

# An Undergraduate International Society 2014-15 Session

## Overview

### Summary



The establishment of the UG International Society in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering seeks to fulfil a mediator role, through the promotion of social and educational activities that will enable students to establish friendship and professional bonds that can be developed and maintained throughout their studies and upon graduation. The inaugural meeting was held on the 24th February 2014 (Robert Burns lunch taster) and invites were extended to all UG international students and class representatives for each year of study. The intention was for the class representatives to provide a "bridge" between the foreign students and the home students through the role of surrogate mentors/buddies. The event attracted 18 students.

**Events list:-** (feedback on webpage)

25/05/15- Visit to [The Kelpies, Queensferry Crossing Project and The Scottish Parliament](#)

26/01/2015 [Second Annual Burns taster + talks from students \(Italy and Greece \)](#)

[03/12/2014 International Students walk Below the River Clyde](#)

[12/11/2014 A Journey through Iran and the Netherlands](#)

### Context

Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Faculty of Engineering

### Contact Details

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### Themes

Themes

## Rationale

The purpose of this initiative is to uncover and promote potential opportunities for synergy within the undergraduate experience at Strathclyde. In addition to providing a welcoming environment as hosts to EU / International students there is a need to ensure that our home students understand that our visitors ensure the university experience offers an internationally diverse and global context to their studies <sup>(1)</sup>. Moreover, recent research <sup>(2)</sup> has found that most university applicants think that studying alongside international students will prepare them for working in a global environment. This finding aligns with the UOS Strategic Plan <sup>(3)</sup> whereby the university is seeking to develop graduates who are engaged, enterprising, enquiring and ethically, globally and culturally aware.

(1) Universities Scotland (2013) [Richer for It: The positive social, cultural and educational impact international students have on Scotland](#) (accessed 20/01/2014).

(2) Higher Education Policy Institute (2015) [What do prospective students think about international students?](#) (accessed 14/08/2015).

(3) University of Strathclyde (2015) [Strategic Plan 2015-2020](#) (accessed 14/08/2015).

## Successes

The lasting benefits of social activities are somewhat intangible albeit anecdotal evidence suggests that the events undertaken have contributed to a wider appreciation and knowledge of this issue.

The comments below suggest that the students who participated in the events had an enjoyable experience. Whilst this positive feedback suggests a level of success the overall aim of the society is to promote more widespread cultural relations between all nationalities studying at undergraduate level. The International Society can be considered a tool to assist this aim.

*First of all, I have to say many thanks for giving us this opportunity of know more about the Scottish culture, so rich, full of magic and histories of battles. I came here to UK because I used to admire British culture, but now I see that Scotland is much more wonderful than I could imagine. It includes these opportunities that people give to us of knowing more about them: Scottish people are always very helpful with foreigners, and like to share experiences. It was great to hear from you such an emotive poem, eat a good Haggis and topical meal, sharing with other international and local students our different sensations of tasting unusual meals for us. The bagpipe made me feel really in Scotland in ancient times and the presentations were really interesting, I could learn more about structures at the same time I learn about other cultures. (Henrique Faccenda, SwB, Brazil)*

*The trip to see the Clyde Tunnel with other international students was a great idea. I very much enjoyed the short lecture at the office of chief engineer. I found out a lot of information about tunnels, the way of constructing them and challenges present. It was very nice to see the control room and honestly I didn't know that maintaining the tunnel is so complex and difficult. It was also very exciting from an international point of view. I had an opportunity to talk with other international students and get to know their experiences in Scotland. After the visit we went for a nice lunch and continued talking about Scotland, Strathclyde and our home countries. I would love to attend more meetings like this one. Maybe next time at some amazing construction site? I am waiting with anticipation.(Jakub Burda, 3rd year, Poland)*

*It was very interesting to get an insight into the architecture of Iran and the Netherlands, especially from people who have visited often or lived there for a long time. They both had very interesting talks! A great way to share and understand other countries better! (Annie Johansson, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Sweden)*

*Last Friday was great, having a society for the international students in the department is a great idea and I think it will get popular and attract Scottish students to get involved too. From my experience I know how hard it is to come here without knowing many people and especially in our year there were not a lot of other international students so I think that having a society back then would have been helpful for sure. A good thing about the society is that students will be able to interact with students from other years and receive some kind of support and hopefully get inspired to do more while in university. I am positive about the society and if I can be helpful with something just let me know.(Iva Slavova, 5th year student from Bulgaria)*

## Lessons Learnt

Don't give up, the students who participated appreciate the efforts made by academics who invest time in such activities.

Once established, form a student committee who will be able to help inform their peers that the society is run for and by students. Academic(s) take a back seat role but ensure that momentum is not lost.

Encourage academic colleagues to attend society events and ask them to consider where their specialist subject could introduce the concepts of a 'globally aware graduate' into a module syllabus.

## Challenges

Encouraging both home and foreign students to participate and engage with the initiative required persistence!

Departmental colleagues misunderstanding the aim of the society. Its not about attracting overseas students (££) to study at Strathclyde, albeit it helps.

Industry sponsorship was investigated but was not forthcoming. Sponsorship would have secured company branding on all publicity and required £1000 per annum to fund coach hire / hospitality.

## Scalability

No scalability issues, more participation from students would have been welcomed!

## Suggestions for Transferability

Formalising the 'cultural experience' for UG students can be achieved through a blended learning approach using curricular and co-curricular activities.

## Attachments

CEE undergraduate International Society Webpage: <https://www.strath.ac.uk/engineering/civilenvironmentalengineering/studywithus/undergraduate/internationalsociety/>

