

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Promoting Scotland internationally, HC 625](#)

Monday 9 January 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 9 January 2023.

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; David Duguid; Sally-Ann Hart.

Questions 61 - 127

Witnesses

[I](#): Patricia Yates, Chief Executive Officer, VisitBritain; and Vicki Miller, Director of Marketing and Digital, VisitScotland.

[II](#): Scott McDonald, Chief Executive, British Council; and Professor Murray Pittock MAE FRSE, Co-Chair of the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance, University of Glasgow.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Patricia Yates and Vicki Miller.

Q61 **Chair:** Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee in our second session on promoting Scotland internationally. We are delighted to have representatives of both VisitBritain and VisitScotland. I will let them introduce themselves. We will start with Patricia Yates from VisitBritain.

Patricia Yates: Good afternoon. Many thanks for inviting us to give evidence. I am giving evidence on behalf of VisitBritain. We promote Britain internationally, so we have staff covering 22 international markets in our network. They focus on making sure that Scotland is sold, working with the travel trade, and that media and influencers come to Scotland and tell the right sort of stories; and they work with our public diplomacy partners, like the British Council and the FCDO, to further Scottish interests in international markets. We are a beneficiary of the GREAT campaign: we get about £19 million a year to run the GREAT campaign for tourism, working alongside other partners—again, like the British Council—to promote Britain as a great place to visit, to invest, to travel and to study in.

Chair: Thank you ever so much for that. Over to Vicki Miller from VisitScotland.

Vicki Miller: Thank you, and for the opportunity to speak today. I am Vicki Miller. I am Director of Marketing and Digital at VisitScotland. I have responsibility for VisitScotland's marketing strategy and activity at home and overseas, promoting Scotland as an all-year-round, responsible tourism destination. As part of my work, I not only work closely with Patricia and the team at VisitBritain, but sit as part of the Brand Scotland strategic marketing partnership, where I work very closely with Scottish Development International and the other enterprise agencies, including Scotland Food & Drink, Creative Scotland and Universities Scotland, to promote Scotland as an attractive place to live, visit, work, study and invest in. Also as part of my work, I work very closely with the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland, particularly on Scotland's aviation strategy, looking at how we—along with the airports—can increase connectivity to Scotland. That is an important part of how we continue to increase our reach and the number of international visitors coming to Scotland.

Q62 **Chair:** Excellent. Thank you both for those concise opening remarks. May I start with a general question: how well is Scotland doing, particularly at securing overseas students? How do you promote Scotland as a brand internationally to people who are thinking of coming to our country? We will start with you Ms Yates.

Patricia Yates: Scotland has some huge strengths, which absolutely we want to use: the strength of its history and heritage, which indeed runs throughout Britain, and its countryside and scenery, which Britain is not



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necessarily seen as being very good at—Scotland scores above the rest of the nations on that. So, we are using the strengths of Scotland and telling the story of very different experiences across a very small group of nations. If you are coming from China or America, it is very easy to travel around and to get a broad range of experiences.

- Q63 **Chair:** You represent VisitBritain. How well does Scotland do? I know that London takes up, if not the lion's share, certainly the vast proportion of visitors who come to the UK. How does Scotland compare with, say, the Cornwalls, Yorkshires and Waleses, the other parts that you represent?

Patricia Yates: It does better than many parts of England. As you have alluded to, London is the real jewel in the crown internationally, but our role—indeed, VisitScotland's role as well—is to get people out from London. Route development and rebuilding regional routes post covid, I think we would both regard as really important, to make sure that people can fly directly into Scotland, so that they do not land in London and forget to leave, and to increase people going out of season. If we are looking at the economic viability of the industry, we are trying to stretch the season so that businesses that are pretty fragile at the moment have more certainty of finances over the year.

- Q64 **Chair:** In your submission to the Committee, I think you said that there are real efforts to try to make people consider other parts of the UK when they come to London. Will you give us an example of the sort of marketing campaign that you might organise to entice people to Scotland in particular?

Patricia Yates: Last year, there was a big focus on the Edinburgh Fringe and the 75th anniversary of the Fringe. For those moments, because history and heritage are such a draw for Britain, we have to make sure there is a message of immediacy around travel as well—because history was the same 100 years ago and it will be the same 100 years in the future. So one thing is that sense of immediacy for travel for things that are time limited or special moments that people need to travel for. We make sure we make full use of those.

- Q65 **Chair:** Ms Miller, whatsort of images of Scotland do you use to try to encourage and entice international visitors to come to Scotland? What do you think we have that is particular or distinctive and that means we can say to people, "Come and see our wonderful country"?

Vicki Miller: I echo what Patricia said about the quality of our scenery and landscape. That has been particularly important as we have come out of covid, with people prioritising things like their own physical and mental health and wellbeing. Scotland is very attractive in terms of all the outdoor activities that it offers. Equally, in north America, for example, ancestral connections are particularly important. Events—we have a huge events programme right across the year—are also particularly important. We offer a number of world-class events and some unique events. This summer, for example, we have a world first—the UCI cycling world championships. So our work is done through events, through history and heritage and through the quality of our natural environment. And really key with our

Brand Scotland partnership is promoting modern-day Scotland, so Scotland as an innovative and inclusive nation. Our vibrant cities, for example, and our food and drink are a really important part of the story that we like to tell, and those are also very important draws for visitors.

- Q66 **Chair:** It seems to me—you're probably both going to correct me on this—that we tend to fall back on some of the more traditional images of Scotland to try to sell it internationally. Of course, there is nothing wrong with that. Quite a lot of people around the world have a connection or certainly feel an association with Scotland, in terms of some of our historic symbols. Do you think there is a tendency to perhaps over-rely on them? Are we maybe doing that at the expense of promoting a more contemporary Scotland, which we could build upon, to get people there?

Vicki Miller: I agree. Particularly in markets where we are not as well known, those important hooks get us cut-through, get us immediate awareness and recognition, but you are absolutely right: part of the story we want to tell is to promote many of the hidden gems and the more contemporary aspects of our culture—the story of Scotland today. And we can do that. The type of marketing that we do today is very different. Social media gives us a huge reach, and we use a lot of user-generated content, from people who have been in Scotland and enjoying Scotland, and are sharing their content. It tends to be the case that the content that people engage with is actually that type of experiential content—content showing how other people are enjoying Scotland. That word of mouth is hugely important. For example, through VisitScotland's social media channels, we have a monthly reach of something like 30 million, so we have 30 million eyeballs looking at the content on our social media channels, which is very vibrant and is about what people are doing and experiencing in Scotland today. That allows us to change the perception.

Also, the work that we are doing with Scotland Food & Drink, Creative Scotland, the Scottish Government and SDI is about presenting that more modern and innovative Scotland and telling the stories of our people and some of the innovations that Scotland is responsible for today. That collaborative work has been really important in repositioning us as a modern, vibrant Scotland and showing the other side of what we offer.

Chair: Thank you. Ms Yates, you were keen to come in.

Patricia Yates: I would echo a lot of that, so I will cut my response short. The strapline of the GREAT campaign is "See Another Side of Britain", so it is recognising the things that we are well known for but telling a slightly different story—a more modern, contemporary story. People want to have experiences, so if they are going round historical sites, they want to know what they can do there—not necessarily the 100-year history of the site. That means telling a much more personal story, using food and drink, and telling people where they can eat, where they can really understand what a country's strengths are and what is unique about this nation.

On icons, I would say that they have an international appeal for a reason, and they have an emotional connection for a reason. I do not think we

should be too sniffy about throwing them all away. I went to South Korea earlier this year, with a different Select Committee, to look at international tourism and talk to tour operators, who were actually selling Britain. Their knowledge outside London was very limited. To get cut-through to the tour operators—let alone the customers—in some of those new growth markets where we are really being the arrowhead, we need to tell a story that takes people from what they know to that more contemporary story.

- Q67 **Chair:** I think we are very fortunate in that we have so many historic symbols and associations with our nation. Obviously, those are hooks that are being used. But I am thinking more about cultural tourism, for example. I do not need to tell you, Ms Yates, that there is a big focus just now on bringing people into the UK through the success of our recording artists, UK film and fiction. Scotland has all these things, particularly when it comes to creative writing. Are there things that we are missing or not promoting enough that could draw a new generation of tourists to Scotland?

Patricia Yates: Film tourism is an important draw internationally: around a third of international visitors who come here want to go to a film location. It turns on visitors very quickly, which is interesting. For example, Castle Howard, which was used in “Bridgerton”, saw a 3,000% increase in 18 to 24-year-olds looking at their website, so hopefully those people will then come and visit. Yes, we use film. VisitScotland also uses film very much for that international connection—to tell a story that has heart. I think that is what people are looking for: a personal connection with a nation.

- Q68 **Chair:** What about you, Ms Miller? Are we missing a trick with some of the more contemporary successes in fiction, in Scottish screen or of some recording artists? We have some of the biggest artists in the world just now, and we hope to hear from some of them as this inquiry progresses. Is there more that we could do to sell some of those aspects of what Scotland is doing?

Vicki Miller: We have used national theme years, for example, in Scotland, as an important hook. We have just come out of the year of stories. In that year, we were able to celebrate the real breadth of everything that we offer across all the creative genres, if you like, through storytelling. As Patricia said, film and TV afford us many hooks from which we can leverage and market Scotland internationally. For example, “Outlander” is probably one of the things that drives more traffic to visitscotland.com than anything else, because people want to come and see the film locations. “Harry Potter” is another example.

Music is also hugely important: traditional music, young artists and our music festivals are all important hooks. As you say, we have such a diversity and wealth of talent. We not only use that to bring people here but take it with us to international events. Scotland Food & Drink and some of our creative artists are really important when we take Scotland on tour internationally and to trade events such as Scotland Week. They

became a very important part of the experience that we create and promote when we are overseas.

- Q69 **Chair:** Excellent. You will probably tell me that you work perfectly well together, that you are all joined up and that there is no tension whatsoever, but are there tensions? Ms Yates, you represent and promote the whole of the United Kingdom, and surely there will be times when you think about which part to prioritise. Ms Miller, you exclusively represent Scotland. Are there any times when you might knock on Ms Yates's door and say, "Come on! Let's get Scotland's profile up a bit when we promote the UK"?

Patricia Yates: I would say that we have learnt a lot over the last few years. I am a relatively new CEO. I have appointed a new international marketing director, and I know he and Vicki have been working very well and very closely. Our strategies are basically the same: we want more people to come, people to go to newer places and to extend the season. We are looking at how we collaborate. We support each other's stories and the destinations that we promote, rather than feel that we need to compete. We are probably working better now—I am looking at Vicki to see if she's nodding.

Vicki Miller indicated assent.

Patricia Yates: We are on a new path to working even more closely together.

- Q70 **Chair:** I suspected that would be the answer, but I will try once again with you, Ms Miller. Will there not be a point where you look at the output of VisitBritain and think, "Give Wales a bit of a rest. Get Scotland further promoted"? Is there any time when that is the case?

Vicki Miller: You can always do more. Obviously, VisitScotland's resources are more limited than VisitBritain's in terms of our international marketing budget, but, as Patricia has just said, we can do a lot of work ourselves with the resources that we have in a number of markets, but not in all of the markets that VisitBritain are present in. We have a strategic framework that ensures I am able to tell Patricia and her team what Scotland's objectives are: what the key hooks are, what events we are focusing on, and the new things that we need them to promote on our behalf. We absolutely tap into their market expertise where we don't have that, because we do not have the people on the ground in a number of international markets that VisitBritain do.

We collaborate very well to tap into their knowledge of journalists and key publications, and also the travel trade. I know Patricia has mentioned that a few times, and that is particularly important, because not only do the travel trade help us to sell Scotland internationally; we connect tourism businesses in Scotland and help them to internationalise and grow their share of business from international markets. The work that Patricia and the team do there is hugely important to help us to help businesses in Scotland. It is very much a collaborative effort. There are things we can do



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on our own, but there are absolutely things that we need VisitBritain to support us with.

- Q71 **Chair:** I know I said “lastly”, but I want to try another lastly. Ms Miller, do you get frustrated by the amount of international tourist traffic that seems to be confined to London? Is there anything that you do in collaboration with VisitBritain to get people beyond the capital? I know there are issues to do with connections and we know we are dependent on London airports for international travel, but is there anything that you have observed or anything that you might be able to suggest for how we get people to Scotland who may come primarily to come to London?

Vicki Miller: Absolutely, and we know that with international visitors, particularly in long haul markets, they are typically going to be doing more than one European destination, either coming in from Europe to Scotland, or coming from London, maybe doing a bit of England, and up to Scotland. That is why our work with VisitBritain is important.

In fact, we have just benefited from a new gateway innovation fund that VisitBritain launched, and VisitScotland partnered with London & Partners to look at joint campaign activity, particularly on the west coast of north America, where we have no direct routes to attract people who we know come into London and then up to Scotland. That activity will happen this year. It is the first of its kind and we will also work with rail partners such as LNER as part of that activity to get people from London up to Scotland. That new gateway innovation fund that VisitBritain launched means we will be able to do the first of that kind of partnership activity with London, which is really exciting.

Chair: Excellent. Sally-Ann Hart is next.

- Q72 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Good afternoon to our guests. I want to pick up on the events bit, because events are really important for tourism and to stretch out the season. I know that a lot of local authorities provide seed funding for events in local areas. For example, in my patch in beautiful Hastings and Rye we have got Jack in the Green in May, the Rye Bay scallop festival in February, and the wild boar festival in October. Those are all local events that attract international visitors. In terms of the seed funding for events, do you think that is something that should be taken on a more national level, so that local events attract international visitors, for example, in Scotland? Do you think this is something the Government need to look at more—seed funding and people working together? For example, England has English wines in Sussex and great food and restaurants on offer. Scotland has incredible Scottish whisky and food on offer. Is that something there should be more collaborative working on?

Patricia Yates: I would certainly echo the importance of events, particularly when we are talking about extending the season, because you can create events and extend the season like that. We run a very small seed fund that helps events to internationalise. I know some Scottish

destinations such as Glasgow have used that when bidding for events. It is to help when we are bidding for events internationally.

I think events in the UK in general are underpowered. We are out in market, promoting business events for sectors that the Government are focused on. Trying to get that to work across Government and not be seen as an offshoot of tourism is quite a battle, as is competing internationally and having the seed funding and Government support to do that. One of the success stories in the UK is Scotland, which is really focused on events. I would say that Scotland has a very well-funded events sector, although Vicki may disagree. Scotland has really had that drive and energy, and in some ways Britain is catching up with what Scotland is already doing.

Vicki Miller: In Scotland we have an events strategy called "Scotland, The Perfect Stage". As part of our core funding from the Scottish Government, VisitScotland gets funding for a national and international events programme. That allows us to support event organisers in the development of their events. Through our marketing activities and the work of VisitBritain, we can help to amplify what those events are doing—so we do fund events.

That events strategy is subject to new consultation. It will come to the end of its life, and there is a further consultation happening at the moment on where that goes. As funding has become squeezed, obviously the amount we are putting in to support events has reduced, but it has been a core part of our sustainable growth strategy from a destination perspective.

- Q73 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Thank you; that was really informative. Let us move on to look at the UK Government's extensive network of embassies, including the British Council and that sort of thing. What engagement does VisitBritain, for example, have with the UK's overseas diplomatic network in relation to promoting Scotland internationally? Could it be strengthened?

Patricia Yates: Most of our offices are co-located in the embassy.

Sally-Ann Hart: You have 22, you said.

Patricia Yates: We have 16 offices and are in 22 markets. We are not in every market we operate in. We would regard ourselves as part of Team Britain in those markets. That includes making sure that tourism is part of the FCDO business plan and that there is a narrative about Britain being a great place to visit, so that when there is a DEFRA food and drink campaign it is about not just the exports, but people coming to the country and actually experiencing the chefs, the cooking and the destination that these great products come from. Obviously there is a lot of the world where we are not in place, and it is more difficult to get broader engagement from ambassadors where we do not have a presence.

- Q74 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Vicki, how do you think the network could be strengthened on behalf of Scotland?



Vicki Miller: Patricia has highlighted that, from a Scotland perspective, VisitBritain have a team presence co-located in market, and we work closely with them when we run trade events in market. We use their hubs, capability and connections in market to help us promote Scotland, so that network is particularly important.

We also work very closely with the Scottish Government's network. We run a lot of joint events, particularly around things like St Andrew's day, Burns and so on. We use the international hubs for key events. We make sure the teams in the hubs are aware of what is going on, particularly from a visitor perspective—what the new events are, what the new attractions are and what the new accommodation is. That is an important part of ensuring they are informed and are able to help leverage additional interest and investment in Scotland. Both the Scottish hubs and the UK hubs are particularly important in helping with that networking.

Patricia Yates: Can I just come back with a couple of examples, which might help? In Canada, WestJet has just launched new routes into Scotland, so we worked with the Foreign Office to have a real razzle-dazzle launch of those routes in Scotland and tell their story. In Brazil, where we have staff, we and VisitScotland worked with the embassy to bring an influencer over to Scotland, who went round distilleries and did a programme about their experiences on the ground. In markets, it can work well. As ever, it depends on the ambassador and their interests. Our team absolutely work to be part of that ambassadorial team.

Q75 **Sally-Ann Hart:** So really, when you are looking at promoting Scotland abroad, essentially you are saying—put me right if I am wrong—that there is room for expansion in other countries. You mentioned Canada and Brazil, but what other countries should we be looking at to promote Scotland?

Patricia Yates: We are already in the major tourism markets. America is obviously hugely important, and China is going to be really interesting, coming back post covid; it was our second most valuable market. The flight connectivity in June was about 35% of what it was pre covid. The flight to Scotland has been lost, so how do we grow visitors from China to get it back to that growth pattern? Flight connectivity and visas are really important. We need to get visa policy and the visa process up and running quickly in markets like China, which we need to see coming back quickly.

Sally-Ann Hart: Vicki, do you want to add to that?

Vicki Miller: To paint a picture, pre covid we had 3.5 million overnight visitors to Scotland from international markets, versus 15 million overnight trips from the domestic market—across the UK. Those 3.5 million international visitors, however, were responsible for 43% of the spend. Some markets—particularly the US market—typically spend almost four times more than a domestic visitor. In terms of sustainable growth, international visitors are particularly important because as part of a visit, they stay longer, spend more money and visit more parts of Scotland.

That is particularly important in addressing regional and seasonal spread, which we have talked a lot about today.

In terms of our own resources, we are focused on the US, France and Germany. Obviously, we have limited budgets and we want them to have the greatest effect, and those are our top three international markets. In all other markets, there is a huge opportunity to grow Scotland's share of global travel. That is where we need VisitBritain's support and investment. You can see that the value of an international visit to Scotland is hugely important for that sustainable growth.

We are not quite back at 2019 levels, particularly in numbers. There is evidence that the spend that we have seen post covid has resulted in a better international spend, certainly in the first half of 2022—we don't have the complete picture for the full year '22 yet. There is definitely room for growth. We are after those high-value visitors from some of those long haul and other European markets, and we look to VisitBritain for that support.

- Q76 Sally-Ann Hart:** In summary, you are both saying that it is not just about promoting Scotland abroad; it is actually to do with economic growth, and if we want to encourage economic growth we need to focus on promoting not just Scotland but the UK in terms of tourism and the brand—both Scottish and UK brands.

Vicki Miller: Absolutely.

Patricia Yates: Yes.

- Q77 David Duguid:** Thank you, Ms Yates and Ms Miller, for coming in today. It has been very interesting so far. We have already spoken about how, looking at the UK from the rest of the world, London tends to be the focus, not least because it is the major travel hub. We have already talked about how both your organisations are working on encouraging people to move out of London to other parts of the UK, especially Scotland. But a lot of what we have heard so far is stuff that is happening in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Being a north-east Scotland constituency MP, I am bound to ask: what are you doing around regular events such as the Edinburgh Festival and the Military Tattoo, and one-off events such as COP26 in Glasgow, to encourage people to use such visits to examine more of what Scotland has to offer?

Patricia Yates: If I go back to COP, the strong story there was about sustainability. As we rebuild tourism and a sustainable destination, we can see how consumers have changed: there is much more focus on wanting to go to destinations where they feel they are contributing to the destination and not destroying it. Scotland has a really good story to tell there.

In some ways, the Edinburgh Fringe in a normal year is a bit of a mixed blessing. Although it is something you talk about in international markets and we want people to go, it is really busy and quite expensive. You want people to dip in there but then to go and explore the rest of the country. It



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is incredibly important that we make it easy for people to understand how they can go to a city, and then go out and explore in that hub-and-spoke way.

If you were going to wave a magic wand, public transport, combined ticketing and integrated transport are areas in which we as a nation, and Scotland as a nation, could do better. We are not necessarily an easy country to navigate for an international visitor—particularly with the rail strikes on. Making travel easier is important.

David Duguid: I will come back to that point in a second, but, Ms Miller, do you want to answer my original question?

Vicki Miller: The strategy that I am responsible for is concerned with ensuring that spread of wealth across Scotland. My objectives are around regional and seasonal spread, and getting the right balance of visitors for every community across Scotland. We do that by working very closely with local authorities across Scotland and destination organisations that are based in Scotland to support the industry. We look at capacity development: helping the industry to internationalise and reach new markets, be that through digital or working with the travel trade.

It is also about understanding within each area which months of the year they want to promote, which type of visitors they are after and what the key hooks are for each part of Scotland. The vibrant message about what the different parts of Scotland have to offer has to come through all the marketing activity we do. That is the kind of insight that we will pass to VisitBritain, so that they are also promoting the variety of what Scotland has got to offer across all regions of Scotland. That bottom-up approach and partnership working is key to helping us achieve those regional and seasonal spread objectives.

As part of our EventScotland funding, we promote events right across Scotland. It is not just the big festivals; if anything, it is the smaller and medium-sized events that have the opportunity to grow and reach new audiences that we are focusing funding on.

Q78 **David Duguid:** Would I be right in thinking that VisitScotland in particular would work with organisations such as VisitAberdeenshire to create a layered effect where VisitBritain says, "Go to Scotland," VisitScotland says, "Go to Aberdeenshire," and then VisitAberdeenshire says, "Go to Fraserburgh to see Scotland's lighthouse museum," for example—shameless plug for my constituency! Is that the kind of model you are talking about?

Vicki Miller: Yes, absolutely. I work very closely with Chris Foy and the team at VisitAberdeenshire, trying to ensure that our activities are complementary and that we are supporting his destination and his team. I sit down with them probably a couple of times a year. We look at our joint plans, where we can collaborate and how we can support them, ensuring that we are not duplicating but amplifying what they are doing. That way of working is hugely important.



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Patricia Yates: If you think about our international network, later this month we are bringing over 100 international buyers. Those are being spread around Britain, but some are certainly going to Scotland, and we would discuss the itinerary for those with VisitScotland and, indeed, Chris at VisitAberdeenshire—who is an ex-VisitBritain staff member, obviously. Similarly, when we are looking at journalists' visits and media visits, it is about telling the stories of where we want people to go and getting those images, as well as using social media. It is a very joined-up approach to tell the story of lesser-known destinations.

David Duguid: I should say that other parts of Scotland are available, but I took the opportunity to plug my own.

Chair: I thought there would be more shameless plugs for people's constituencies.

Q79 **David Duguid:** I am tempted, but I have a couple of other questions.

Ms Yates, you mentioned some of the challenges involved in people moving around not just the rest of the UK, but within Scotland in particular, outside the central belt. What would you say needs to be done in that area, and are there any other challenges—other than just getting around the country—that are getting in the way of encouraging people to get out of the central belt in Scotland? That was maybe more of a question for Ms Miller, but I will give Ms Yates a chance first.

Patricia Yates: You are leading me into dangerous ground here. If you look at why people do not travel—so, switching the issue—it is because they do not know what is there and they cannot practically get there. We are both working hard to get the “Why should I go?”

On the practical reasons of “How do I get there?”, I think if you look at other countries—people keep talking to me about Switzerland and its train system—you see how easy it is to get a single-price ticket that takes you everywhere. We are just not there, are we? It is about getting the right transport links—getting the extra mile, so that you do not just turn up at the rail station and you cannot get to the attraction you came to see—and a sensible pricing structure for international visitors. Our current system across all the nations is not priced for international visitors at the moment. There needs to be thought about how we do that and make it part of the equation, so that it is easy for people to get around.

Q80 **David Duguid:** I will move over to Ms Miller for the rest of this question. Is there a possibility for a synergy on improving those networks or connectivity issues, not just for tourists but for local populations as well, and bringing it all together into a one-size-fits-all solution?

Vicki Miller: Absolutely. Scotland's 2030 tourism strategy focuses absolutely on responsible tourism. Being a more sustainable tourism destination is at the heart of that. We want to encourage more visitors to travel responsibly, and use electric vehicles and public transport to get around. The challenges are really as Patricia has outlined: integrated timetabling, and easy and integrated ticketing, are just not there. We work



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in partnership with all the transport providers—CalMac, ScotRail, LNER—to promote easy ways to get around, but it is not as easy as we would like it.

Responsible tourism also places great importance on local community, and what is good for the locals will be good for visitors, so that transport infrastructure investment is critical to Scotland being a responsible and sustainable tourism destination. Working very closely with colleagues in Transport Scotland, CalMac and so on to influence that is an important part of the work that we do.

- Q81 David Duguid:** Thanks for that. I have one last question, in that case, going back to the core events that have international renown and attract people to Scotland in the first place. In our inquiry, should we be looking to make any recommendations on how either Government—the Scottish Government or the UK Government—or, indeed, your own organisations, could do things better to help to capitalise on those events? Let us start with Ms Yates again.

Patricia Yates: To pick up on an earlier line of questioning, use the international network that not only we but the FCDO have to ensure that the Foreign Office and embassies are briefed on the events that they should be talking about in every presentation that they give. That sort of joined-up approach tends to be a bit piecemeal, so we should make sure that ambassadors know the events and places that they should be talking about.

David Duguid: Thank you; that's interesting. Ms Miller?

Vicki Miller: What we have already mentioned—sustained funding to help attract events to Scotland—is particularly important, as is allowing us to continue to grow the capacity of the existing events. Investment in things such as theme years has also been particularly important, and I know there is a bit of a question mark around theme-year funding; we do not know about the future of theme-year funding. All of those things have been really important in that sustainable growth, attracting more international visitors and creating that colour that we know that visitors look for in terms of that cultural experience that they can enjoy. Sustained investment, I think, will be critical to being able to compete globally.

David Duguid: Okay, I think that is all I was going to ask. Thank you very much, both. You have inspired me to get in touch with Chris Foy again, because that idea that what is good for locals is good for tourists, or vice versa—I am going to get in touch with VisitAberdeenshire on that.

- Q82 Chair:** Thank you. Deidre Brock and Wendy Chamberlain have joined us in these proceedings. I do not know if they have questions that they want to ask, but I will give them one to think about, and ask you something just now. I have a huge tourism sector in my constituency. My shameless plugs will go the Enchanted Forest at Faskally and Scone Palace, too. One of the things that I get back from them, more than anything else, is that they find it very difficult to get the staff for some of their facilities and attractions. Those types of economic impacts—outside the general state



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of the economy, the cost of living crisis, and so on—must have a huge bearing on the experience of people who come to Scotland, and the ability for those small businesses, effectively, to survive, thrive and develop. Do either of you have any views about where we are, particularly in Scotland, and maybe in more remote areas, like mine and Mr Duguid's—and maybe Wendy to a degree—on getting staff to be able to serve in some of those establishments?

Patricia Yates: We have talked pretty exclusively here about demand-side generation. I would say that the issues in British tourism are around the supply side, and that is staffing and energy costs. What you will see is that businesses are not opening to their full extent. So, they will do three days a week instead of seven. They will not sell all of their rooms, but they will put their prices up on the rooms that they are selling. We are starting to hear from international tour operators—particularly the Germans, who tend to book a little bit in advance and do explore—that they are finding it very hard to contract hotels, and particularly hotels in Scotland, where there is already a shortage of bed stock, so we are being squeezed at the supply side.

I would say that tourism has always found it difficult to attract staff. That goes pre-pandemic. It has got worse during the pandemic, as people have left and had the chance to experience other jobs, so have got out of tourism. We have not quite backfilled that, whether through getting older people to come back into work or trying to get younger people to see tourism as a career of choice. I think we are both supporting the industry and the Hospitality Rising campaign, which is about recruitment and retention for the industry, but I would absolutely say that, at the moment, supply-side issues are what dominate conversations on tourism.

Q83 Chair: Supply-side issues, Ms Miller. Is that something that you have experienced or seen? It is quite concerning if Ms Yates is telling us that tour operators are now reconsidering whether to come to Scotland. Is that something, again, that you are finding?

Vicki Miller: Yes, and I would echo that. We have had that feedback as well, directly from tour operators, and we do know that the cost of doing business is another factor, but particularly where markets from, for example, North America, where there is absolutely demand for Scotland, there is an issue with capacity at the moment whereby their business is open but perhaps the food and drink aspect of their business is only open for some of the week, not all of the week. Staffing issues at the moment are affecting capacity. The demand is there. It is affecting capacity for smaller businesses—the cost of doing business. Well, for all businesses, but particularly some of the smaller businesses, which make up a large percentage of the businesses that operate in tourism in Scotland, are also impacted by the cost of doing business in Scotland. There is a concern and a nervousness among the industry this year that the cost of living in particular will have an impact on the number of domestic visitors that want a holiday at home. We tend to attract higher-value spending overseas visitors, so, again, overseas visitors will be particularly



important, but an issue with capacity will prevent that sustainable growth that we are looking for.

- Q84 **Wendy Chamberlain:** A very brief one from me. Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you both for your time this afternoon. When I am just thinking about the infrastructure in my constituency, North East Fife, a lot of what we are actually seeing in terms of the newer and more dynamic things are really very much community-oriented and started. So Pittenweem arts festival, the Fife whisky festival—they have come about because people have just decided to do something. I am conscious that we have talked very much about top-down things, but how are you capturing that bottom-up activity and ensuring that it gets the sort of attention that it needs? I will come to you, Vicki, in the first instance.

Vicki Miller: You perhaps did not hear my earlier response. That is hugely important and actually I would say that we take a very much bottom-up approach, working with local authorities, local tourism groups, and destination organisations in order to capture to those local events—those things that are unique to those particular locations—so that we feature all of those things across all of our own channels and across all the paid marketing activity that we do. That close working and local collaboration is really important. You are right that, coming out of covid, interestingly visitors want to spend in local communities. They see that as an important part of their responsibility. Part of being a responsible visitor is enjoying spending money locally. Whether that is at local events or on local food and drink, they see that as an important contribution to sustainable growth and we have seen that come through in some of the research that both VisitBritain and ourselves have undertaken with visitors. So those community aspects are really important.

- Q85 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Lovely. It is great to hear that it was already covered before I appeared. My other question, if I can come to you, Ms Yates, is probably this. We have had an inquiry on the media and Scotland and when I think about how Scotland is known in the world—Outlander, Falkland Palace, another push there, Chair—I suppose, from that media perspective, some of those sort of older tropes about Scotland and its history are delivered by those kind of programmes. How are we ensuring that we are seeing a more modern face of Scotland that maybe helps from a tourism perspective? What engagement do we have from VisitBritain?

Patricia Yates: We have the success of “Downton Abbey” in the States and I keep telling my US team that we are not like that. Again, I think you have to work with the grain. Those are stories that engage people and enthuse them. Use them to tell the story of what you will experience as a visitor as you come and making sure that they are immersive experiences and people can feel the history and not just learn about it. Tourism is all about experiences nowadays, so those are really good calling cards to then direct the message.

Wendy Chamberlain: Lovely, thank you.



- Q86 Deidre Brock:** Very quickly—I do not know if this was brought up before—with the Scotland international houses that are being set up in cities such as Brussels, Berlin, Paris and London, does not the fact that so many of them are now being set up by the Scottish Government suggest that they are perhaps, in part, a response to a perceived failure by the UK Government, embassies, VisitBritain and other bodies to sufficiently promote Scotland's interests? There are so many other areas of the UK in competition for the resources that VisitBritain might provide—or, indeed, the embassies.

I asked a question about this to one of our previous witnesses. How do you determine where the focus sits at any one moment? Who gets the resources? How do these decisions get made? What engagement do you have with the Scotland international houses that are being set up?

Patricia Yates: How do we decide what we talk about? It is a collaboration. We work with Scotland, Wales and London to think about the themes that we will use for the year and, therefore, what stories we tell. Scotland feeds through content, and it normally feeds through great content, which makes our lives a lot easier in telling those stories.

Looking at our results, I would say that about 20% of our additional value generated through our activity is directly around Scotland. Scotland's share of the international tourism market is about 8% to 9%, so we are ensuring that Scotland gets more than its fair share of the international work that we do.

The Scotland houses are not organisations that we work through, because we would work with VisitScotland as our Scotland experts and FCDO as our international experts, so I think Vicki is best placed to answer that.

Vicki Miller: The Scotland hubs are really important. I was explaining at the beginning that I am also part of what we call Brand Scotland, which is a partnership of multiple agencies in Scotland—including Creative Scotland, Scotland Food and Drink and Universities Scotland—and the enterprise agencies, including Scottish Development International and the Scottish Government. That initiative is about raising the awareness of Scotland internationally and recognising that we have low awareness in a number of markets. It is about promoting Scotland through one narrative so that we are all consistent; it is about working together to promote Scotland as an attractive place to live, visit, work, study and invest.

While I benefit from the great partnership that we have with VisitBritain, internationally there are obviously the other aspects of what Scotland has to offer, in terms of attracting students and inward investment and so on. All that is very important, and that is the work of the Scotland hubs.

We will work with Team Scotland partners and the hubs to look at how we can increase international trade and investment, which includes the tourism element, but it is obviously broader. We benefit from both.

- Q87 Deidre Brock:** Is that one of the things that led to the big and very successful percentage rise in foreign direct investment in Scotland? I



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think that it is the second highest area in the whole of the UK. It had a huge increase; I think it had one of the highest increases in Europe, if I am not mistaken. Is that the sort of thing that you think is leading to those sorts of results?

Vicki Miller: Yes. We talked earlier about the importance of route development, so again that Team Scotland partnership along with Transport Scotland, and I think that co-ordinated effort to attract more direct routes into Scotland has, over a period of time, doubled the number of people going through Scotland's airports. That obviously helps with all aspects of not just leisure travel but business travel and supports trade as well. There has been a very deliberate strategy there, both on the aviation side of things and the collaboration around brand awareness and attracting investment.

Deidre Brock: Excellent; thank you.

Chair: Thank you both ever so much. That was a fascinating session, which I knew would have great interest from the Committee. There were a couple of things you mentioned that we may come back to you on for a bit of clarity to be forwarded to the Committee. For now, we will take a short adjournment until we have reorganised the seating for our next guests. We will take a very quick break.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Scott McDonald and Professor Murray Pittock.

Q88 **Chair:** We now resume our session on promoting Scotland internationally. We have a representative of the British Council and Professor Murray Pittock joining us in this part of the session, and I will now let them introduce themselves and say anything by way of a short introductory statement.

Scott McDonald: Thank you, Mr Chairman, for having me here today. I am the chief executive of the British Council—a job I have had for only one year and four months. Our role at the British Council is to focus on the long term and build connections, understanding and trust between the people of the UK and the rest of the world. We support prosperity and peace by building the foundations for trade agreements and other agreements and motivating people to visit, study and do business in the UK, and our goal is to create an environment of trust where we can share our values, learn from others and have a positive impact on the world. We are committed to supporting all four nations of the UK and, in addition to our operations in 100 countries around the world, we have 60 people in Scotland supporting both Scottish and global activities.

We work across arts and culture, education and the English language, connecting Scotland to the rest of the world. Our current portfolio of work is focused largely on arts and culture and higher education, where we work to support Scottish international ambitions by showcasing the best of



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Scotland on the world stage, building international connections that have economic impact but also provide us with the platform to build influence around the world.

As a final comment, I would say I am very happy to be here today. I have eight great-grandparents, as most people do. Four of them are Scottish, so I cannot think of much better to do than support the international ambitions of Scotland.

Chair: That is a very thorough pedigree. Thank you for that. Professor Pittock?

Professor Pittock: Thank you. I am here representing the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance, which is an organisation representing 14 universities, the Royal Society of Edinburgh—as Scotland’s national academy—and the national graduate school, one of the aims of which is to demonstrate that humanities are part of every research question. Relevant to the kinds of issues we may be discussing today are two recent joint events we had with the deans of arts and social sciences in Australia and New Zealand on the environment, humanities and the economy, and another with the representatives of the Scottish and Irish Governments and the Irish Humanities Alliance on the implementation of the Scottish and Irish Governments’ joint strategic review, which was held at the Royal Society of Edinburgh in October 2022.

I have a strong personal interest in the kinds of things we will be discussing, and one of the key areas that I would very much like to see raised again is the diplomatic template that was put together by Baron Kerr, the late Sir Iain Noble and global Scot Clark McGinn on providing a one-stop shop for embassies wanting to hold Burns and similar events worldwide, which would have circumvented quite a lot of the effort of trade and events teams by providing a single central functionality. It was derailed by the global economic crisis, but obviously my report on Burns and the Scottish economy is relevant to that and is also relevant in terms of the implementation of some of the recommendations. That report would have been particularly noticeable in the south-west of Scotland.

Q89 **Chair:** Excellent. Thank you ever so much for your very concise introductory statements.

I will start with you, Mr McDonald, so that you can explain to the wider public watching this sitting what the British Council actually does. I know that you are part—indeed, a feature—of most of our embassies and high commissions around the world, but is could you give us examples of your work? We will leave aside the significant dates—the Burns suppers and the St Andrew’s Days. What specifically could you do on our behalf to make sure that Scotland is promoted effectively internationally? You mentioned arts and culture; maybe there are examples from those areas that you can give about the type of work that you do.

Scott McDonald: I will try to cover arts and culture, and education, because those are the two big pieces of what we do. The British Council is



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trying to do a number of things at once for Scotland. One is to have a positive economic impact, perhaps by bringing students to Scotland from the rest of the world—by advertising why you should come to Scotland and what is great about Scottish universities. That has an impact on the Scottish economy. It might be setting up Scottish higher education establishments with research partnerships, or other partnerships around the world; that, again, has an economic impact, as well as an impact on the quality of education. In arts and culture, it would be connecting Scottish artists across all the areas of arts and culture with artists across the rest of the world, in order to create joint opportunity for them. Again, that would have an economic impact, but also give the UK and Scotland a platform around the world from which to share our values and our views on the way we should live. That is essentially what we do.

Q90 **Chair:** Is it a sort of showcasing of Scottish artists and Scottish cultural events?

Scott McDonald: It is more than showcasing. It is building connections between Scottish artists and artists in other places, to increase the opportunity for both. That increases economic opportunities for them, but also opportunities to share our views and values around the world. Showcasing is a piece of it.

Q91 **Chair:** I know a number of artists who have made good and effective use of your support and your offices to get an international profile in different countries. Is that the type of work that you continue to do?

Scott McDonald: We do continue to do that. I think there was an era, some time ago, when the British Council had more money or did more showcasing, and could take bigger groups around the world more often. We can't afford to do that anymore, but we still do take lots of people around the world and connect them.

Q92 **Chair:** Thank you. Professor Pittock, you have said that the visibility of Scotland's distinctive brand within the UK has not been promoted strongly or systematically. Those are reasonably strong words. Could you expand on them a little and tell us exactly what you mean by them?

Professor Pittock: One of the things I mean by that is that practice at embassies in terms of promoting Scottish festivals and events varies, to some extent according to the sympathies, interests and tastes of the ambassador. It is important to ensure greater consistency, and that that greater consistency maps on to awareness of Scotland's national brand. For example, Scotland is the 17th most recognised brand on the annual Anholt measurement, but it is stronger than that average in the US and Australia. It has been rising in recent years in China and India; perception is up by 10%; it has gone from 61% to 67% over the last five years, but there are weak spots in Japan, South Korea and Turkey, for example. We need to align international perception of Scotland's brand with the international demonstration of and attention to Scotland's brand in the diplomatic sphere. That is the first thing.



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The second thing I want to note is the profiling of Scottish research and higher education achievements, which came over very nicely in space at the Dubai expo, which was a complete surprise and got a lot of attention, because nobody associates Scotland with a space industry. *[Interruption.]* There it is. It got a lot of media attention. That has been quite well done at hub—Scottish Government hub—events, but it hasn't been done with the hubs in collaboration with the embassies. There has been one exception that I am aware of, which was the creative economy one in Dublin, which I was involved in. Generally speaking, that is not well or consistently covered. There is not consistent linkage, for example, between the Quaich events on the Scottish digital marketing network that the Scottish business network provides. They are strongly endorsed by a number of leading global Scots, such as Kevin Sneader, who is the Asia-Pacific lead for Goldman Sachs. But once again, they happen largely—not completely—outside the diplomatic network. There are a lot of good things happening, but as so often happens in a complex environment, they do not talk to each other.

- Q93 **Chair:** Is it fair to say that the biggest variable in how Scotland is being represented internationally is the ambassador? If the ambassador is interested and perhaps has a Scottish connection, Scotland will feature just that little bit more in the activities of that embassy or high commission.

Professor Pittock: That is certainly true, but there is also, if I may say so, a wider throughput. For example, with a big event such as the British Chambers of Commerce annual Burns supper in Germany, a lot of the whisky is profiled from, say, Diageo, because that is real low-hanging fruit. With SDI—Scottish Development International—there is now more embassy representation than there used to be, but at the same time, the products of Diageo are not very interesting or exciting to many of the major German corporate leaders, including German whisky importers. It is nice that it is free, but it does not tell them anything about the new distilleries coming through. It does not tell them anything about craft gin, which could easily run through a Burns supper environment as well. I have seen it used quite effectively at international events. It is a matter of greater connectivity between the diplomatic, commercial, trade and events sectors, and Scotland and the UK working synergetically.

- Q94 **Chair:** I think we all recognise that Scotland has a strong brand that is pretty well known and accepted internationally. People have a perception of Scotland. You said it is a nostalgic view that people have of Scotland—a view that is a couple of hundred years old. Is there anything wrong with that, given that people still make these connections with Scotland? You mentioned some of the more contemporary images of Scotland. How do we bring together the common perceptions of Scotland, which have to do with its heritage and perhaps its more historic nature, with some of the more contemporary activities that we are doing?

Professor Pittock: First of all, there is nothing wrong with that, except that sometimes it makes us lose opportunities, because it makes it difficult to embed things such as renewable energy or the space industry in



people's minds. Secondly, however, I do not think it matters if you put the new and the old together. It wasn't just space. The Dubai expo selection, which was largely scientific and cutting edge, was surprising to people, but it was not unwelcome. Thirdly, there is really good connectivity between the traditional values—for example, the association of Scotland with the rural, the organic, and a pure and more honest society. That is a little bit of an exaggeration, of course, but I am just talking about caricatures here. And there are things such as provenance. The integration of food into the marketing of culture is so well done in Austria and France, but so weakly done in the UK as a whole, and particularly in Scotland by comparison. Given that cultural tourists tend to spend more than 40% more per capita, that is an obvious open goal.

There is the promotion and the foregrounding of Scotland's humanitarian values, which are very strong in the brand, as well as the environmental ones. For example, the Edinburgh and Traquair women in conflict 1325 fellowship, which was based on UN Security Council resolution 1325 on the role of women in conflict zones and in preserving peace in home societies, has been going for quite a number of years. It is not that well publicised, but there are a lot of alumni now from Afghanistan to Ukraine, and it builds on the Scottish brand and the reputation for humanitarianism and good governance. Part of that reputation for humanitarianism is actually Burns's reputation. There are many international humanitarian prizes and charity events, and we attend suppers every year connected with Burns. These things can feed each other with just a little bit of development.

- Q95 **Sally-Ann Hart:** You just mentioned the diplomatic sector working together with businesses in a hub. Are you saying the platform for that is the Edinburgh hub that is being set up? Is that the sort of place that could be used? In our last evidence session, we discussed a new hub that is being set up in Edinburgh. Perhaps that could be the sort of format that enables them to work more closely together

Professor Pitttock: It certainly could. I am sorry not to be clear about what I had in mind with the Scottish Government's eight or nine trade hubs across the world, and about how effective it is when they work in concert with the embassy, in which all but two of them are based.

Sally-Ann Hart: Okay. I was just seeking clarity on that.

- Q96 **Chair:** Lastly from me, Mr McDonald, if the British Council, through the embassy network or in a specific country, wanted to put on some sort of Scottish event—a promotion of some sort of Scottish cultural activity—where would you go to seek the best thing to do? What would be the most effective way of using that opportunity? Where would you go to decide what sort of thing to showcase?

Scott McDonald: You need to think of the two ends of this. We have a big team in Scotland working on trying to define and articulate what the distinctive things are about Scottish education, arts and culture. We publish a whole series of reports on arts and culture and higher education, and we share them around the world. To come directly to your question,

we are in 100 places around the world, and we need to decide how to show that distinctiveness to make a point. We work with the embassy, which is always there, and certainly with the Scottish hubs in the places where they are. There are not that many of them.

Q97 **Chair:** So you would use the Scottish hubs that are available?

Scott McDonald: We work extensively with the Scottish hubs. There are different models depending on the market, but in China, the Scottish hub is integrated with the embassy, which is integrated with the British Council. We are all one; we are on one platform. In Germany, there is ongoing, regular dialogue. There is also a model in Canada, where we don't have many resources on the ground anymore but there is a Scottish hub. We feed the hub with all the British Council content, so it has everything we have. They are a very effective mechanism.

Q98 **Chair:** Are you integrated with the GREAT campaign? Is the British Council one of the arms for the activities going on for the GREAT campaign?

Scott McDonald: Yes, we collaborate with the GREAT campaign. We have the same objectives in one bit of the Venn diagram of how we work together. That is collaborative and it works well.

Chair: Thank you.

Q99 **Sally-Ann Hart:** The arts, culture and education all promote soft power and foster positive relationships across nations. I will take the British Council first, and then I will go to Professor Pittock. What should be the UK Government's priorities in promoting Scotland? You mentioned the need to choose what aspects are to be decided on by the UK Government and the Scottish Government, but what should be the UK Government's priorities in promoting Scotland's cultural, arts and educational offer to the world?

Scott McDonald: There are a few things that determine the priorities. First, we try to do at the same time promotion that creates economic impact and influence. We need to start with where Scotland has things to offer in arts and culture, and where we can make the most effective partnerships that have the biggest impact on them. There are two other elements that we look at a lot. The second is that the UK as a whole has a series of values that we are trying to promote around the world, which I think we would all agree on: democracy, the rule of law, respect, tolerance and individual liberty. That tends to guide us to places.

The final thing is that each country has a set of unique attributes—things they believe in and want to focus on. In Scotland's case, you might pick out a focus on public good in education and in arts and culture, and we would focus on that. That gets driven very much by our teams here in Scotland, which push us around the world and say, "These are the distinctive things about Scottish education, arts and culture. This is what you should be pushing. This is where it should lead you in the world."

Q100 **Sally-Ann Hart:** How effectively is the UK Government doing this? How



could it be done better, looking at the priorities?

Scott McDonald: In the areas we work in—arts and culture and education—I think it is done effectively, because we are able to do that prioritisation here in the UK, and then share that around the world. My sense is that Scotland gets more than its fair share of input into that, because we are always trying to do two things at once: to sell the UK as a package, and to sell each piece of the UK. The same goes for Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has a very distinctive story that we are out there pushing. Think about education, for example: there is a distinctive Scottish offer to the world, which is quite powerful. There is a bunch of unique things about it that we can describe, and that attract people here.

Q101 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Thank you. Professor Pittock, do you want to add anything about the priorities, and whether the UK Government could be more effective?

Professor Pittock: I do, a little. Culture, including food and drink, is very important. The appeal of Scotland's environment can easily be aligned with its renewable energy. You need to look at the music and literature of the two cities—Edinburgh is a UNESCO city of literature, and Glasgow is a UNESCO city of music—and use that as a platform. Also, the UK's representation of Scotland internationally needs to focus more on SMEs and businesses, which often report a lack of support. University spin-outs in Scotland are 21% of all UK spin-outs, but not all spin-outs are capitalised at the same level—Scotland's spin-outs are 14% of UKRI-related spin-outs, according to *Daily Business* for July '22; those are the '21 figures.

The strength of Scottish businesses and innovation coming from the university sector needs to be more clearly foregrounded. Things are inconsistent at present; they are sometimes good. This is the 300th anniversary of Adam Smith's birth, and I am involved in the events to do with that. As far as I know, there is only one embassy-style event under discussion, which will be joint with the Scottish hub in Washington DC. There is quite a lot of scope here, because Adam Smith is really important across the world; rechristening our business school the Adam Smith Business School has brought several thousand more Chinese students to Glasgow in the past five years, because of the application of Smithite policies in Hong Kong in the 1960s, and the link with China's economic development after 1976. There is an awful lot more potential to develop, and I commend those suggestions to the Committee.

Q102 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Thank you. Mr McDonald, what are British Council Scotland's priorities when it comes to promoting Scotland's cultural, arts and education offer internationally? We have mentioned the UK, but what priorities are specific to Scotland?

Scott McDonald: You have talked a lot today about national tropes, which we think are important and relevant; we do not dismiss them. However, there are a bunch of things about Scotland that are unique in arts and culture; the professor touched on some. Thinking about the phrase, "to be rooted", and adjectives such as "egalitarian", "dynamic",



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“connected”, “supported”, “spirited”, there is a really interesting package of things that you can put together. From there, we need to get practical, and to say, “What are we actually promoting, to whom, and with which countries?” Scotland has a priority list of countries with which it is trying to do things. It includes the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Pakistan, China, India and a few others. We make cultural links between Scotland and those countries, and try to base that around the distinctive things about Scotland. We try to use the assets that Scotland has. We focus on festivals and big events such as COP26 and the culture summit in Edinburgh, and try to make connections. We are linking Scotland to those countries in dozens of ways.

Q103 Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you to both witnesses for your time today. I want to talk a little bit about soft power. The UK Government’s integrated review described the UK as a “soft power superpower.” I would be interested to hear your thoughts on that. What particularly is it about Scotland, from a soft power perspective, that differentiates itself and adds to the UK’s offer? Are the UK Government utilising this power? I suspect I know what the answer will be, but, Professor Pittock, can I come to you in the first instance?

Professor Pittock: Soft power is very much a UK strength throughout the world. A lot of it comes from the education side. I think the UK currently ranks second in terms of leaders of states across the world who are alumni of its universities. We can lose sight of that rather important long-term soft power outcome.

Scotland has a distinct national brand, which has been recorded by various groups including Anholt and the British Council. It is a brand that is in some ways simpler, and in that sense more easily sold in certain markets, than the UK brand, but that at the same time requires a degree of complication and integration to bring its more contemporary and traditional elements together. As you have already heard—I don’t want to repeat myself—that is not currently happening optimally. That is an issue that can be found in the business diaspora as well as in terms of co-operation between the Governments, and the foregrounding of higher education and innovation by UK embassies worldwide.

Q104 Wendy Chamberlain: So we are confident that what we are seeing is not simply a case of a degree of PESTLE analysis that has shown that we should over-index Scotland in some countries and not in others—actually, it is just not consistent.

Professor Pittock: I do not think that the place where Scotland is foregrounded depends on it being a country with strong recognition of Scotland; it depends on the diplomatic appointments, yes.

Wendy Chamberlain: Yes, and we would want it to be more systematic than that—absolutely. Thank you, professor. Mr McDonald?

Scott McDonald: I agree with all that. You get soft power by building trust and convincing people of your attractiveness, so that they want to come and visit, trade, ally with us and things like that. To the extent that



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Scotland is a key part of our building trust and being attractive, it is a key part of the UK's soft power, which is indeed very strong.

I will highlight the education sector, which the professor mentioned, because it is a key part of the UK's soft power, and certainly of Scotland's soft power. We have talked about various attributes over the last couple of sessions, but let me highlight some of what we think are the attributes of the Scottish sector that make it really distinct around the world and very attractive to others.

Education is thought of very much as a national public good in Scotland. There is a lot of collaboration, a lot of whole-sector focus, and a lot of inclusion. There is a whole-sector approach to quality enhancement and student experience in Scotland, which is not common. There is world-class research and benefit from that in Scotland. There is real interplay of looking internationally but being very rooted domestically, and a real focus on graduate skills and employability. I do not know whether you agree with all those, but if you did agree with them, they make Scotland a pretty attractive place to come and be a student.

Wendy Chamberlain: Given that I represent St Andrews University—keep going!

Scott McDonald: That makes us attractive and it attracts people to come here. If they come and study here, they will build bonds, and then they will go back to their countries and they may become politicians, businessmen or whatever it will be. Those are the links we are trying to create. We are good at soft power in the UK, and Scotland is an essential part of that. Scotland has a particular appeal, coming back to some of the national tropes around attractiveness. People just like Scotland, and like the concept and the idea; we can use that to our advantage.

Q105 **Wendy Chamberlain:** You pre-empted what I was coming to. I know you have described Scottish universities as the "jewel in the crown" in terms of soft power assets. I suppose one of the disappointing things for me was the UK Government's integrated review. Before they published that, they made the decision to merge the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as it was at that time. We know that there have been funding implications for that—indeed, Mr McDonald, you referred to that yourself. Do we feel that some of the ODA cuts that we have seen for some of the international programmes have potentially had an impact and are diminishing some of the work that we are trying to achieve here? Can I come to you, Mr McDonald?

Scott McDonald: I would just say that the ODA cuts come from the obvious pressures we have because of the events that have happened over the last couple of years and which will probably continue for some time. They have an impact on our ability to support programmes and countries and to build soft power, but part of government is learning to live within the means, and we have to learn to live within our means and do the best with what we have there.



Q106 Wendy Chamberlain: I am just very conscious that some of those programmes were in train when the funding was cut and therefore had to close early. I suppose when you are talking about our dependability or our trust as part of our soft power, it then makes things quite difficult. Can I turn to Professor Pittock? Obviously, Erasmus has gone. We have the Turing scheme. The British Council obviously had a role in that until Capita took over. Has the loss of Erasmus impacted the ability of Scotland's universities to attract people to come to Scotland to study, given that it does not have the reciprocal element that Erasmus does? This is something we have looked at as a Committee before.

Professor Pittock: The impact is serious in a number of ways. First, the current situation where, by their very status, continental European students are charged overseas fees has led to huge drops across the sector. It has changed the nature of many of the major universities in terms of the number of students from continental Europe that will attend, because they have perfectly good universities that cost a lot less, to put it bluntly. But there is also the issue that whereas in foreign language placements 20 or 30 years ago many people went to be "un assistant" in school in the junior honours year, they now go—or did go—to Erasmus. That is still a work in progress, trying to replace Erasmus and the people who got to go for a year abroad to do their own modern language experience.

Wendy Chamberlain: And the bilateral partnerships just aren't making up for that in the short term.

Professor Pittock: Well, a bilateral partnership is as good as its mobility, both in terms of personnel and funding. Without two-way mobility and two-way funding—both of which have been severely restricted in recent years—there are serious issues. That is true of the mood beyond Europe and the mood music for people who technically were always overseas students themselves, because when that rather unfortunate headline in *The Times* came out about possible restrictions on overseas students, it was being used by the comms office of one major Australian university that same afternoon for marketing purposes. We have to be very careful about preserving soft power and about what soft power can deliver for the UK's visibility.

Wendy Chamberlain: And how it can be chipped away by potentially non-interlinked decisions.

Professor Pittock: Yes.

Q107 Wendy Chamberlain: May I stay with you, Professor Pittock, to ask about Horizon? Does the impact of the non-decision on Horizon also play a part here?

Professor Pittock: The UK Government have been very committed to providing cover for the absence of Horizon funds and for covering Horizon projects that are now not fundable because of the lack of an agreement. But this is ultimately not sustainable from any point of view, including ours, because it is hard to get people to apply for Horizon or equivalent



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European scheme funding when the future is so uncertain. That has an impact because, again, major research universities in the UK historically had 10% to 12% of their research income, or sometimes even more, coming from European sources. In a situation where research funding is still rising rather behind inflationary costs, it is a double whammy on the sector.

Q108 Wendy Chamberlain: Thank you. Mr McDonald, I am coming to you last. I really care about the British Council; I had a Westminster Hall debate on its future. One thing you mentioned in your opening remarks was the work you do in terms of attraction to Scotland, research and so on. If we look at the fiscal challenges that the British Council has faced of late, how much more difficult does that make it for the British Council to deliver all the good things that I think there would be a lot of cross-party consensus on in terms of Scotland's position internationally?

Scott McDonald: There is no doubt we are under financial pressure, for all the reasons you know. The impact of that is just that our network and our reach into the rest of the world is a little lighter than we would like it to be. I think, within the resources we have, we have optimised it in the best way possible, so we are focused on the right countries, with the right resources. We could always do more. I have a long list ready to go, for anyone in government saying, "If you had a little bit extra, what would you spend it on?" I have great stuff to spend it on, and it would be the same in Scotland.

Q109 Wendy Chamberlain: Do you feel more comfortable now that you have a more sustainable funding framework? I ask because I think that one challenge has always been, "We're fine till this point and then till this point." Do we feel that the British Council is in a better place for the long term?

Scott McDonald: Yes, I do feel that. In the heat of the crisis over the last few years, we were getting—like the rest of the sector, I think—one-year settlements, and we do a lot of long programmes, so it made it very hard to plan. Now, we have a three-year settlement, which is much easier to plan with. I guess, at the end of that three-year settlement, we will have to negotiate a new one and try to build from there, but it feels much more stable than it was 18 months ago.

Wendy Chamberlain: Because these things take a long time. I thank both witnesses. Thank you, Chair.

Q110 Chair: On soft power, I know this is a term that the UK diplomatic missions like to use, but nobody knows exactly what it is. It all seems to be self-definition as to what it actually is and how it is constituted. What do we use to measure it? Are there any indices that we have that could actually assess what soft power is? I imagine that every nation in the world would say that it does soft power well and it has its own means of communicating it.

You have talked about education—yes, of course. The creative industries would be another example. But do we know what we are talking about



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when we refer to it? Is there any way we can measure it and say, for example, "This year, the soft power is not as effective as it was last year or in the last few years"? I know it is a term that everybody uses, but do we know what we are talking about and do we know how to measure it?

Scott McDonald: There are several independent indices out there that measure it, each in a slightly different way, and they all measure it around some measure of attractiveness and trust. It ends up being partly survey based. There are some quantitative things they can do. But all of them end up putting the UK near the top; that is pretty incontrovertible.

It is a term that has been around for some time. It's not a very useful one, because the whole point of soft power is to be out building friendships and trust; as soon as you are out there exercising soft power, you have sort of defeated the point of it. That's something we talk about here—how we exercise our soft power. When we're working in Nigeria, trying to build connections, we don't say, "We're here doing soft power"; we describe it a bit differently.

Q111 **Chair:** Is it a term you are comfortable with, Professor Pittock?

Professor Pittock: I am completely comfortable with it. I agree very much with what has been said about its definition. I think, in addition, there are certain really hotspot economic measures of soft power. One of them is where you are particularly well known—for example, for whisky. Culture sells directly and indirectly into the market, and areas of high perception of Scotland are often areas of high sales of Scots whisky. I'm comfortable with it in that context. But it comes with another context, because ultimately soft power is about how many people see you on their phone and swipe right. Do they like you? Will they come? Do they want to come and study with you? Do they want to do business with you? Finding out those things, across a range from the commercial to the educational, is a critical part of exploring how much soft power you have at the coalface.

Q112 **Deidre Brock:** I want to ask about the global diaspora and whether we are tapping into it as effectively as we might. You mentioned the GlobalScot initiative at the outset, Professor Pittock. Mr McDonald, you already told us about your personal connections, through your grandparents, with Scotland. We all certainly know of the very valuable connections forged with the Irish diaspora, which many of us look at rather enviously from Scotland. To what extent do you think the UK Government and bodies such as the British Council are engaging with, committing to and connecting with the global Scottish diaspora, and where will that lead us in the future?

Scott McDonald: Maybe I will start, and focus on the Scottish diaspora. Most of the work there is done, I would say, by the Scottish Government hubs around the world, and to some extent by the embassy. At the British Council, we know most of the individuals who would be in the market. In the past, we have not managed them as a diaspora, or tried to get to them or promote things to them in that way. That is something worth thinking about now.

Q113 Deidre Brock: All right. For example, Tartan Day in New York has been going for some time. It seems to me that it is not getting quite as much attention, at least in Scotland, as it used to. Is that still a big part of the sorts of promotions you take part in?

Scott McDonald: Which day, sorry?

Deidre Brock: Tartan Day in New York.

Scott McDonald: No, we would not play a big role in that.

Deidre Brock: Okay.

Q114 Chair: Is there a reason why you would not want to get involved? Is it not one of the biggest demonstrations of Scottish culture soft power that you could see anywhere in the world? All the Scots community in North America marches down Fifth Avenue in New York.

Scott McDonald: The primary reason that we would not get heavily involved is that we have closed our office in the US, so we have no presence there at all. As I said before, the way we work in the US, because it is such a big market, is through the Scottish hub.

Q115 Deidre Brock: Have you closed those offices in response to funding cuts? I know that you raise a lot of your own money through teaching and so on.

Scott McDonald: We went through a process over the last couple of years in which we ended up having to shut down a small number of offices and move others into a hub model, largely for financial reasons. We had to then prioritise across markets. The US is a slightly strange case, because obviously it is an important market on every dimension. It is also so massive and complicated that it is hard to have an impact with just a couple of people there. You either need a big operation or probably nothing at all.

Deidre Brock: Right. The GlobalScot initiative, Professor Pittock.

Professor Pittock: The GlobalScot initiative has probably never reached its full potential because of the amount of support that is able to be dedicated to it. The capacity does not match the opportunity. One of the things I am referencing here is both the Scottish Business Network and the 2020 report by Momentous Change, which contacted 1,067 Scots diaspora in business in 74 countries. A lot of what came back from that is that the UK Government need to do more to target specific sectors of industries for exports, such as technology or renewable energy.

The Scottish Business Network and the Asia Scot platform are very keen to do more collaborative working. They are keen to increase the frequency of major events and gatherings, to promote Scotland not just in Tartan Week but elsewhere, and to link the Quaich city events, which are the digital Scottish business events run by SBN—Boston, Tallinn, Singapore and Los Angeles last year—with a wider set of what is happening to promote Scotland and the UK abroad. They are also keen to widen the



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understanding among Scottish companies, many of whom go to Scottish Enterprise but are not aware of the DIT, when actually they could utilise both. That is critical, because Scotland's international perception is weakest for exports, and Scottish SMEs are among the weakest in terms of developing export capacity, partly because of confidence and support.

There is a lot of breadth out there, but, to go back to what I said at the beginning, it is about ensuring that that breadth is all part of the same provision and awareness, and maximising the hit that businesses in Scotland's leading areas can get. Doing that through Scottish culture is part of it, but it is not all of it, of course.

Q116 Deidre Brock: Going back to the report you mentioned, the Scottish Government commissioned a report examining what a successful diaspora policy might look like. Were you—?

Professor Pitttock: I think that probably is the report. It is Momentous Change, 2020.

Q117 Deidre Brock: I see. So do you think it is really just financial resources that are holding us back from really making the most of the opportunities that the Scottish diaspora could bring to Scotland?

Professor Pitttock: It is not just that, no. It is that—it is actually the working across. What I very much get from the Scottish Business Network, for example, is that they really want to work with a wider range of governmental and agency partners. They do an awful lot on their own across a very wide diasporic footprint, but they do not feel that they are always connected in. It is not just about money; it is about opportunities for sharing, partnership and joint events, and bringing diplomacy into the commercial and soft power arena regarding Scottish business worldwide on a more consistent basis.

Deidre Brock: Okay, thank you.

Q118 Chair: Is the Rolls-Royce version of utilising your diaspora what the Irish do?

Professor Pitttock: Yes, but it would take a long time today. The Irish have a different relationship with the diaspora; it lasts longer, for one thing. The work done in the 1990s showed that Irish people who left voluntarily to go to Canada believed that they had been cleared off the land, and Scots who were cleared off the land believed that they left voluntarily. The Irish diaspora is longer lasting in terms of its stickiness, but there are a lot of Scots-born and first-generation Scottish businesspeople globally, and there is an awful lot of enthusiasm for a slightly different arrangement that creates a better platform on which our business strengths can function.

Q119 Chair: In a previous life, I was involved in a number of activities linking up with members of the Scottish diaspora. I found that there was a real desire to be a part of it. I remember standing in Grand Central station during one of the Tartan Week events, which the British Council is no longer involved in, with people queuing up to sign up to programmes



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about Scottish ancestry. We must be missing something massive with this.

Professor Pittock: It is, again, a complicated question. The diaspora organisations, or Scottish affinity organisations, move at different paces but, for example, the St Andrew's Society of San Francisco—which I worked with 15 years ago, when it was very conservative as a cultural organisation and very well funded—now does seminars on Scottish business and what is happening in Scotland and Scottish industry every few weeks. Some of these organisations, particularly in areas that are in dynamic economies themselves, such as California, have changed; they are not one size fits all.

Q120 **David Duguid:** I find this discussion on the diaspora fascinating, probably not least because I used to be part of the Scottish diaspora, having worked in the oil and gas industry in various countries. Different countries have different levels of that connection. I will give a few examples; Venezuela, Canada—which I worked in—the US, Norway, Denmark and Azerbaijan. I should probably declare an interest here, as a member of the Azerbaijan APPG who is married to an Azerbaijani.

Having just come back from there, where I spent new year, I was told by one of the ambassadors—either our ambassador to them or the other way around—that Azerbaijan actually has a higher number of Scottish expats per head of population in that country. I do not believe that there is a Scottish hub in Azerbaijan, but there is a very strong Scottish diaspora there.

That leads me into a follow-up to Ms Brock's question. In order to tap into that diaspora, what are either the British Council or yourself doing to identify different industries, such as the oil and gas industry or the energy sector more widely, or the space industry, as you mentioned. It is very easy for us in Scotland—who live in Scotland and have lived in Scotland all our lives—to take for granted what I think you referred to as "national tropes": the whisky and the castles, and everything else that people think of when they think of Scotland. I think Billy Connolly referred to it as the shortbread tin image of Scotland. As we discussed earlier when we talked to VisitBritain and VisitScotland, we should not necessarily be afraid of that. It can often be a good hook to bring people into the conversation about what Scotland has to offer internationally.

Professor Pittock, I think you mentioned the space industry. Today we have the launch from Cornwall, which includes satellites made in Scotland, so we are already there. There is another launch planned from Shetland—later this year, I believe. I have already mentioned the energy sector. It is not just whisky and castles that Scotland has to offer. What already exists, and what could the UK Government, the Scottish Government, or a combination of the two, be doing to make more of that industry-related, technological, business-related diaspora that exists in Scotland and the connections around the world from Scotland?



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Professor Pittock: That is a question that I wish I had the answer to. The Scottish Business Network and the Asia-Pacific network have about 35,000 business members across 100 countries, so there is a lot of dialogue going on there. As I have suggested, it is not fully connected into other things that are done internationally, and university research and spin-outs—the new edge of Scottish business—are not generally platformed in any consistent way internationally through governmental agencies. What are we doing in Azerbaijan? I am not doing anything in Azerbaijan. I am sure that somebody is doing something in Azerbaijan.

David Duguid: Well, we have a Scottish ambassador, so that helps.

Professor Pittock: Yes, but the important thing is to ensure that all the agencies are working positively together, because the Scottish Government has a really important role to play. When it comes to diaspora feedback, there is a lot of pro feedback about both the Scottish and UK Governments. Where there is negative feedback—I am quoting the report—it tends to be that the UK Government lacks focus and interest, and the Scottish Government is not sufficiently pro-business.

There is a sweet spot in terms of co-operative working and international representation. Referencing the British Council's soft power report, I do not find it coincidental that the comparative sub-state area that has the highest degree of recognition across most areas in that study is Quebec, which also has the highest degree of overseas representation of any of the sub-state areas.

In a sense, working together is a really good way of ensuring that both the Scottish and the UK Governments foreground Scotland. I mentioned the Dubai expo, because I think it worked. The work between the DIT and the Scottish Government civil servants worked better than sometimes that co-operation works, so it was a good example and one to build on.

We probably need a single unified platform. I spoke at the beginning about the diplomatic pack platform for Burns suppers that was being put together a few years ago, but we need something that clearly takes the burden off the day-to-day work of trade and events people in embassies, and gives them a calendar: regulars and one-offs, opportunities, and spin-off major research sessions.

We could learn from other countries too. The three universities in Ireland that have now gone through two venture capital rounds are responsible for most spin-outs in Ireland, and three universities in Scotland—Edinburgh, Glasgow and Strathclyde—are responsible for most spin-outs in Scotland. There is a lot you could do if you started to develop a palimpsest, a template, a profile and a plan, and so far one of the most encouraging things is that there is more opportunity in Azerbaijan!

Q121 **David Duguid:** I did not mean to focus specifically on Azerbaijan; I used that as an example because it is very close to me. It is a place where we automatically have that connection between the industry, and between the Azerbaijani people and the Scottish people. I am married to one—it



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does not get much more connected than that. The connections almost happen organically. I know the British Council are highly involved in Azerbaijan, for example, but could we expand it to other examples as well?

Scott McDonald: Sure. I think the Committee's interest in the diaspora is important and relevant in these countries. It is not a fully tapped resource at all. I think the linkages that Professor Pittock keeps raising with the business community, whether that is small or large businesses, are equally important. If it was tied together, there could be more progress.

The British Council is limited in the scope of where it focuses; we focus on education, arts and culture and the English language. We try not to go beyond that. We think of ourselves as having a responsibility to build a platform for the others to operate off of. If we are building links between countries, it might be students who have come here and gone back and become business people. With arts and culture, it might be things that have come together; for example, we might share a Scottish performance and people get to know the country better that way. Both of those create more of a platform for trade across industries. Where I have seen it working, I think the hubs pull everything together quite well. You have a limited number of hubs, and there is an affordability issue on how many you could have.

Q122 **David Duguid:** I think I heard one of you say earlier that all of the hubs apart from two are embedded within UK embassies, so there is that working together already. Presumably, we have British embassies all over the world that do not have Scottish hubs in them, and they somehow still manage. What more can be done between the UK and Scottish Governments working together—whether there is a Scottish hub or not—to better promote Scotland?

Professor Pittock: The starting point is quite simple. It is about consistency across the major festivals: Burn's night, St Andrew's day and, maybe in North America, Tartan Week. It is about awareness of one-off festivals that have got global pull, such as Adam Smith. It is about extending the good practice that the Scottish Government have initiated in profiling leading-edge research and spin-out companies globally. That is a small package, but it would make a big difference, especially if we focus on integrating leading edge with some of the festival events that I have suggested. Not reaching for corporate with whisky, but giving people stuff that excites and interests them. Whisky sells so well across the world that it is very familiar in a lot of Burn's suppers. Actually, giving people what is not familiar is all part of the invitation to swipe right in that soft-power field.

Q123 **David Duguid:** I like the swipe right analogy. I remember that one of my mentors when I was working in industry explained to me that it is very important how people experience you. Do people come away having had a good experience? Mr McDonald, do you have anything further to add on the UK and Scottish Governments working together better?



Scott McDonald: The only thing I would add is that, from a soft-power perspective, the world is becoming much more competitive. Many countries are investing heavily and successfully. There are some wonderful examples out there, such as South Korea and what it has done in terms of culture. But there are many other examples in education, business and other areas. To the extent that the UK and Scotland continue to invest in the research and articulation of what actually makes Scotland distinctive, which is then shared through Scottish hubs and the broader UK network, there is scope to do more.

Q124 **David Duguid:** Any specific examples of what we could be doing more of? In your experience of the British Council, for example, are there any best practices that could be picked up on? Let me ask that question in a different way: is there a process that the UK Government could be following a bit better to identify what those best practices are, and help develop the templates that Professor Pittock is talking about?

Scott McDonald: Maybe there is some way to bridge what the two of us are saying. I think in the sectors I have talked about, there is a very clear process. There is a lot of research done, there are very clear reports put out—those are shared around the world—and everyone has a good idea of what they are selling. But that is only two of the sectors of the many things that Scotland offers the world, so there could be something done that sits above that. There could be things done that tie that together, and I think the essential one that the professor has mentioned a few times is the linkage to business. I describe a long-term effect; you could have a shorter-term effect.

David Duguid: I agree.

Q125 **Deidre Brock:** Just going back to the Irish diaspora, the strength of that does not come simply from economic opportunities or the links that are made at that level. It started because of a shared love and appreciation of the country's traditions and culture, and I am just interested in whether promoting that more heavily then helps to create the strength of connections that the Irish certainly display in bucketloads. Perhaps we could get a little more attuned to that.

Professor Pittock: I am sure we could get more. The Scottish diaspora and Scotland, in terms of business, culture and expectation, used to be really close together before world war two, and there is a post-imperial phase where increasing discourse came up in Scotland, saying, "Ah well, this stuff is all guff." The way the diaspora celebrates Scotland is factitious, but in Dublin people have no problem selling plastic leprechauns on St Patrick's day, because it is all part of the experience of having fun.

I think Scotland is rather closer to its diaspora, and the diaspora is getting rather closer to Scotland, so there has been a sea change for the better in the last 30 years, but it is still a work in process. What I was saying earlier is that some parts of the diaspora are very engaged with contemporary Scotland and are also very traditional, so they are really on message for the brand, and some parts still need to engage more. The issue is that it is



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more variegated than the Irish diaspora, and partly that is because it was always, in part, an imperial diaspora. It is about the very different experiences that have gone into Scottish business in south-east Asia, which was always the practice of elites—quite large elites at times—and in Canada, where there is much more general distributed Scottish identity in large parts of the populace, particularly in some of the provinces.

Deidre Brock: Fascinating. That is really interesting.

Q126 **Chair:** I suppose I'd best ask this, given your interest in Burns suppers, Professor Pittock—we are a couple of weeks away from the 25th, and I am pretty certain we are going to be asking the Foreign Office how many of our embassies and high commissions will be hosting Burns suppers this year. I am anticipating and hoping it is going to be a positive response that we get from that, but are we making too much or too little of our significant days—our Burns nights or St Andrew's nights? You mentioned Tartan Week, and I always seem to think that, of all the international ones we do, that must now be ranked as one of the most important too.

Professor Pittock: Too little. Absolutely too little. Even though there are things other than Burns in the world, the fact is that Burns has about 10 million people going to official suppers worldwide. Even the Burns supper in Accra, Ghana, raised £25,000 a few years ago for humanitarian causes. That is a drop in the ocean, of course, but the strong association with those values, as well as celebrating Burns, is real and remains a real opportunity. There is no one-stop shop here, but it is very much the same thing for Tartan Week. I think one of the things is that we have not decided fully what the focus is. Because it is unfocused, it is about Scotland, but why would I go if I am not in the parade? I might go to a lecture, but the lecture was kind of like a lecture that happened 10 years ago. What is it about? What makes it Tartan Week, and what it makes it Tartan Week 2023?

Q127 **Chair:** Mr McDonald, are there going to be a number of Burns suppers hosted by the British Council?

Scott McDonald: I agree with Professor Pittock's conclusion. It comes back to what we were talking about: the national tropes. They are tropes in a way, but they are very powerful and positive ones.

Chair: They are particularly good too, the Burns suppers.

Scott McDonald: I grew up in Canada until I was in my mid-teens. As you all know, the Canadians love all of those tropes and we really live by them. The feel you got from all of our Scottish relatives at the time was that most of this stuff was a bit passé, and there is a linkage there to be made that could make it more powerful, I think.

Deidre Brock: Do you think it's Scottish cringe? Dare I raise that topic at this late stage?

Chair: It is best that we do not get Professor Pittock started on that one. We will raise a metaphorical glass to the baird in a couple of weeks.



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Thank you ever so much for fascinating evidence. It has been a great session, and we are really grateful for your input. If there is anything else that you feel could usefully help us with this inquiry, please get in touch. We would be happy to receive any further contributions.