scottish Government's vision is to become more active internationally, forming connections and partnerships across the globe with countries who share our ambitions to alleviate poverty, achieve net zero and be an attractive place to live, work, visit, study and do business.

Within that context, our ambitions for Scotland's first International Education Strategy (IES) are:

- to work with our universities and colleges to attract students, staff, and researchers from outside the UK; to help diversify our international student population; and support them to maximise their contribution to Scotland.
- as an outward looking, inclusive nation that values our international education capabilities and export potential, we will work with universities and colleges, to maximise our social, educational, and economic contribution globally.
- as a world leader in international education, research and knowledge exchange, we will deepen our global collaborations and engagements.

Our universities and colleges are globally respected. The National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)<sup>3</sup> highlights that Scotland has more top universities per head of population than any other country in the world and is in the top quartile of OECD countries for Higher Education Research & Development. As highlighted by the College Development Network's International Ambitions Report<sup>4</sup>, Scottish colleges successfully export, engage, and excel overseas. They welcome students from over 130 countries, hold partnerships from Azerbaijan to Vietnam and attracted more Erasmus+ funding per capita for their staff and students than the rest of the UK. Colleges act as 'enablers' of internationalisation given their responsibility to reflect the needs of industry, government, and internationally competitive skills.

The opportunity to draw in talent, co-develop and attract investment into joint collaborations, and build our international reputation and profile is huge. Our teaching, research, innovation, and knowledge exchange must continue to make a difference - to enhance and contribute to global wellbeing, address 21st Century challenges and attract inward investment and talent to study, live and work in Scotland.

Scotland's IES has been developed in challenging economic times that require us all to work even closer to support our shared ambition for strengthening international education and research collaborations and knowledge exchange. In our 23-24 Programme for Government<sup>5</sup>, we are committed to bringing forward legislation to ensure the right structures and organisations are in place to help make Scotland the best place in the world to be educated.

The Scottish Government's International network of offices are located in Beijing (China), Berlin (Germany), Brussels (Belgium), Copenhagen (Denmark), Dublin (Ireland), London (United Kingdom), Ottawa (Canada), Paris (France) and Washington DC (USA). These offices directly engage with governments and organisations in their respective countries, to learn from others' experiences and to share our knowledge, skills, and technical expertise for the global good. They also facilitate high-level engagement abroad for Scottish Ministers and provide a base for Scottish public sector and commercial stakeholders to interact with their international

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<sup>3</sup> [Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#)

<sup>4</sup> [College Development Network's International Ambitions Report](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2023 to 2024](#)

partners. Through these important engagements, we help share and build understanding on common challenges and priorities, pave the way for new cultural and commercial projects, and develop partnerships with our key partners and attract people to come to live and work, study, visit and do business in Scotland.

## Summary of the International Education Strategy

		Ambition and Actions	Baseline Indicators
1	Destination Scotland – inward attraction of international students, staff, and researchers	<p><b>Ambition:</b> To work with our universities and colleges to attract students, staff, and researchers from outside the UK; to help diversify our international student population; and support them to maximise their contribution to Scotland.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> 1.1 We will work through Brand Scotland and Connected Scotland with our universities and colleges to promote a welcoming Scotland to prospective international students, staff, and researchers to enhance the sector’s profile at home and abroad, including with SG’s International Network.</p> <p>1.2 We will deliver a Scottish Education Exchange Test and Learn project in 2023/24 and build on this to develop a Scottish Education Exchange Programme.</p> <p>1.3 We will launch a Talent Attraction and Migration Service (TAMS) in 2024 that provides information and advice for students considering staying in Scotland post-qualifying.</p> <p>1.4 We will encourage and support international students to stay in Scotland post qualifying to work in Scotland’s growth sectors.</p>	<p>In 21-22, 83,000 International students from 180 countries</p> <p>Engagement rate Scotland.org-study 22-23 34%</p>
2	International Education and Economic Growth-maximising exports	<p><b>Ambition:</b> As an outward looking, inclusive nation that values our international education capabilities and export potential, we will work with universities and colleges to maximise our social, educational, and economic contribution globally.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> 2.1 We will use our international offices and programme of Ministerial visits to actively</p>	<p>Overall net economic benefit of International Students 2021-22 of £4.21bn</p> <p>UK value of £25.6 bn TNE exports in 2020</p>

		<p>promote and grow Scotland’s world class transnational education (TNE) and help unlock innovative opportunities for our universities and colleges in new and emerging markets.</p> <p>2.2 We will continue to work collaboratively to promote our universities and colleges’ TNE offer globally, including with the UK Government and British Council.</p> <p>2.3 Building on our Scottish Connections Framework<sup>6</sup>, we will work with our universities to engage alumni communities and seek opportunities to connect these networks with the wider Scottish diaspora around the world.</p>	
3	<p>Research and Knowledge Exchange - Scotland’s world leading offer</p>	<p><b>Ambition:</b> As a world leader in international education, research, and knowledge exchange, we will deepen our global collaborations and engagements.</p> <p><b>Actions:</b></p> <p>3.1 We are committed to supporting universities to maintain and strengthen their collaborations domestically and internationally, by continuing our investment into core university research and knowledge exchange to produce positive economic and social outcomes.</p> <p>3.2 We will work with the sector to maximise participation in the Horizon Europe programme, monitor Scottish institutions’ performance and identify areas where further effort is required to amplify Scotland’s access to the programme.</p> <p>3.3 We will work with our networks, including Connected Scotland and our international offices, to increase network building, further international links and maximise the profile of the Scottish research sector, including through events and inward and outward visits.</p>	<p>Most recent REF (delivered May 2022) - evidence of world-leading (4*) research in every Scottish university, and delivery of world-leading research in each of 34 disciplines assessed in the process.</p>

<sup>6</sup> [Scottish Connections Framework](#)



## Destination Scotland – inward attraction of international students, staff, and researchers

Scotland welcomes international students, staff, and researchers, recognising the important and valuable contribution they make to the Scottish economy, our educational environment, our society, and our communities.

We will work with our universities and colleges to attract students, staff, and researchers from outside the UK; help diversify our international student population; and support them to maximise their contribution to Scotland, including by encouraging them to stay.

International students and staff bring a diverse range of views, expertise, and knowledge. They widen access to international networks and infrastructure that drive our research competitiveness.



Our universities and colleges provide world class education, skills training, and overseas collaborations that bring education to developing countries. This allows Scotland to work towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals by providing education, research, and innovation in other countries. Such initiatives are an important part of our overall inclusive, welcoming, and diverse educational environment, which actively promotes knowledge transfer and shared experience between nations.

The number of students choosing to study in a country different to their home nation has grown over the last two decades. This number currently sits at around 5.6 million students<sup>7</sup> and it is forecast to increase even further in the next decade<sup>8</sup>. Prospective students are faced with an increasing number of study destinations from which to choose, meaning competition across host countries is fierce and growing. Furthermore, the UK Government's immigration rules may make Scotland a less viable option for those with dependents.

Scotland has proved popular as an international student destination with numbers increasing since 2013. In 2022/23 **more than 83,000 students from over 180**

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<sup>7</sup> [Unesco Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students](#)

<sup>8</sup> [HOLONIQ International Education Market report](#)

**different countries** came to study at Scottish universities, and international students made up a quarter of the total student population.

The international student journey begins with the decision on where to study. A UCAS survey of 1,200 students applying to study in the UK in 2021 suggests that the most common motivation for students studying abroad is to experience life in a different country (chosen by 75% of respondents), suggesting that applicants are not solely focussed on the pursuit of academic excellence, but also on a well-rounded student experience.<sup>9</sup>

The 2023 IDP<sup>10</sup> report indicated that international students choose to study in Canada, Australia, the USA and then the UK (ranking fourth). Those that study in Scotland rather than other parts of the UK state that they do so because of its high quality of education, safety for international students and good employment opportunities (all above UK average).

1.1 We will work through Brand Scotland and Connected Scotland with our universities and colleges to promote a welcoming Scotland to prospective international students, staff, and researchers to enhance the sector's profile at home and abroad, including with SG's International Network.

Scotland attracts international students primarily because it boasts some of the best universities in the world and a world-class education system. Eleven of Scotland's universities were in the top 200 of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024<sup>11</sup> for international outlook, demonstrating why Scotland is a destination of choice for students and academics from all over the world.

Scotland's 4-year degree courses can provide international students with flexibility to explore course and subject options before settling on their final choice of degree; and our postgraduate masters courses are offered over a one-year period, providing better value for money than some competitor countries' two-year courses. Our diverse universities and colleges offer over 4,500 courses in more than 150 subject groupings at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

We are recognised as a cultural and creative hub being world leading in culture and creativity through our film, television, and gaming sectors, and as a world leader in research and innovation.

Scotland has a world-renowned reputation for providing a warm, friendly, and open welcome to everyone. It has a cost of living up to 46% lower than London, and is viewed as a safe and inclusive society.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Scotland's vast outdoor environment means that in 2019, over 65% of adults in Scotland lived within a 5-minute walk of their nearest green or blue space.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [UCAS Student Influence Report](#)

<sup>10</sup> [IDP International Student Research](#)

<sup>11</sup> [World University Rankings 2024 | Times Higher Education \(THE\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Moving to Scotland | Scotland.org](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Scottish Government National Performance Framework](#)

The Scottish Government has co-invested with Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland, through Connected Scotland<sup>14</sup>, to produce targeted international campaigns and promotions that increase global awareness of the Scottish international education brand. As part of this work, SG have invested in the Study in Scotland section of scotland.org<sup>15</sup>, and with Connected Scotland, to profile our unique university and college offer.

Brand Scotland is the marketing and communications collaboration between the Scottish Government, Visit Scotland, Scotland Development International, Universities Scotland, Scotland Food and Drink, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Creative Scotland. As a partnership, Brand Scotland unites Scotland's international communications to increase the impact and effectiveness of all this work, building Scotland's global reputation as a leading global citizen and a dynamic, fair, and inclusive country in which to live, work, visit, study and do business. As part of this overall brand strategy, the study pillar delivers a marketing and communications programme that promotes Scotland as a safe and welcoming place to study, encouraging students from across the world to use one of Scotland's institutions. Connected Scotland support the marketing and promotion of international higher education and work with Brand Scotland to co-create campaigns and assets to target student recruitment in key international markets.

Marketing activity for 22-23 was built around the creative proposition of '*Come to study, find Scotland*' aimed at both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The activity was agreed with the Universities Scotland Branding Group and reached prospective students in a range of countries including China, India, Nigeria, Ghana, Germany, and France.

Utilising Brand Scotland's partner framework also helps promote the longer-term opportunities of post-study employment and migration, with the live/work pillar showcasing the range of career opportunities across Scotland.

Brand Scotland's future programme of marketing activity will embed student experiences within this audience-led approach as we continue to tell the story of Scotland. The International Student Campaign will also align with Brand Scotland's new brand positioning, 'Head, Heart and Spirit'. This will bring out some of the unique elements that Scotland offers prospective students, including world leading courses, connections to innovative industries and growth sectors, and our distinct culture and inclusivity.

Additionally, we will use our marketing and promotional tools to shine a light on the many areas of skills provision where Scotland's colleges are leading the way, in particular, in sectors identified in A Trading Nation<sup>16</sup>. Through highlighting the world-class training options in these subject areas, we are sending a clear message that Scotland has a responsive, industry aligned skills base, which is a powerful attraction for inward investors and international students alike.

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<sup>14</sup> [Connected Scotland website](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Study Website - Reasons to Study in Scotland](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Scottish Government Trading Nation Plan](#)

Furthermore, prospective students want to hear from current students or alumni about their study experience in Scotland. Connected Scotland will continue to develop the Study in Scotland section of scotland.org, including adding a "Student Experience" section to showcase videos of international students discussing practical advice and highlight the benefits studying in Scotland brought to their future career prospects.

SG and our universities and colleges can connect globally through partnerships with the British Council, through our Trade and Investment Envoy for Education's joint work with the UK Government's International Education Champion. In addition to working collaboratively with the UK Government's International Education Champion, it is also important that we are showcasing the distinct education offer in Scotland, alongside the broader Brand Scotland messaging.<sup>17</sup>



### **L'Etudiant Study Abroad Fair in Paris, France**

The Scottish higher education sector was represented at the L'Etudiant Study Abroad Fair in Paris by "Team Scotland," which included nine Scottish universities, Connected Scotland, Universities Scotland, and the support of the Scottish Government.

The primary goal in attending the fair was to promote Scottish undergraduate and postgraduate study opportunities to potential French applicants. Approximately 4,000 French students attended the fair, exceeding all initial expectations and indicating a high level of interest in Scottish higher education.

The Deputy First Minister, Shona Robison MSP, attended the fair and she talked to students, helped promote Scotland and was keen to see how partnerships like Connected Scotland, and its work with Brand Scotland, can open new international

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<sup>17</sup> [British Council Scotland website](#)

opportunities for Scottish Higher Education through collegiate activities. She praised the Connected Scotland partnership and the work it was doing to bring Scottish universities together in their international outreach activities and highlighted the importance of maintaining the strong links that both Scotland and Scottish universities have with France and Europe.

1.2 We will deliver a Scottish Education Exchange Test and Learn project in 23/24 and will build on this to develop a Scottish Education Exchange Programme.

Working jointly with universities and colleges we will actively promote available international scholarship programmes such as Fulbright, Chevening, GREAT, Commonwealth, the Erasmus Mundus programme and those available at Scottish universities through an improved digital study content on scotland.org.

SG recognises the importance of both inward and outward educational exchanges, and will continue to work with our universities, colleges, and the UK Government on its Turing Scheme (for outward student exchange) to ensure it can best fit Scotland's needs. Student and staff international exchanges<sup>18</sup> can help students and staff make global connections and build networks, take them out of their comfort zone, and support them in becoming more globally aware, adaptable, and employable. In 2023-24, working with our universities and colleges, we have introduced an Education Exchange 'test and learn' programme to try and repair some of the damage that has been caused by being fully able to access Erasmus+, and to strengthen our global international links by supporting the outward exchange of staff and researchers. An evaluation will be undertaken of the scope of the pilot and the application process.

As set out in the 2023 Programme for Government, we have committed to build on this initial 'test and learn' programme, prioritising placements for disadvantaged groups and further demonstrating our commitment to EU and global partnerships through colleges, universities, and schools. The project will not be able deliver the full benefits of the Erasmus+ programme, but until such a time as the Scottish Government's ambition to rejoin Erasmus+ is achieved, it will support international staff exchanges and develop stronger partnerships between educational institutions.

1.3 We will launch a Talent Attraction and Migration Service (TAMS) in 2024 that provides information and advice for students considering staying in Scotland post-qualifying.

Scotland faces significant demographic challenges, and our Ministerial Population Taskforce<sup>19</sup> continues to take forward a cross-cutting approach to this in delivering on Scotland's Population Strategy<sup>20</sup>, published in March 2021.

Scotland's population growth is projected to come solely from inward migration over the next 25 years, so we must take action to ensure we have a large enough working age population with the skills to meet the needs of our economy and public services.

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<sup>18</sup> [IDP Global Benefits of Exchange Programs report](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Ministerial Population Taskforce](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Scottish Government A Scotland for the future report](#)

Talent attraction and inward migration are essential for Scottish communities given the current and future demographic challenges that Scotland seeks to address. International students, staff and researchers represent a potential future pool of talented individuals that can be attracted to the workforce.

Scotland's colleges and universities are vital to the training and accreditation of our highly skilled workforce. The international education sector enables Scotland to supplement its domestic skills base with the best of global talent, ensuring a high-quality supply of graduates and researchers with highly sought-after skills and qualifications across the Scottish economy.

However, in the face of increasing competition from other countries for the best global talent, the UK's immigration system must be improved to allow Scotland to retain students after graduation and allow them to join the workforce or to set up their own businesses, through an inclusive migration system which meets Scotland's future needs.

We need an immigration system that supports our higher education sector to deliver the best learning, the best research, and the best experience for the most able students, anywhere in the world, who choose to study in Scotland.

The Fresh Talent post-study work visa which ran from 2004 to 2008 was the first time the UK immigration system was tailored to meet Scotland's needs. It was subsequently mainstreamed across the whole of the UK, before being abolished by the coalition government in 2012.

Encouraging international graduates of our institutions to live and work in Scotland long-term remains an essential element of our focus on population. The new five-year 'Scottish Connections' visa (described below) would replace the two-year poststudy work visa the Westminster government currently offers. Therefore, international graduates of Scottish universities could apply straight after their studies to stay in Scotland to live and work for a further five years.

Under the Scottish Government's proposals for an independent Scotland, international students would be able to apply and stay in Scotland to live and work here for five years after the end of their studies through a 'Scottish Connections' visa. This would also mean graduates who live overseas can return to Scotland on this route.

In 2024, we will launch a Talent Attraction and Migration Service (TAMS) to provide immigration information and advice to employers recruiting people from out with Scotland. TAMS will also support individuals who are moving, or have recently moved, to Scotland. The service will support international students in Scotland by providing information on visa routes, including graduate visas. For individuals who are already here, we will ensure that they are aware of and have access to information that will help them move from study to work. This will include career advice provided by Skills Development Scotland.

1.4 We will encourage and support international students to stay in Scotland post qualifying to work in Scotland's growth sectors.



Attracting talent is essential to increasing innovation, supporting inward investment, meeting skills gaps in our labour market, and addressing population challenges. Our universities and colleges welcome staff and researchers from across the globe to work and live in Scotland. Almost two out of every five (38%) academic staff at Scottish universities come from outside of the UK - this is higher than the UK (around 32%).<sup>27</sup> This is testament to the world-class international reputation of our universities and colleges, and the quality of the opportunities that they provide in an increasingly highly competitive global market.

Retaining international students post qualifying brings diversity and innovation to our workforce and helps deliver a pipeline of skilled workers to employers across the country. Going forward, we will work with universities, colleges, employers, and students themselves to help make connections between study and work. We will ensure students and employers are aware of current visa options and continue to press the UK Government for a migration system that meets the needs of Scotland.

### International Student and Employer Engagement

Since 2016, The Glasgow School of Art Winter School has brought together students, invited experts, researchers, and faculty from leading creative institutions around the world for an annual event hosted by The School of Innovation and Technology at GSA's Highlands and Islands campus in Forres. A platform for sharing with writers, designers, students, and academics across Europe and beyond, Winter School participants engage in collaborative design practice that spans different cultures, languages, and disciplines.

Now in its ninth year, the event is an evolving prototype in international and cross-cultural education "beyond the curriculum", bringing together students from Spain, Denmark, France, Germany, Bratislava, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China – both virtually and in person.

Winter School is attended by School of Innovation and Technology postgraduate students, along with their peers from a range of international partner schools. Alongside leading industry experts and academics, they explore new ways for design to address contemporary ecological, cultural, and technological issues, challenging contemporary and future notions of design practice. The school's strong relationship with the local community in The Highlands and Islands provides opportunities for students to work collaboratively with people from the area, design academics and contributors from economic and political life to identify collaboratively areas where design and innovation can help improve life in rural communities.

Since 2016 the international partnership prototype has rapidly evolved, temporarily moving onto digital platforms during COVID but has now developed into an extended hybrid approach. For 2024 the initial online phase of Winter School 2024 on this year's theme Place, Soil and Care in January develops into a second in situ phase in April.



## Standing with Ukraine

The University of Edinburgh and Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (KNU) forged a strong and equitable strategic partnership in 2022. This collaborative partnership has been a catalyst for rich and impactful academic and cultural interchanges between our two institutions and cities. The partnership not only supports the current needs of Ukrainian education and innovation but also the longer-term, reciprocal strategic objectives of our two institutions and nations beyond the current crisis.

We've hosted colleagues and students in-person and online seminars and labs and provided seed funding for research proposals, skills, and resource development. Staff and students have visited Edinburgh for collaborative projects, shared teaching and more. Edinburgh has hosted KNU students who were urgently in need of access to labs and facilities closed to them due to the conflict. Activities continue to evolve and look ahead and have been strengthened by funding from the UUK International grant scheme launched as part of the UK-Ukraine Twinning Initiative.

## International Education and Economic Growth- maximising exports

Our excellent post-16 education sector also plays a vital role in strengthening Scotland's international reputation and economy.

As an outward looking nation that values our international education capabilities and export potential, we will work with universities and colleges, to maximise our social, educational, and economic contribution globally.

International students, staff and researchers have an overwhelmingly positive impact on Scotland's economy and society. They add to the diversity of our student population and play a vital role in making Scotland an outward-looking country, enhancing its skills and research base, contributing to our economy, and building education and research connections globally.



The net contribution in 2021-22 of international students in Scotland to the UK economy was estimated to be £4.21 billion. Those that choose to stay can contribute valuable skills to our workforce and support the sustainable growth of our economy. Our Talent Attraction programme will enable employers to recruit from a more diverse pool of labour, bringing extensive benefits to their organisation including greater innovation, new ideas and addressing current or emerging skills needs.

Additionally, through our network of international offices, partners such as our Trade and Investment Envoys, GlobalScots<sup>21</sup>, and the global field team of Scottish Development International (SDI), the international trade and investment arm of Scottish Enterprise, we can further broaden our international education profile and promote what Scotland has to offer in even more countries, supporting actions within NSET and attracting inward global investment.

This helps us maintain a consistent approach for Scotland to promote and export our international education offer through Connected Scotland - working together to promote Scotland as a destination to study, live and work. We will look to maximise those benefits through actions in NSET and our Scottish Connections Framework.

2.1 We will utilise our international offices and Ministerial visits to actively promote Scotland's world class transnational education (TNE) and unlock new, innovative opportunities for our universities and colleges in new and emerging markets.

2.2 We will continue to work collaboratively to promote our universities and colleges and their TNE offer globally, including with the UKGOV and the British Council in meetings with other countries.

Whilst welcoming students from across the globe to Scotland is important, Scottish universities and colleges can provide global education and training opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups through their TNE provision.

TNE is a key export activity with a major positive economic benefit to Scotland. Total UK revenue from education related exports and TNE activity was estimated to be £25.6 billion in 2020<sup>22</sup>.

Our world-class universities and colleges are actively growing their global provision of TNE, providing Scottish qualifications outside of Scotland through establishing strategic partnerships with overseas institutions and utilising a range of TNE delivery models. This includes delivering online courses and establishing campuses with international partners.

Many of Scotland's universities and colleges have students studying through TNE activities, with over 60% of Scottish providers reporting more than 1000 TNE students each. Overall Scottish providers reported 45,115 students in TNE at multiple global locations, which accounts for 8.5% of the total reported by UK providers. Asia continued to report the largest proportion of Scottish providers' TNE

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<sup>21</sup> [Scottish Government Trade and Investment policies](#)

<sup>22</sup> [UK Government International Education Strategy](#)

students (41.9%) in 2021–22, followed by the Middle East (19.8%), the European Union (13.0%), Africa (10.8%), North America (8.9%), non-EU Europe (3.5%), Australasia (1.2%) and South America (0.8%).<sup>23</sup>



In March 2023, six Edinburgh College lecturers travelled to China to deliver an intensive Business English course to students studying at Hainan University's College of International Studies.

Our International Network offices are well-placed to develop networks and frameworks to help ensure that SG can work with colleges and universities promoting education, knowledge exchange, research, and TNE so global opportunities can be identified and maximised. As part of this, the Scottish Government is committed to working with partners to help overcome barriers to developing TNE relationships with target countries. This will include establishing a mechanism for Scottish institutions to raise issues with us.

Our international offices, the British Council and our Trade and Investment envoy for Education working with the UK Government's International Education Champion will continue to promote and support the development of partnerships between Scotland and other countries.

Our Global Affairs Framework<sup>24</sup> provides further opportunities to strengthen our international university and college relationships. The SG and SDI's International Network of offices promotes Scotland's global profile and engages extensively with educational institutions, businesses, and other key stakeholders within education, both in Scotland and abroad.

The SG currently has nine offices – in Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Dublin, London, Ottawa, Paris, and Washington DC who work internationally throughout the year to bring education and business leaders together.

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<sup>23</sup> [HESA Transnational student data](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Scottish Government - Scotland's Global Affairs Framework](#)



In April 2023, Edinburgh College welcomed students from the Immaculate Heart College in Kagoshima, Japan, they completed a bespoke English and Airline Operations course – specifically designed to support their aspirations of forging careers in the airline industry after graduating.

In partnership with Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland, and Connected Scotland, the network plays a key role in promoting Scotland’s world leading international education and research offer through media activity and events. In addition, the network supports activity on the ground in host countries to link up opportunities on exchange, research, and TNE programmes.

## 50 Years at HKU Space

Edinburgh Napier University has recently celebrated an enduring transnational education (TNE) partnership with Hong Kong-based HKU SPACE which began over 50 years ago. The two institutions began working together in the early 1970s, thanks to relationships forged in Hong Kong by ENU's first Principal, Dr Joseph Dunning. The first certificates in Medical Laboratory Technology were awarded in 1973, as part of a collaboration between what were then Napier Technical College and the Department of Extra Mural Studies of Hong Kong University. The course was designed to address a specific shortage of expertise in the city at the time. Since then, around 8,000 students have graduated, with 12 collaborative degree programmes on offer today in subject areas such as biological sciences, social sciences, mass communications, accounting and finance, and tourism and business. The partnership with HKU SPACE contributes to a wide range of TNE degree programmes offered by ENU. During the last academic year, they saw more than a thousand students graduate in numerous locations, including Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar.

2.3 Building on the Scottish Government's International Strategy, we will work with our universities to explore how best to engage their alumni communities and seek opportunities to connect these networks and with the wider Scottish diaspora around the world.

Through our Scottish Connections framework and our Ministers travelling internationally, where programme and resources allow, we will engage with Scottish alumni around the world to support and expand this global community. GlobalScots continue to engage and mentor the alumni community and build education, trade, and investment opportunities, thereby strengthening the diversity and reach of the group. These connections raise Scotland's profile and reputation and encourage individuals and companies to visit, study, live, work, and do business in Scotland. We will work together with our universities and colleges, where possible, to plan specific, timed and mutually beneficial international engagement.

This will include capitalising on the new opportunities which emerge from our association to the Horizon Europe and Copernicus programmes and strengthening links with Scotland's top collaborator countries – to build new networks, develop new knowledge and expertise and drive economic impact.

## International Research-Scotland's world leading offer

Scotland's world class university research and its key outputs of new knowledge and insights are fundamental in finding solutions to the most pressing global challenges, delivering the innovations that tackle climate change, food insecurity, improve health, and enable us to remain at the forefront of new technologies across a broad range of sectors. We aim to promote Scotland as a global research partner.

The quality of our research means that Scotland is a highly attractive and effective global partner— 55.4% of our research is undertaken with an international collaborator.<sup>25</sup> This interconnectedness supports the leverage of further funding, and allows for an exchange of knowledge, skills, and infrastructure, fostering innovation and competitiveness between Scotland and the world. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of international collaborations in delivering our own ambitions, and is committed to supporting the sector to build, strengthen and expand its global network.

Scotland's research base has a global reputation for excellence, and each of Scotland's universities conduct world leading research. The research undertaken at our universities is a key asset and export for Scotland. The international partnerships built by Scottish researchers are vital to driving the strength of our offering, opening access to new networks, expertise, and infrastructure; helping us to attract and retain the best talent, and leveraging further investment.

Strong global links and partnerships will be critical in transforming our economy and our society in key areas of national and international interest, including energy transition, health and life sciences, data and digital technologies, decarbonisation, space, agriculture, and advanced manufacturing. Thematic areas and geographies of particular interest to Scotland are captured in key Scottish Government strategies, including Scotland's National Innovation Strategy<sup>26</sup>, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, and the Inward Investment Plan<sup>27</sup>. These help to signal where we have significant clusters of Scottish expertise and investment, and support strategic partnership building with international collaborators, while recognising the Scottish research sector's autonomy to pursue opportunities according to their own interests and expertise. They also signal the importance of academia and their ties to industry in stimulating inward investment and innovation and transforming Scotland's economy.

3.1 We are committed to supporting universities to maintain and strengthen their collaborations domestically and internationally by continuing our investment into core university research and knowledge exchange to produce positive economic and social outcomes.

Scotland ranked top among the OECD countries for its Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) (public and private) spend as a percentage of GDP in 2021 (0.98%), above 0.42% in the OECD, 0.64% in the UK, and 0.47% for EU27.

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<sup>25</sup> [Scotland's Research Contribution to National and International Challenges](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Scottish Government National innovation strategy 2023 to 2033](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Scottish Government - Shaping Scotland's economy: inward investment plan](#)

The Scottish Government will continue to support the research sector through the dual funding system by providing our higher education institutions with core flexible funding to build capacity to leverage further investment and pursue international opportunities and partnerships. This funding also supports initiatives such as Innovation Centres and Alliances for Research Challenges through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which help to create a critical mass of excellence, and bring together leading academic and industry expertise in areas of global importance, such as energy transition and sustainability, food systems, healthy ageing, and quantum technologies.

The strength of expertise, infrastructure and regional, national, and international networks make Scotland highly competitive at leveraging additional funds. In 2021, research and development projects were the third largest focus for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Scotland and remain at historically high levels — with Scotland ranking joint second behind London for R&D FDI.<sup>24</sup>

Our research excellence also acts as a draw for talent, with around 38% of academic staff, including researchers, at Scottish universities coming from outside the UK<sup>27</sup>. With the end of EU freedom of movement, it is more important than ever for Scotland to remain a welcoming country. We recognise the vital importance of EU and global researchers in shaping and diversifying Scotland's research landscape, and continuing to attract the very best researchers to Scotland will be essential in ensuring the future competitiveness of the sector.

As a nation, Scotland is committed to utilising research to help deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which we have embedded within our own targets and ambitions. According to a 2022 SFC report on Scotland's Research Contribution to National and International Challenges, one third of Scotland's research outputs were directly related to the SDGs in the last decade, tackling key global challenges such as world hunger, sanitation, and climate change.

The Scottish Government has supported the development of collaborative networks which have facilitated the sharing of expertise and maximised impact delivered by the sector. For example, our Arctic policy framework, Arctic Connections<sup>29</sup>, encourages greater collaboration between Scottish and Arctic institutions across multidisciplinary research, and our support for the UArctic research collaboration programme<sup>30</sup> shares knowledge and expertise multilaterally across like-minded institutions. The Arctic Connection Fund has recently awarded 9 new projects in the latest round of calls from March 2023, covering areas as diverse as the space industry, inclusive education, maritime infrastructure, renewable energy, and rural tourism; and working with international partners based in Canada, US, Greenland, and other countries in the Nordic region.

In pursuing such international collaborations, it is vital that Scotland's research sector is able to manage the associated risks, which are increasingly dynamic and growing in complexity. Guidance from the UK Government Research Advice Collaboration team and Universities UK has been developed to aid universities in conducting due diligence. This helps them to navigate the risks, whilst maximising the benefits associated with internationalisation.



3.2 We will work with the sector to maximise participation in the Horizon Europe programme, monitor Scottish institutions performance and continue to identify areas where further effort is required to amplify Scotland's access to the programme.

We are committed to supporting Scottish universities to continue to tackle global challenges and produce positive economic and social outcomes. We will do this through our continued investment into core university research and knowledge exchange, and by supporting their efforts to maintain and strengthen their collaborations domestically and internationally.

Scotland is an active and valued partner in a large number of EU and rest of the world research collaborations and has secured significant funding as a result. For example, in Horizon 2020 we collaborated with over 150 countries and secured around 11% of the UK's overall funding with 8% of the population share. Following the formal association of the UK to the European Commission's largest Research and Innovation programme, Horizon Europe, we are committed to working with Scottish research and innovation communities, as well as with the UK Government and European Commission, to ensure the sector can fully capitalise on opportunities and continue to build the European partnerships which help drive Scotland's strength and excellence in research.

3.3 We will work with our networks, through Connected Scotland and our international offices, to seek opportunities to increase network building and maximise the profile of the Scottish research sector to further international research links through events and inward and outward visits.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance and value of international collaborations in supporting our own ambitions and has funded a range of programmes to support international research collaboration over the years. For example, before access to Horizon was secured, the Scottish Government partnered with the SFC and Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) to deliver the Saltire Research Awards (SRA), to provide opportunities to build and strengthen networks with European researchers across 30+ EU Member States. SRAs led to new connections and multidisciplinary research in mutual areas of interest for over 200 projects. More recently, our 'test and learn' project will support international staff exchanges and help develop stronger partnerships between educational institutions.

In addition, the Scottish Government currently supports the following schemes:

- The Scotland Asia Partnership for Higher Education Research (SAPHIRE) programme. This fund continues to support the enhancement and establishment of existing and new international research partnerships between Scottish universities and key partners in Asia, supporting progress on global challenges such as health inequalities and climate change. The programme provides the opportunity for connections that applicants may not have achieved otherwise, to expand their research networks, or further their research by strengthening an existing connection.
- Connected Scotland provides a forum for further and higher education stakeholders in Scotland to come together to support the sector's ambitions for

globally connected research. The network facilitates events to foster new connections with partners with mutual interests.

The most recent engagement has created numerous opportunities for key stakeholders in Scotland to work closely with the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and DFG (German Research Foundation) to facilitate agreements and events around areas of mutual interest, such as renewable energy and biotechnology, and foster further Scottish-German collaboration.

The Scottish Government recognises visas and mobility remain a barrier to international collaboration. We remain committed to continuing to press the UK Government to ensure their immigration policy supports collaboration, and better fits with the research sector's aspirations and needs. We will encourage the UK Government to reach a deep and generous mobility agreement with the EU when the Trade and Cooperation Agreement is reviewed. We will push for visa fees to be reconsidered, as this remains a major obstacle to attracting and retaining talent in Scotland and is a detriment to the UK's own desire to be viewed as a science and technology superpower by 2030. Alongside this we will continue to work with UK Research Innovation (UKRI) to ensure a viable immigration system for researchers to move into and out of the UK and Scotland easily, through the UK's Global Talent Visa.

## [Building the European University of the Future](#) [University of Edinburgh and Una Europa.](#)

University of Edinburgh is a founding member of the Una Europa alliance. Una Europa brings together eleven leading universities from all corners of Europe to forge a new path for education and research and to shape our shared future for the better. Spanning 500,000 students, over 100,000 staff, and 10 languages UNA Europa launched Europe's first truly joint bachelor's degree in 2023 – transcending boundaries of discipline, nation, and university to take international collaboration to the next level. The alliance has also taken its first steps towards a common research ecosystem underpinned by a shared research and innovation agenda. Guided by its 2030 Strategy, Una Europa is working towards a truly inter-university and pan-European campus, shaped by universities' universal and fundamentally interwoven obligations to society: research and innovation, teaching and learning, and societal outreach.





## Conclusion and Next Steps

Scotland's post school education and research excellence is a major component of Scotland's soft power offering. The Scottish Government will deliver on the International Education Strategy by continuing to build links through our network of international offices and making education a key part of Ministers' international engagements. We will promote Scotland's teaching expertise, the benefits of studying in Scotland and the global value of our research work. We will also promote our willingness to enhance international partnerships.

More detailed implementation plans for each priority theme of the IES are being developed. These roadmaps will set out specific and measurable actions that we will prioritise to drive forward our shared ambitions. To ensure effective governance of the IES, we will establish an Implementation Group that will oversee progress as we work with our universities, colleges, and partner agencies to promote, enhance, and further develop Scotland's offer and reputation for education and research excellence.



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