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15 January 2025

Dear Convener,

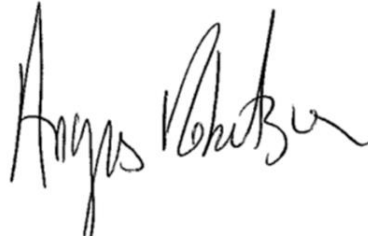
I am grateful for the efforts of the Committee in undertaking an inquiry into the outcomes and indicators relating to the Scottish Government's international work, and publishing its findings in a report of 29 October in support of Parliamentary scrutiny of the statutory review of the National Outcomes. As I said when I wrote on 18 November acknowledging that report, I was glad of the opportunity afforded both myself and government officials working in Scotland's international network to provide evidence to inform your inquiry, alongside the evidence of stakeholders including representatives of academic institutions, business groups and international non-governmental organisations.

I now write to provide a response on behalf of the Scottish Government to the recommendations made by the Committee, in the form of an annex to this letter. In addition, on 8 January 2025 the Deputy First Minister set out her plans to rethink and reform the National Performance Framework during the Scottish Parliament debate on the review of National Outcomes. This reform work can support the development and implementation of a stronger, more strategic and impactful framework that more accurately reflects Scotland's context and circumstances. The various Committee reports, including your own, provide an extremely useful contribution to the evidence base on which to build this change.

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I have copied this, for their awareness, to the Deputy First Minister who has overall Ministerial responsibility for the National Performance Framework; and to the Chief Statistician, who leads development of and is responsible for the National Indicators.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angus Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ANGUS ROBERTSON

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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP
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NATIONAL OUTCOMES**RESPONSE OF THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT TO
RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE CONSTITUTION, EUROPE,
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

in their report **NATIONAL OUTCOMES: RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF
OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS RELATING TO THE SCOTTISH
GOVERNMENT'S INTERNATIONAL WORK**

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Preamble

This paper first addresses issues connected to the Scottish Government's international work in Part 1, and then broader recommendations in relation to the National Performance Framework (NPF) overall in Part 2.

Part 1: Scottish Government International Work

Paragraph 130 – International Strategy

“As stated in the report from our 2022 inquiry, the Committee believes that the international work of the Scottish Government should be strategic in approach, explicit about its priorities, and informed by a clear set of policies, values and objectives. There should also be an emphasis on effective collaboration across government in relation to external affairs and how this interacts with domestic priorities, and – allied to that policy coherence – continuing work to address challenges in measuring the impact of soft power and enhancing scrutiny.”

Our International Strategy, published in January 2024, sets out three thematic areas or priorities, informed by policy and values. Delivering on this Strategy requires input across government with the relevant policy areas engaging in monitoring and evaluation processes. As the committee notes measurement in an empirical sense, particularly around soft power and external relations, continues to be a challenge, but we remain committed to identifying opportunities to measure impact and outcomes where possible, as evidenced in our most recent annual report (published on 18 November 2024).

Paragraph 41 – Good Global Citizenship

“Given that “being a good global citizen” now sits at the beginning of the narrative beneath the revised wording to the International National Outcome, we ask the Scottish Government to elaborate on the meaning of this phrase in practical terms i.e., how it informs policy, and particularly “promoting peace, democracy and human rights globally” in respect of examples of its actions and assessment of their impact.”

When drafting the International Strategy we grounded our conception of being a "good global citizen" within the UN's concept of global citizenship¹ which is embedded in the sustainable development goals. In this way it also relates to the work we have been doing around policy coherence. This commitment, originating in the 2016 International Development Strategy, seeks to integrate development priorities into the broader policy agenda for global good by:

- ensuring that different Scottish Government policies work in synergy with our development policy;
- eliminating policy incoherence which can undermine or hamper development progress; and
- identifying other Scottish Government policies, across Ministerial portfolios, which can contribute positively to development outcomes and impact

In a more specific way our commitment to take a feminist approach to international relations means that anyone involved in international policymaking across Scottish Government has a responsibility to consider and apply our feminist principles as set out in our 2023 position paper. Where this relates to international development, and with broader Scottish Government commitments to mainstream equality, we have

¹ See <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/global-citizenship>

established a process to mainstream gender equality in all of our new international development spend. As such all new development programmes are expected to support with the advancement of gender equality globally. Each programme is scored against a set of criteria, which forms part of the decision-making process for funding.

A further practical example is a new Scottish Peace Programme which is expected to be launched in early 2025. During the initial six-month inception phase, the suppliers will work with stakeholders in Scotland and abroad to develop a Theory of Change and Results Framework to measure the impact of two key programme activities:

- a Scottish Peace Platform to coordinate the efforts of civil society, academic, government and private sector stakeholders based in Scotland involved in peace building activities internationally; and
- delivery of the 1325 Women in Conflict Fellowships Programme designed to build the capacity and confidence of women from conflict affected regions to engage in peace building activities.

Paragraph 40 – Soft Power

“We ask the Scottish Government to set out how it will seek to sustain credibility and strike that balance between values and interests in its pursuit of soft power; whether for example by promoting a wider public conversation in Scotland, mainstreaming the international agenda across its directorates and agencies, or seeking the views of a “critical friend” in the form of a panel representing international NGOs and partners from the global south.”

We note that this is raised in the context of policy coherence across Scottish Government, and the concern that is raised in the report that “tensions may arise when objectives clash or are perceived to come into conflict.”

In various strategy documents on international issues (including the International Strategy, the Vision for Trade, and the Feminist Approach to International Relations framework) we make it clear that our policy is not to pursue economic growth for example at all costs, but in a way that is consistent with our values. This takes into account factors such as adherence to human rights principles, the rule of law, including intellectual and material property rights protections and government corruption; and security issues related to hostile foreign state actors.

In relation to trade, the delivery of Scotland’s Vision for Trade is how the Scottish Government seeks to strike a balance across policy objectives. Recent examples, set out in our Annual Report in October 2024 include working collaboratively to address any differential impacts of trade (such as measures to address the gender export gap) and using our work on trade to support human rights (such as our call for Scottish businesses to sever links with Russia in response to the full scale invasion of Ukraine). Listening to the voices of businesses, academics and other organisations in Scotland and globally on trade policy is a priority for the Scottish Government and the Vision for Trade acts as our call for an ongoing and open dialogue on trade policy.

We take regular opportunities to increase understanding of and mainstream the international agenda across the Scottish Government, including through a formal programme of learning and development sessions with guest speakers. This provides the foundation of a mainstreamed learning offer through the working internationally standard of the Policy Profession, which the Scottish Government is implementing in line with the UK-wide Civil Service professional development framework.

We are also engaging with UK Government Officials as they seek to establish a UK Soft Power Council in order to identify possible opportunities for Scotland. In terms of our international development work, we believe Scotland should play its part in tackling global challenges like climate change, pandemics, poverty, injustice and inequality, all of which remind us of our global interconnectedness and the need for the Global South and North to work together. Supporting international development and humanitarian action is one of the most important ways Scotland can be a good global citizen and our financial investment in our international development partner countries, and for humanitarian crises is a key part of this.

In addition to our financial investment through overseas development assistance, we have already been taking a strategic approach to policy coherence for sustainable development, across Government by working across a range of Ministerial portfolios, for a number of years:

- our climate policies are part of a “do no harm” approach in terms of Scotland’s ambitious climate targets to reach net zero; an additional contribution is made internationally through our Climate Justice Fund which includes world-leading funding for Loss and Damage;
- SG Health Directorates established a Scottish Global Health Coordination Unit, and developed the wider NHS Scotland Global Citizenship Programme – as part of this policy coherence work, in 2021, the Scottish Government’s Chief Medical Officer for Scotland commissioned a review of the standards required for donations of medical equipment to Low and Middle Income Countries, which resulted in the publication of a new ‘Donating Medical Equipment Report: 10 Step Guide and Checklist’ to provide a clear roadmap through the important considerations for a safe and effective donation.
- we provide funding to support global citizenship education in Scotland’s schools through the work of the Development Education Centres (DECs);
- the Scottish Government’s Procurement Strategy 2022-24 explicitly recognised the use of public procurement to support ethical and fair trade producers and suppliers, and links to the SG International Development Strategy, and its alignment with international development goal; that Strategy has since been updated again in March 2024 and includes key references to policy coherence and fair trade.
- a new Global Renewable Energy Centre was launched in May 2022 as a joint initiative between International Development and Energy portfolios.
- our 2021 Scottish Government International Development Principles were co-developed with civil society in Scotland and our partner countries during our COVID Review, and were adopted to apply not only to our International Development programme, but also agreed by relevant Cabinet Secretaries for

application to our wider work, including Climate Justice and Health, in line with our commitment to PCSD.

For more detail on these initiatives, our recent ‘Scottish Government Contribution to International Development Report’ (June 2024)² presents a range of policy initiatives in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals – both our overseas investment in our partner countries across a range of thematic areas, as well as wider Scottish Government policy initiatives that contribute to international development, including through trade procurement, environment, energy, health and education policies, as part of our commitment on policy coherence for sustainable development.

We continue to work with, and listen to, international development networking organisations such as Scotland’s International Development Alliance on any key further areas that they might identify for the Scottish Government to consider in terms of policy coherence. Through our international development work, we also separately set up a Global South Advisory Panel in 2022 as part of our commitment on shifting power to the Global South, to widen access and ensure diversity and ensure that Global South voices are heard direct by the Scottish Government to ensure ongoing dialogue and to drive and support further positive change; we are currently reviewing the scope, membership and focus of our Global South Panel for its future work, with policy coherence embedded within that review.

Paragraph 129 – Scottish Connections

“The Committee notes the commitment to review The Scottish Connections Framework every two years; and we ask the Scottish Government to set out in its response to this report, as well as to inform the next iteration of that Framework, what its future engagement with the diaspora – in all its varied forms – will look like in terms of the extent to which it will be supported, what is hoped to be achieved in economic and cultural terms, and how it will be evaluated. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government undertakes to publish a report every two years based on its review of the Framework and setting out the contribution made by its work with the diaspora in terms of promoting the values, objectives and priorities of Scotland’s International Strategy.”

Year one was about establishing the Scottish Connections Framework across Government and with stakeholders, putting in place the building blocks and capacity, and learning from our initial approach. Colleagues across SG, public bodies and our international network have worked hard to implement the Framework’s commitments.

In the second year, we focused on delivering a set of agreed priorities. We awarded 11 successful projects as part of the second round of the Scottish Connections Fund and we will be working towards further promoting these efforts and products in collaboration with the successful organisations. We launched the Scottish Connections Advisory Panel receiving regular expert advice and we aim to launch the Scottish Connections Award in 2025 to celebrate and highlight noteworthy

² See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/contribution-international-development-report-20212023>

diaspora work. We will continue to mainstream diaspora engagement into international visits and engagement, in particular with relevant tier one and tier two priority bilateral partners in Europe, South America, Asia and Australia/New Zealand. We will continue working with major diaspora organisations and Scottish organisations with global reach to increase engagement with their members and audiences, including through our digital offerings. We will also use ministerial visits, the Fund, Award and other tools to increase our reach in more geographies. In collaboration with trade and investment teams within Scottish Government and SDI, we will continue exploring ways to leverage the business networks and connections of GlobalScots (GS) to support specific asks relating to the promotion of Scotland's culture and creative sector around the world. Diversification of the network is part of continuing recruitment plans with the number of women increasing. Alumni engagement objectives will continue to cover intelligence sharing, 'soft diplomacy' and economic development.

The Framework committed to a formal review every two years and a full report will be provided in the first half of 2025, with opportunity for parliamentary debate.

The International Network Annual Report 2023-24, published in November 2024, set out our intention that reporting from 2024-25 onwards would include updates on delivery of the International Strategy overall. Scottish Connections will feature as a key component of the "reputation, influence and relationships" priority theme in the strategy. Following the review of the Scottish Connections Framework, we will consider carefully how best to align reporting to ensure transparency and accountability while also minimising duplication.

Paragraph 76 – Monitoring

["Despite the challenges in devising metrics, we note the evidence suggesting the potential for measurability or assessment in such policy areas as conflict resolution, feminist foreign policy, and the promotion of human rights and climate justice. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to set out how it will work with colleagues in the education and the third sectors to improve understanding of the impact of its work in the international arena."](#)

We are currently in the process of setting up monitoring and evaluation frameworks with partners and relevant policy officials across the SG for each of our international development programmes. This includes working with colleagues in various policy teams such as health and education. This also includes ongoing work with the social research team as well as delivery partners to establish participatory methodology in line with our commitments to equalise power aligned with our commitments to take a feminist approach to international development. Applying participatory methodology will allow the SG to better evidence impact of our programmes in our partner countries.

Further, in line with our commitment to take a feminist approach to international development, and with broader SG commitments to mainstream equality, we have established a process to mainstream gender equality in all of our new international development spend. As such all new programmes should seek to advance gender equality, are scored against a set of criteria and are expected to report on the impact

of their programme relating to gender equality outcomes. This is one of the key quantitative indicators which will support the measurement of the SG's implementation on taking a feminist approach to international relations.

As noted, the initial inception phase of the Scottish Peace Programme saw suppliers work with stakeholders in Scotland and abroad to develop both a Theory of Change and Results Framework to measure the impact of key programme activities.

Paragraph 128 – Evaluation

We ask the Scottish Government to reflect on the evidence in this inquiry and, in its response to this report, provide some examples of where it has been able to learn lessons from other small countries or sub-states and their approach to international work, or vice versa, particularly concerning the evaluation of that work.

We regularly engage with counterparts in the devolved governments in Wales and Northern Ireland to share experiences and best practice around our approach to international activity. In addition, where we have staff based overseas they seek to identify examples of best practice from their host countries. The size of our network and resource allocation means that it is not possible to undertake this kind of engagement or learning at any greater scale, but we will continue to take opportunities for knowledge exchange, including around evaluation, where possible.

Paragraph 126 – Reporting

“The Committee welcomes the publication at the end of last year of the International network: annual report 2022-2023, the first such report to set out the contribution made by the international offices to promoting the values, objectives and priorities of Scotland's International Strategy, and a key recommendation from our 2022 inquiry. We note that monitoring and evaluation is underway for the second such report and welcome the Cabinet Secretary's assurances that the approach will be to continue to refine and improve these reports to ensure accountability and transparency in how the network is delivering against its objectives.”

The Scottish Government was happy to accept the recommendation made by the Committee to prepare an annual report, and this now forms a key component of our commitment to transparency and accountability on the impact our international activity has on delivering priorities. We welcome feedback and input from the Committee and other stakeholders on how to further improve our reporting to demonstrate this through both qualitative and quantitative means.

The second annual report was published on 18 November 2024 showing how the work of the international network contributes to delivering our international objectives and supporting our priorities at home in reporting year 2023-24. Scotland's International Strategy was published in January 2024, and our intention is that annual reporting from 2024-25 onwards will report on delivery of the strategy overall, but will retain a focus on the international network within that. The first report in this format should be published by the end of 2025.

Paragraph 127 – Intergovernmental Relations

“Given the passage of time, as well as the outcome of the recent UK General Election, we ask the Scottish Government to provide an update on the status of the 2013 Concordat on International Relations with the UK Government and how it now fits with the relatively new Intergovernmental Review structure and arrangements.”

The [Concordat on International Relations](#) sets out how the United Kingdom Government and Scottish Ministers should co-operate with respect to international relations. It supplements the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the UK Government and the devolved governments, signed in 2013, which laid out key parts of the devolution settlement not codified in law.

Whilst the review of Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) in 2022 looked at the structures for joint working, replacing the previous Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) system with new IGR arrangements in practice, as far as we are concerned, the Concordat on International Relations has not been updated and is still in place.

From the Scottish Government’s perspective, the principles contained in the Concordat, including the recognition of devolved governments’ interest in international policymaking in relation to devolved matters and the UK Government’s commitment to involve the devolved governments as fully as possible in discussions on all international matters which touch on devolved matters, are still valid and do not necessarily need to be amended. However, given that some of the language, referring to the JMC for example, is now out of date, a light touch review to make minor administrative or technical updates where appropriate could be helpful. The Concordat itself recommends an annual review, which would be easier to maintain when the necessary administrative changes have been made.

A further issue is that the Concordat has no statutory footing and is intended to be binding in honour only. Whilst the Scottish Government welcomes the current UK Government’s commitment to a more collaborative approach on international engagement, and we are seeing some improvements in joint working, there are no formal mechanisms in place to underpin this to ensure the longevity and consistency of this approach.

An Interministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) in 2023 noted the need to revisit the issue of international matters in IGR and we continue to engage with the UK Government and other devolved governments on this issue via the appropriate channels.

Part 2: National Performance Framework

Paragraph 39 – National Outcomes

“There was evidence from this inquiry to suggest that the National Outcomes do not always inform policy and spending, and that there can be a disconnect between the vision of the National Performance Framework and governmental decision making. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide examples of where the National Outcomes have informed policy and spending decisions.”

The NPF supports decision-making by bringing together data and reporting systematically and objectively across a range of economic, social and environmental indicators.

As part of the refresh of national outcomes, the Scottish Government has committed to developing, in partnership, an implementation plan – as recommended by the Finance and Public Audit Committee in 2022. Input from Parliamentary committees, including as part of recent scrutiny of the national outcomes, will be reflected in this work – including our focus of embedding collaboration and partnership in this work.

Paragraphs 74 & 75 – National Indicators

“A National Indicator for International Relationships (formerly International Networks) is currently being developed and we ask the Scottish Government to consult the Committee on the draft of that indicator before its ministerial sign off.”

“The Parliament considers the National Outcomes every five years but there is no consultation for the National Indicators. There is a concern that the Parliament is being asked to scrutinise what is being measured rather than what it is being achieved. The Committee therefore recommends that the Scottish Government includes the revised National Indicators in the next and future iterations of its consultation with the Parliament on the revised National Outcomes, consults with this Committee on all the revised International National Indicators for this iteration after they are drafted and before they receive ministerial sign off, and sets out a timeframe for publication of these Indicators.”

Following the review of National Outcomes, it is expected that the National Indicators that underpin them will also undergo changes. Currently there are 81 indicators in the NPF across 11 National Outcomes, of which six indicators are still in development. A revised set of National Indicators will be completed and published once a revised set of National Outcomes has been agreed with Parliament.

A review of the National Indicators does not fall within the scope of our statutory duty to review the National Outcomes. Development of National Indicators is being led by the Chief Statistician, and will be completed following our response to the Parliamentary inquiry, by the deadline set by the Finance and Public Audit Committee.