



Global Alumni Networks and Ireland: Learning from International Practice

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Foreword

For decades, higher education institutions have cultivated connections with their alumni, to yield mutually beneficial relationships. Increased international students, Erasmus exchanges, an intercultural-focused curriculum and SDG-targeted postgraduate awards present students of today with a rich internationalisation experience. Therefore, upon graduation, these students are increasingly becoming active global alumni citizens.

It is in this context that national agencies and governments recognise the immense potential of alumni through global alumni networks. KITE was commissioned in early 2019 by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to complete a scoping study on this global alumni trend. As part of the study, this research captured the learning from global alumni networks from across Europe and beyond, culminating into recommendations to the Irish government and this KITE White Paper.

Global Alumni Networks and Ireland: Learning from International Practice navigates through the purpose, policies and structures of networks worldwide, distilling the learning for the Irish context. However, the learning goes beyond Ireland.

The questions throughout the White Paper and the reference to alumni across policy documents will likely resonate across other nations, cities, states and regions considering a strategic, formal global alumni programme.

I hope that this KITE White Paper will open lively debate on the purpose, strategy and future of global alumni networks. I welcome your feedback on this White Paper. Please reach out to me, I am delighted to discuss the learning and potential for global alumni networks in your country, city or region.



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There is a role for alumni as ambassadors, developers, investors and innovators for and in Ireland's reputation, public diplomacy and future.

Executive Summary

Alumni—past students, graduates and those people with an educational experience in Ireland— have a strategic role in enhancing Ireland's economic, social and cultural value. Moreover, Ireland alumni are global citizens, with an impact beyond our borders and identities. Key government reports such as *Global Ireland 2025*, Ireland's Diaspora Policy *Global Irish* and the international education strategy *Irish Educated, Globally Connected* present ambitious targets and recognise a role for alumni to become ambassadors, developers, investors and innovators in Ireland's reputation, public diplomacy and future. This report presents the research on global alumni networks. This is a learning tool for Ireland on the potential impact of formalising and coordinating alumni efforts.

Alumni should be central to a global alumni network strategy. This will ensure mutually beneficial alumni relations activity so alumni are motivated to build a lifelong connection with Ireland. Active alumni gain value from the relationship through career advancement, leadership and volunteering opportunities such as advocacy, mentorship and networking that can align with Ireland's values, interests, education and culture.

There are special considerations for Ireland when considering a pan-alumni engagement. A broad definition of alumni may capture the affinity diaspora with unique Irish educational experiences (e.g. study abroad, Erasmus exchanges, Irish language learning) along with an island of Ireland approach. By keeping alumni at the centre of a global alumni network, enables members of the affinity diaspora who identify themselves as Ireland alumni to gain a lifelong connection with Ireland. This report summarises the international learning from the scoping study project that may prove to be valuable to other countries, regions and cities considering a strategic alumni initiative.

The Model- Summary

National-led global alumni networks are a public diplomacy and alumni relations trend that has emerged worldwide over the last decade. The Model section reviews the national alumni networks established in Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom alongside other emerging networks. Each established network has features, activities and resource allocations aligned to its purpose: national policy priorities, such as the internationalisation and promotion of higher education, business and entrepreneurship, employability and addressing skills shortages, and public diplomacy. This report synthesises the components of the international models and presents learning to be considered in the Irish context:

1. Explore the purpose for establishing a global alumni network and articulate its key benefits to Ireland, to alumni and to key stakeholders (why);
2. Create a strategy to identify the vision, mission, objectives and strategic actions based on modes of work (inter/intra alumni engagement; high tech, high touch) to yield the results that meet the purpose and benefits towards impact (what);

3. Identify the lead department and supportive departments and agencies (who);
4. Map out Ireland's strategic locations for a global alumni network that may include: priority international student recruitment locations, international student recruitment, concentration of existing international alumni and Irish-educated diaspora abroad, including existing Ireland alumni networks (where);
5. Consider the role of alumni volunteers play in establishing and maintaining alumni engagement in global alumni networks, online and in local alumni associations. (when);
6. Assess the best strategy and models (priority/alumni focused; select/universal scope) that best meet the purpose and benefits desired, including for engaging alumni volunteers and a phased approach (how);
7. Identify the resources (funding, personnel, IT support, action plans, toolkits) to build a visionary global alumni strategy and thriving network (how);



Ireland can invest in its global alumni to nurture their future, and to enable Ireland to flourish.

The Strategy- Summary

The Strategy section of this report reviews the two recognised national alumni strategies in The Netherlands and Australia. These examples show that a global alumni strategy clarifies the reasons to engage with alumni, and their role to contribute to public diplomacy and national interests, towards securing cross-departmental government support. Both national strategies demonstrate the clear purpose and coordinated priorities (including regional priorities) for alumni engagement. These strategies and subsequent implementation of alumni networks are aligned to the key national priority branding: for the Netherlands it is the Study in Holland brand; for Australia, the Austrade brand. In other international models, alumni are part of a wider organisational strategy, with initiatives involving alumni aligning to national priorities.

Some of the learning drawn from the Strategy section include:

- Create a strategy that focuses on alumni can help consolidate already existing efforts and connect this to wider national policy or priority aims;
- View alumni networks as a strategic means to an end, and part of an important ecosystem of networks and connections instead of alumni as a single disconnected action;
- Recognise that devising a strategy involving alumni must involve elements where alumni derive as much benefit (professionally or personally) from engaging in the alumni activity;
- Build into the strategy a way to celebrate the achievements of alumni, such as an alumni award or prize, along with a strategy to identify and feature alumni of prominence (e.g. business, social responsibility roles) promoted to fellow alumni and prospective students;
- Segment alumni into key groups to target the type of strategy and actions for new, established and senior (highly influential) alumni;
- Consider a resource complement that aligns with the ambitions of a strategy, including personnel, ICT requirements and budget needs.

Theme 1

Building Reputation
for Internationalisation
and Education

Theme 2

Supporting Talent for
Economic Development

The Sector and The Impact - Summary

The consultation with The Sector and Irish policy documents in The Impact section also draws on the four key overarching themes that emanated strongly from The Model and The Strategy sections of this report:

1. BUILDING REPUTATION FOR INTERNATIONALISATION AND EDUCATION

With the emphasis on internationalisation Irish higher education, higher education institutions (HEIs) wish to distinguish their institutions within the wider Education in Ireland collective brand abroad. Alumni are recognised as a key HEI brand ambassador, providing testimonials in the college prospectus, responding to prospective student queries at educational fairs or even through interactive app technology. What has emerged in this study is many of the same collective aspirations for engaging alumni at a global alumni network level are the same aspirations for individual institutions.

Therefore, the research suggests that two largely polarised groups emerge when discussing national-led global alumni networks. On one hand, there is concern that a global alumni network may dilute a university's effort for meaningful alumni-alma mater relationships, especially for alumni philanthropic prospects. On the other hand, many institutions with emerging international offices or limited alumni relations functions expressed that a global alumni network would provide a resource to support their alumni abroad. The main challenge is to build confidence and create shared ownership of such a network with higher education stakeholders. One agreement across the HEI sector was the potential that a coordinated global alumni initiative for Ireland may offer alumni opportunities for professional advancement and leadership development.

There are existing examples of alumni promoting Irish higher education abroad, such as student-turned-alumni Education in Ireland ambassadors and the Ireland China Alumni Network. The potential outcome is that a flourishing global alumni programme for Ireland may preserve and build the status of Irish qualifications abroad through both informal and formal alumni ambassadors fostered through the network.

The Impact of a Global Alumni Network: A recognisable alumni brand and ambassadors to build the reputation of the quality of Irish higher education abroad; Showcase and celebrate Ireland alumni achievements, potentially converting alumni to returning postgraduate/PhD students and researchers.

2. SUPPORTING TALENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Alumni remain an underdeveloped key talent pool for Ireland. Through their Irish education, alumni have initiated their relationship with the country, culture and customs and are well-placed to offer local market insight and access for Irish companies abroad. A global alumni network, especially *in* Ireland, can offer alumni career development support from a coordinated basis and can help identify alumni talent to fill skills shortages in key sectors, building a relationship of reciprocal benefit.

Theme 3

Sharing Knowledge for
Research and Innovation
Opportunities

Theme 4

Fostering Public
Diplomacy for Irish
Values, Culture and
Sustainable Development

Data on alumni held by HEIs has become even more sensitive since the enactment of GDPR in 2018. At universities, this alumni data is a powerful tool to build alumni profiles and prospects towards securing their involvement or philanthropic gift. Therefore, there is that concern multiple messages from Ireland—HEI, global alumni network—to individual alumni abroad, may dilute the university’s message. This is why a transparent strategy for a global alumni network would ensure the message is clear and there is a means to provide support to alumni while not duplicating HEI alumni engagement efforts, instead seeking ways for strategic collaboration.

The Impact of a Global Alumni Network: Create a conduit to promote Ireland’s talent and skills needs of today and foster the alumni talent needs of tomorrow through career advancement and networking events. As the lifelong mutually beneficial relationship continues, new alumni become established and potentially highly influential, and may return to Ireland to fill skills gaps, or help initiate new investment or talent for Irish companies in Ireland or abroad.

3. SHARING KNOWLEDGE FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION OPPORTUNITIES

Overall, the research suggests that considering alumni as a concerted affinity diaspora group was welcome as a new concept that could present some new avenues for knowledge transfer. Alumni may also be future collaborative research partners along with focusing on alumni as a key group to open doors for foreign direct investment to Ireland, enterprise development or even entrepreneurship by international alumni in Ireland. Alumni’s knowledge of Irish culture becomes a powerful business engine to support the formation of research and innovation opportunities.

The Impact of a Global Alumni Network: An agile, strategic alumni network, informed on Ireland’s knowledge-led economy, on its research priorities and innovation. This engaged network becomes Ireland’s local/regional/global knowledge experts, advocates, investors, researchers, business leaders, influencers today and for the future.

4. FOSTERING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FOR IRISH VALUES, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ireland alumni can play a key role in public diplomacy worldwide. Alumni can become local advocates for Irish values and culture. The Irish Aid Fellowships support alumni associations in countries worldwide, in particular in South Africa and Vietnam. In these countries, these alumni associations work together on sustainable development initiatives in their local communities. The research from the sector suggests that there is potential to develop activity grants for alumni associations to begin or continue sustainable development and public diplomacy work.

The Impact of a Global Alumni Network: Mobilise a highly educated and highly motivated alumni network to collectively address Ireland’s sustainable development priorities, along with public, economic and cultural diplomacy. An opportunity to celebrate the achievements by Ireland alumni to inspire the next generation of global, socially responsible leaders.

Final Thoughts – Alumni as Diaspora

The full report, submitted to the Global Irish Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs, outlines key recommendations to apply the learning on global alumni networks for Ireland.

Alumni are a very special affinity diaspora group. During their studies, students develop a special affinity for their institution of study but also for their city, region and for Ireland as a whole as part of this transformative learning experience. With national-led global alumni networks developing across Europe and the world, it is the ideal time for Ireland to consider a unique model, drawing on good practice and on Ireland's ability to inspire— and be inspired— by its affinity diaspora, its global alumni.

Irish educated alumni
have the potential
to build a lifelong
connection with Ireland

Introduction

Alumni—past students, graduates and those people with an educational experience in Ireland— have a strategic role in enhancing Ireland’s economic, social and cultural value. Key government reports such as *Global Ireland 2025*, Ireland’s Diaspora Policy *Global Irish* and the international education strategy *Irish Educated, Globally Connected* present ambitious targets and recognise a role for alumni to become ambassadors, developers, investors and innovators in Ireland’s reputation and future. This research report considers the learning on global alumni networks and its potential impact for and in Ireland.

National-led global alumni networks (referred to throughout as global alumni networks) are emerging as a global trend, with recent growth in Europe, established as an initiative of government or in partnership with government-funded agencies. This study draws on learning from other national models and key leaders to inform the needs for a formal, coordinated Irish response to global alumni, recognised as a strategic and growing affinity diaspora group. The data reinforces the potential for a global alumni network *for* and *in* Ireland:

- Irish alumni living abroad: each year, 10% of the 70,000 total graduates of HEIs in Ireland go abroad immediately following graduation for employment¹, a steady trend;
- International alumni: 25% of all international graduates of Irish HEIs each year are employed abroad immediately following graduation, increasing to one-third following postgraduate graduation;
- Alumni of Study Abroad programmes in Ireland: HEIs and private institutions offer a range of study abroad options in Ireland. For example, over 11,000 Americans studied in Ireland, ranking 7th of destinations of American students studying abroad, up 8% on the previous year².
- International students: Ireland continues to increase future international alumni, with international students representing almost 11% of the total student base at HEIs³.

Ireland is already recognised internationally for its excellence in higher education and research.⁴ In addition, Ireland has focused significant efforts to mobilise the Irish diaspora to attract enterprise and innovation investment. There is already a limited and ad hoc Ireland alumni response: ICAN (Ireland China Alumni Network) along with alumni engagement in Brazil, South Africa, Vietnam and through Irish Aid fellowship supported alumni associations. HEIs, in particular universities, also connect with alumni living outside of Ireland, with active country or city chapters, philanthropic giving and events. The impetus for exploring and initiating a formal national-led global alumni network is one intended to complement existing alumni efforts abroad.

A global alumni network is only as effective as its active alumni participants; Alumni need to be motivated to see value in participating in the network. By building mutually beneficial alumni relations keeps alumni central to a global alumni network strategy and ensures alumni are motivated to build a lifelong connection with Ireland. Active alumni gain value from the relationship through career advancement and leadership opportunities such as advocacy, mentorship and networking that can align with Ireland’s interests, values, education and culture.

Ireland in return secures a pool of engaged and supportive advocates to: promote Ireland as a high quality study or research destination to prospective students in their home country or country of residence; create volunteers and leaders open to celebrating Irish values and culture; identify future investors, researchers or entrepreneurs.

Ireland is a small country with an impressive—even enviable—global recognition of its culture and diaspora mobilisation.

Ireland is a small country with an impressive—even enviable—global recognition of its culture and diaspora mobilisation; Therefore, a global alumni network with a broad definition of alumni may capture the affinity diaspora with unique Irish educational experiences (e.g. study abroad, Erasmus exchanges, Irish language learning) along with an island of Ireland approach. By keeping alumni central to the strategic purpose of a global alumni network, enables members of the affinity diaspora to view benefit and subsequently identify themselves as Ireland alumni. These self-identified Ireland alumni will be poised to engage actively in building a lifelong connection to Ireland.

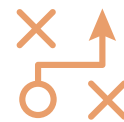
Objectives

The objectives of this scoping study divided into four areas, forming the four sections of this report:



1. THE MODEL:

Identify and research key tenets of national alumni networks, primarily in Europe, to assemble learning that could be applied to the Irish context.



2. THE STRATEGY:

Analyse the national alumni strategies from other countries to gather learning for an Irish context.



3. THE SECTOR:

Consult the key stakeholders in alumni leadership, internationally-facing educational institutions and organisations to recognise the potential, opportunities and challenges towards the development of an Ireland global alumni network.



4. THE IMPACT:

Consider the potential impact of a global alumni network for the Irish diaspora, for Ireland's efforts globally to advance the Irish economic, social and cultural development. The network's potential impact would be aligned to current government policy and strategy.

Methodology

Over a four-month period, this study draws on a broad qualitative methodology. In The Model section, research data was gathered through interviews, study visits, consultations, desk research and observations with key European national-led global alumni networks including:

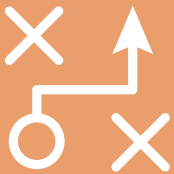
- Holland Alumni Network and Holland Alumni Network- Netherlands
- Swedish Alumni of the Swedish Institute
- Emerging models in Estonia, Barcelona Alumni and the European Union Alumni Engagement Initiative
- Alumniportal (Germany)
- Alumni Hungary
- France Alumni
- Danida Fellowship Alumni (Denmark)

The data gathering phase also included participation in the annual Meeting of National Agencies Alumni Networks in The Hague in May 2019. The interviews, contacts and consultation, led to access to many national and policy documents that formed part of the documentary analysis along with guest access to the online global alumni communities. The Model section synthesises this learning from other global alumni networks into key areas for consideration and also highlights many of these networks as case studies highlighting good practice.

The Strategy section reports on the two countries with publicly available and widely recognised national alumni strategies: The Netherlands and Australia. This section analyses these strategies and any related reports or factsheets. Apart from these two key examples of national alumni strategies, other countries have also embedded strategic alumni activity into their organisational strategic plans; This section focuses on Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom, who use different approaches to strategic development of alumni activity. The analysis of government policy and strategy documents is the main source of data collection. In addition, through a series of interviews, national alumni strategy is examined vis-à-vis other government policies in diplomacy, business, education and culture. In the case of the Australia Global Alumni this data collection also includes access to the online alumni community “practitioners’ hub” for HEIs, missions and key stakeholders.

To investigate the uniquely Irish context and potential for a global alumni network, The Sector section gathers data through a series of interviews with those in alumni leadership, internationally-facing educational institutions, key government departments and agencies including:

- Government departments and agencies: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including Embassy/Consulate and Irish Abroad Unit leadership; Department of Education and Skills; Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation;
- Alumni relations personnel and international affairs personnel in higher education;
- International higher education institutions based in Ireland;
- Internationally-facing programmes and organisations (e.g. study abroad organisations, language schools, scholarship programmes, Irish Council for International Students) and corporate alumni programmes active in Ireland;
- Representative organisations of the HEI sector and international students.





Exploring the learning on
global alumni networks
for Ireland and *in* Ireland

By presenting stakeholders with various models of global alumni networks, initiated a robust debate and informed consultation. This was also informed through a gatekeeper approach, with the Irish Abroad Unit providing suggestions for key interviewees (both key individuals and organisations) along with asking each interviewee for further suggestions on other stakeholders that would be useful contacts for the study. In addition, a short survey was designed to gather responses of open-ended qualitative responses from higher education institutions (the international offices and alumni relations/development units, including university foundations).

Finally, The Impact section applies the data and themes identified in the first three sections and contextualises it through a document analysis of current Irish government policy and strategy. This section of the study considers the potential impact of a global alumni network for:

- the Irish diaspora (e.g. affinity, lived, returning)
- government efforts globally to advance Irish economic, social and cultural development
- current government policy and strategy

The study distills the insight into impact of a coordinated national alumni effort: benefits to alumni, prospective and current international students, the wider Irish diaspora, HEIs, missions, business, culture and beyond.

Report Outcomes

This research report:

- Presents case study and consultative research to demonstrate the models of global alumni networks worldwide to create learning for Ireland on the merits, opportunities and the challenges to a coordinated, global alumni network for/in Ireland;
- Articulates the benefits and impact of a coordinated global alumni effort for Ireland, drawing on a wide sector consultation, current government priorities, strategies and policy;
- Summarises the learning on national-led global alumni networks
 - **For Ireland:** an external network abroad for former international students, affinity diaspora and Irish living abroad who studied in Ireland.
 - **In Ireland:** an internal network for international students/alumni living in Ireland to meet and enhance their Irish affinity diaspora status while residing/studying in Ireland to build personal, professional needs of alumni and also wider Irish society;

Throughout the report there are questions for Ireland that can be a reflective point for any nation/region/city that wish to establish or enhance their global alumni work.



Why, What, Who, When, Where and How

Section 1 - The Model

National-led global alumni networks is a public diplomacy and alumni relations trend that has emerged worldwide over the last decade.⁵ Unlike university alumni relations adapted from an American model, national alumni networks have grown organically, and have only seen convergence in their strategies with more recent meetings and connection between such networks. This section aims to categorise the models of global alumni networks drawing on the elements shown to be crucial to their development.

These pan-alumni or coordinated alumni efforts at a national level are varied: the lead agency/department responsible, the structure, the target alumni audience and even the resources invested and definition of alumni (narrow or broad) is based on the initial purpose for the global alumni programme.

The direct involvement and engagement by alumni also varies widely: from an agency transmission mode of delivery, where alumni are almost passive participants in the communications to highly devolved systems where alumni volunteers lead alumni activity. Even the location global alumni networks can be different from online virtual alumni involvement regardless of country of origin to active alumni associations in key countries/cities with active, in-person alumni events.

This section reviews the global alumni networks established in the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, France, Australia, Denmark and Sweden, alongside some emerging global alumni networks. Each established network has features, activities and resource allocations aligned to its purpose: national policy priorities, such as the internationalisation of higher education, business and entrepreneurship, employability and addressing skills shortages, or public diplomacy.

There is a dearth of academic literature on the development of global alumni networks. In addition, as this trend continues, there is an appetite to create an inventory of the purpose, structure, resources at play in the development of national alumni efforts to create a typology and framework for this work. This is beyond the scope of this study, however, through the presentation of the models from various well-established and fledgling global alumni networks, is learning for a model that may be appropriate for Irish context.

To note, the term “national-led global alumni networks or programmes” in this report refers to those nationally-coordinated alumni efforts, supported and funded through government or designated national agencies. Other national networks, such as Alumni International Singapore, bring together alumni networks from other countries (including the Irish Graduates Association of Singapore) under one alumni volunteer-led association. These networks are not directly government supported nor is their function to support internationalisation, national policies or public diplomacy and are excluded from this study.

For the purposes of structure, this report presents the models of global alumni programmes based on: why, what, who, when, where and how. The first section—why—is also covered in more details in the next section the Strategy. Throughout this section short case studies of global alumni programmes are presented, to highlight various features drawing on the why, what, who, when, where and how sections.

Why: Exploring the Purpose for National-led Global Alumni Efforts

The impetus for initiating national global alumni efforts based on other European and global models is varied, although it can be summarised into these four key areas:

1. Building the country's reputation for internationalisation and international higher education;
2. Supporting a key talent pool for industry, education and entrepreneurship opportunities;
3. Sharing knowledge, research and innovation opportunities aligned to national priorities;
4. Fostering public diplomacy by building active advocates for the country of study's values and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) abroad.

These aims focus primarily on the benefits to the national policy and priorities, however, they can be re-designed to create alumni-centred aims:

1. Raise the reputation of the country's higher education qualifications abroad;
2. Support the career advancement for alumni, a key talent pool for industry, education and entrepreneurship opportunities;
3. Provide a platform to enable alumni to share knowledge, research and innovation aligned to national priorities and key themes/disciplines of interest;
4. Foster alumni as civic actors, leaders and advocates for country of study's values and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) abroad through active engagement.

A global alumni network is only as strong as the alumni who are motivated to build an affinity with their country of study, engage with alumni activity and support the growth of the network. An alumni-centred perspective creates alumni interested and willing to participate for their own benefit, both personal and professional, while supporting the benefits to the country of study, HEI (alma mater) and the communities in which these alumni live, work, research and volunteer.

QUESTIONS FOR IRELAND:

- *What are the key reasons to coordinate alumni efforts nationally to benefit Ireland?*
- *How would a national-led global alumni programme for Ireland benefit alumni directly?*

What?

CASE STUDY- HOLLAND ALUMNI NETWORK



Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for the internationalisation of education, established the Holland Alumni network (HAN) in 2009. The Netherlands recognise that international alumni are ambassadors for Dutch education, Dutch culture, and, as a highly educated group, represent future decision makers and leaders.

The 10 international education offices (NESO) promote Dutch education and are also responsible for the local Holland Alumni network, to 'link international talent to the Dutch labour market.'⁶ There are another 39 country networks, based on a concentration of international alumni and/or Dutch living abroad. Alumni volunteers take a leadership role in coordinating these local alumni networks and events with HAN support.

Starting in 2009 with no designated personnel, Nuffic now has a dedicated Alumni and Careers section, with 10 full-time and part-time staff members. The budget on non-personnel costs has also increased since inception. This funding covers the Web site, branding, online alumni community, worldwide/HAN-NL event costs and the production of the national alumni strategy.

The HAN online platform, the coordinating space for country networks, has over 70,000 alumni subscribed to date. Alongside the country communities, platform enables alumni to connect to virtual communities: on themes (e.g. Dutch Engineers Alumni Network; water energy and climate), scholarships (e.g. Netherlands Fellowship Programme) or HEI communities operated directly by HEIs. HAN is now a core function of Nuffic and aligns with the Study in Holland brand.

What: Considering National-led Global Alumni Models

There are various structural models employed on the establishment of national-led global alumni programmes. Alumni involvement can be characterised as intra-alumni engagement (to facilitate networking within a group of defined alumni in the global alumni network) or inter-alumni engagement (active engagement between alumni and a wider group of alumni stakeholders such as prospective/current international students, government agencies, missions, and their own alma mater – their HEI of graduation).

Some national-led global alumni efforts concentrate online communications, as an impetus to motivate alumni to act. For instance, in the German Alumniportal, managed by DAAD,⁷ alumni are encouraged to sign-up to the online Alumniportal for information, job postings and online webinars, creating a space for inter-alumni engagement. The intra-alumni engagement is facilitated through the Alumniportal's virtual groups, to ask/answer questions from fellow alumni or enable alumni to follow groups based on themes or geographic locations. Since the groups are led by alumni activity, they can be dormant to very active depending on the recent alumni interactions.

The Holland Alumni Network (HAN) model also has an online portal, offering alumni with a suite of in-person events worldwide to facilitate networking between Dutch-educated alumni. In addition to this intra-alumni engagement, the HAN also coordinates pre-departure events for new international students going to the Netherlands to study, thus creating some inter-alumni engagement opportunities. Both examples in different ways show a balance between ‘high tech and high touch’, a concept explored by John Naisbitt⁸, with the reminder that technology is only a conduit to creating connections and building relationships. A model that takes into account both virtual and in-person connection best addresses an alumni-centred approach with mutual benefits, thus increasing the motivation for alumni to become actively engaged in a global alumni network.

QUESTIONS FOR IRELAND:

- *What type of engagement between alumni and between key alumni stakeholders is required?*
- *What level of high tech and high touch work is desirable among international alumni and would best suit an Irish model?*

CASE STUDY: ALUMNIportal, GERMANY



In 2008, through the cooperation of agencies with various strengths and funding from the Foreign Office, the DAAD began the management of the Alumniportal Deutschland⁹. This is a bespoke, virtual space to encourage international alumni who completed higher education study, research or training in Germany. The aim of the Alumniportal to provide lifelong alumni benefit through opportunities:

an online alumni magazine, digital learning (including webinars and German language learning) and third-party events, job postings (from over 4000 companies registered on the system) and the ability for alumni to create their own online profiles.¹⁰ With over 120,000 alumni on the portal to date, with varying levels of recent and regular activity, the Alumniportal also facilitates groups—that can be created by alumni or by other stakeholders engaged on the site—based on thematic areas of interest, careers or geographic areas. The Alumniportal describes itself as an online network between Germany alumni, universities, companies and organisations of international cooperation. The Alumniportal is managed by two dedicated DAAD staff members and through a support system within the DAAD.



One of the key goals of the Alumniportal is the promotion of the SDGs, with the many thematic groups, opportunities and alumni profiles with meaningful links to highlight Agenda 2030, the 17 SDGs. The publication of *Global Goals, Powered by Alumni* in 2019 features profiles of Germany alumni who are making a marked contribution in their home country related for each of the 17 SDGs.¹¹ With the tagline ‘Germany connects us- worldwide’ the Alumniportal offers an online platform to create wide Germany alumni connection.

Who: Defining Alumni and Partners

Alumni are often defined to be graduates of a higher education institution, their *alma mater*. National-led global alumni networks already stretch the boundaries of the alumni definition, however, the purpose and spirit of connection is the level of *identity* that an international student-turned-alum has for not only their alma mater but the country in which they studied: its culture, values and education. As an alum engages ‘in the formation of their own sense of self,’¹² McDearmon examined how the increases in alumni role identity leads to more altruistic activity. Therefore, it is not only a country’s accepted definition of alumni for a network, but indeed the extent to which alumni themselves identify as “Irish-educated” to yield engagement and benefit.

The global alumni programmes worldwide have adopted different alumni definitions. On one hand is the fully inclusive approach: all international alumni (current international students, former students and graduates) of HEIs and the wider country’s diaspora alumni living abroad. Some national agencies also include Erasmus exchange students. On the other hand, some national alumni networks focus on a very specific alumni group: national scholarship/fellowship winners, usually from the Global South, who have completed postgraduate study in key thematic areas.

The size and scope of the alumni definition is determined by the purpose for the network and the resources available to foster the network. Some networks, such as the Danida Fellowship Alumni Network, have a well-established alumni activity grant programme for country-based alumni associations led by fellowship winners, to complete initiatives in their communities to promote the SDGs, which aligns with the Danida Fellowship Centre strategic objectives.

The other “who” is the internal leadership fundamental to identify and drive the aims of a national-led global alumni programme and also in providing resources towards its sustainability. In many instances, it is an agency responsible for promoting international education, such as the Nuffic (Holland Alumni network) or CampusFrance (FranceAlumni), who also have a strategic presence in countries worldwide. Other examples, such as Global Australia Alumni, is coordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A lead agency or department tends to work in partnership with other government departments, agencies or external organisations to realise the full strategic purpose of an global alumni network. Although not a national-led global alumni network, the Irish Graduates Association of Singapore (IGAS) attracts participation from the Embassy of Ireland in their volunteer-led events, including their popular quiz nights. IGAS supports a broad alumni definition, to include an Island of Ireland-educated alumni, which serves to enable alumni to self-select participation in the association based on their affinity to their place of study.

QUESTIONS FOR IRELAND:

- *How does Ireland define its Ireland alumni, given the identified national priorities?*
- *Who is the lead department and who are the key partners to coordinate a global alumni effort for Ireland?*

CASE STUDY: ALUMNI HUNGARY



Alumni Hungary

To create a 'highly engaged alumni community' the Tempus Public Foundation in cooperation with the Ministry for Human Capacities established Alumni Hungary in 2016. This network is open to all past international students who studied in Hungarian HEIs, with an emphasis on scholarship winners (Stipendium Hungaricum graduates).¹³ Alumni are described as 'double ambassadors' for strengthening cooperation in economic, scientific, cultural and political arenas while also promoting Hungarian higher education. Alumni Hungary spans two of the three schemes of Tempus Public Foundation work (higher education and study in Hungary). Alumni Hungary actively participates in student recruitment, creating alumni video testimonials and involves alumni in pre-departure activity.

Along with the bespoke online platform to allow for interaction among alumni, Alumni Hungary organises strategic alumni events. In 2018, 30 alumni attended the 'innovation in healthcare' event to discuss how to initiate and continue strategic cooperation with Hungary in healthcare and innovation. The next series of events in 2019 look outwards, to Alumni Meetings in China, USA, France, Ecuador and Macedonia, the latter in partnership with the Hungarian embassy. Through an active Alumni Volunteer Programme (with 80 volunteers from 26 countries) Alumni Hungary provides training and a toolkit for volunteers who serve at recruitment fairs and even support internationalisation at home (IaH) initiatives in Hungarian HEIs.

Where?

Where: Place matters

Online global alumni networks are often balanced with local alumni associations. Locations are often determined by the priority countries for student recruitment, concentration of alumni, or scholarship winners. For instance, the Swedish Institute Alumni Network facilitates locally-run alumni associations, mainly in Africa, as their focus is on the SI scholarship winners. The alumni volunteers govern and coordinate the local networks.

Local alumni networks can also align strategically to the student lifecycle. Alumni can offer authentic experiences to prospective students at recruitment fairs or testimonials reinforcing the quality of the education. Alumni can participate in pre-departure events in key cities to provide advice to new students taking up student places in the chosen country abroad. International students are also encouraged to join the online alumni network (e.g. FranceAlumni, Alumniportal, Alumni Hungary, Holland Alumni network) to connect with alumni throughout their studies, to create links with those who pursued the same field of study or followed a desired career path. Global alumni networks with a local association can also be an anchor for returning international graduates to their home country, to have a place to meet others with a shared international experience and to support career growth.

Active local alumni networks also enable diplomatic missions and international education agencies to have a ready audience to promote cultural, economic, research or innovation events.

For instance, NESO Russia, run Dutch Science Talks, lectures by Dutch academics in key Russian cities, open to the wider public, including the local Holland Alumni Network. A formal connection to the country of study can also foster lifelong education ambassadors to encourage others to pursue studies in the country or to return for further postgraduate study.

QUESTIONS FOR IRELAND:

- *Where are the strategic locations for international student recruitment, concentration of international alumni and/or concentration of Irish diaspora?*
- *How could existing Ireland Alumni networks benefit from a nationally coordinated approach?*

CASE STUDY: HOLLAND ALUMNI NETWORK – NL: THE GLOBAL NETWORK AT HOME



In 2017, the Holland Alumni network launched a network within the Netherlands itself, open to international graduates of Dutch higher education who have remained in the Netherlands, returned Dutch with international experience, current international students, doctoral students and researchers and “internationally (minded) students and alumni residing in the Netherlands.”¹⁴ Using the same brand as both Holland Alumni network and Study in Holland, contributes to creating a worldwide recognised and familiar brand.

Through community leaders (alumni volunteers) the HAN-NL organise monthly events, including recruiting fellow HAN-NL members as speakers for professional development or career themed events. The HAN-NL has its own annual activity budget from Nuffic managed by the community leaders and often Dutch HEIs support these events with venues and promotion to their own international students.

Many active members of HAN-NL indicated that after completing their studies they sought an international network in the Netherlands that met regularly, not facilitated by their own alma mater. While these alumni have a shared experience of Dutch higher education, the members indicated it heightened their interest in becoming active in their own university alumni activities and events.

Along with regional groups, across the Netherlands, HAN-NL recently launched an entrepreneurship-themed group open to alumni who own their own business or are thinking of starting a business in the Netherlands. HAN-NL also supported the sold-out Here2Start event in June 2019 focused on international entrepreneurs wishing to start a business in the Netherlands. The event included expertise with sessions on “Startup Visa Checklist, The Dutch Startup Ecosystem, Taxes for Entrepreneurs, How to Do Business with Dutch People”¹⁵ among others.

When?

When: Direct Alumni Engagement

There are excellent examples of global alumni networks that provide interactive opportunities for alumni to participate in network activity. When to involve alumni—at initial set-up of an alumni network or as volunteers in more established networks—also varies based on the models studied for this report. Managing global alumni networks does entail, in many European examples, at least two full-time staff members once it is mainstreamed as a core national function. A suite of alumni volunteers, especially at local level, can also keep the momentum in local alumni activity.

Involving alumni as local leaders and ambassadors of the higher education system and culture creates strategic lifelong and valued volunteers. Across the models studied, the involvement and stewardship of excellent alumni volunteers created activities that support the career development of alumni and align with the initial priorities of alumni engagement. This also led to less direct involvement by diplomatic missions to organise events (only invited to attend or provide a venue). This volunteer-led local alumni associations is also an advantage for HEIs with resource or time constraints, allowing the HEIs to concentrate instead of primary student recruitment markets.

Many global alumni networks also actively promote opportunities for alumni to reconnect directly with their alma mater (their HEI of study) for additional alumni connections and activities. Still others offer HEIs special groups on the global alumni network platform, with the HEI alumni team as facilitator. Many HEIs concentrate their international alumni efforts, focusing on key countries with high concentrations of alumni. Due to limited resources, many HEIs do not operate an alumni chapter in countries with smaller concentrations of alumni. Direct alumni involvement is based on self-selection and personal preference. In many cases this is a matter of identity for the individual alum: they may identify with their scholarship or field of study related to a scholarship before their HEI of study, while another may identify with their HEI community first. Still others, found that their lifelong connection and transformative experience was in the country of study, or that this broader entity offers wider opportunities for career development and networking in their home country.

QUESTIONS FOR THE IRISH CONTEXT:

- *How can alumni volunteers help advance Irish priorities and their own needs?*
- *Is there a benefit to a nationally coordinated alumni programme for Irish scholarship alumni? (e.g. Irish Aid, Government of Ireland)*

CASE STUDY: SWEDISH INSTITUTE ALUMNI NETWORK



With over 15,000 former scholarship winners, the Swedish Institute (SI) manages an alumni network that initially focused on these scholarship winners or participants in SI funded leadership and summer programmes. The aim is to foster a lifelong relationship with Sweden and the SI, ‘to work together for sustainable development’¹⁶ and to offer a way for alumni to meet with shared interests and a shared experience through local alumni associations.

Continue Case Study...

How?

Continuation of Case Study:

Since most SI scholarships emanate from SDG-aligned themes, the Alumni Network offers alumni a lifelong extension of their studies to meet and network with others with a shared experience. The local alumni associations—over 30 across the globe—are annually certified by the Swedish Institute, by filing documentation to promote good governance, such as demonstrating the Alumni Board is democratically elected. Once certified, the association can apply for SI funding for events. As alumni association activity grew, the missions saw a reduction of mission-organised events, with mission playing the role of participant and actively supporting the alumni public diplomacy work.

SI toolkits support the local alumni associations to identify and organise events that align with the SDGs and meet SI funding criteria. Whether it is an event in Pakistan to debate gender equality or a community athletics event in Ethiopia, these events raise the profile of Swedish higher education, Swedish values and the SDGs. To recognise alumni volunteers, SI offer annual training with each alumni association choosing one Board member to travel to Sweden (funded by SI) for an Alumni Leaders Day, arranged to be the day before the Inspiration Day, the day SI awards diplomas to current scholarship winners, thus enabling alumni to attend this momentous occasion.

How: Identifying resources, Addressing data concerns

Global alumni programmes have become embedded national programmes in many European countries. The resources for this work varies on the size and scope of the alumni work and its alignment with other national priorities and if there is both resources required for online networking platform and local alumni programming.

With GDPR considerations, the global alumni networks within the EU largely work from a self-selection model, that is, alumni elect to join the national-led global alumni network, indicating their education link to the country of study (including year, field of study, interests and location). This information cannot be externally verified by HEIs, nor it is possible with GDPR to transfer data to HEIs.

A partnership approach with HEIs is deemed the more effective, though it is acknowledged that larger universities, with resources to invest in international alumni programming, are more resistant to partnership with national alumni efforts. Keeping alumni at the centre of the work enables the net beneficiary be alumni, aligning to the national priorities. A challenge is how to increase meaningful participation from senior alumni (e.g. company CEOs or foreign government ministers). Networks like the Danida Alumni Network present an annual Alumni Award to recognise distinguished alumni. Establishing a prestigious group, such as national alumni fellows, may also be a way to secure senior or highly influential alumni engagement.

Global alumni networks also become a conduit to HEI alumni networks. HEI alumni events and initiatives are posted on the calendar for free to a wide audience of alumni, that may potentially include alumni not yet reconnected or aware of the alumni offerings within their own alma mater.

The Holland Alumni network, France, Germany and Hungary provide interactive online alumni communities for alumni. While some countries chose an off-the-shelf alumni network platform, others created a bespoke in-house design. Resources required for each model is almost identical, simply that one provides more up-front resource investment with regular updates and platform support, a bespoke model requires ongoing internal technical support to maintain the platform operational.

The ongoing financial investment to initiate and then to maintain an alumni network varies based on what is available. However, alongside on average two full-time staff members and administrative support from a general team, there is an operational budget of approximately €200,000-300,000 per annum for online community, alumni association requirements and events worldwide.

QUESTIONS FOR THE IRISH CONTEXT:

- *Given the existing outreach to Irish diaspora and by HEIs to alumni, what model is best suited to Ireland?*
- *Given the model selected for Ireland, what investment and resources are available?*

MEETING OF THE NATIONAL AGENCIES GLOBAL ALUMNI NETWORKS

An annual meeting is held to support the learning across Europe across global alumni networks. After several years, there is a desire to develop a formalised structure. This structure will also provide a means to house an inventory of global alumni networks logistical information, completed to offer ongoing support, sharing experience and insight for established and developing alumni networks.

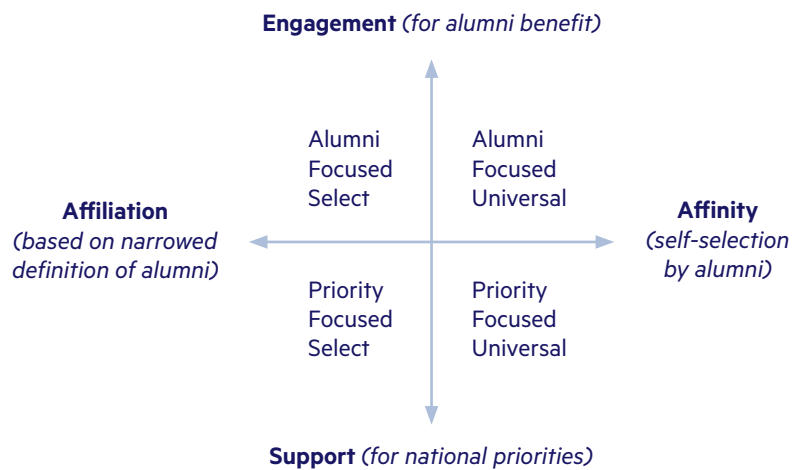
This meeting is open to established, developing and emerging global alumni networks. The meeting in 2019 included participation from established networks, Nuffic (Holland Alumni network), Alumniportal (Germany), France Alumni; networks that focus primarily on scholarship or fellowship recipients: Swedish Institute Alumni Network, and the Danida Alumni Network (Denmark); new networks: Hungary Alumni and Barcelona Alumni; developing networks in Estonia and for the EU. In the past, Poland, the UK and Australia also attended meetings. Participation in the meeting enables national agencies to share their learning with minimal cost (only the cost of accommodation and travel) and countries like Ireland, would be welcome to participate in future meetings. The meeting in 2020 will be hosted by the Danida Fellowship Centre in Copenhagen.



Presenting The Model: Elements for Consideration

The elements of national alumni networks presented in this section— why, what, who, where, when and how—draws from the Gallo alumni relationship building paradigm to create the Gallo Global Alumni Network Model design that illustrates the relationship between the network scope and the network focus, summarised into this x/y axis matrix:¹⁷

FIGURE 1: THE GALLO GLOBAL ALUMNI NETWORK MODEL DESIGN MATRIX



THE NETWORK SCOPE - AN AFFILIATION MODEL VERSUS AN AFFINITY MODEL (X-AXIS):

On one hand, global alumni networks are narrow in scope, focusing primarily on alumni with a specific affiliation, such as scholarship or fellowship awardees or specific programme participants. On the other, global alumni networks that are universal, open to all alumni who have graduated (or even attended) HEIs in the country of study, who express their own affinity (self-selection by alumni) with their country of study, due to their cultural or educational experience.

THE NETWORK FOCUS- AN ENGAGEMENT VERSUS A SUPPORT MODEL (Y-AXIS):

On one side, the primary purpose for the alumni involvement is for their own engagement, to yield direct personal or professional gain. On the other side, the primary focus for alumni involvement is to direct their support to national priorities: alignment with country of study values, the SDGs, internationalisation activity, research and innovation initiatives. The engagement side also yields indirect benefits for national priorities, and on the other side involving alumni in national priority activity can offer individual alumni with leadership skills (e.g. as a member of an alumni association organising an event promoting SDGs, or networking opportunities at a pre-departure student event). Therefore, the model for a global alumni network is not an entirely a polarised one, as shown in other European and international models. Many networks may sway across multiple points on the scale as they develop or through the emergence of national priorities are realised through alumni activity.

For example, the Holland Alumni network – Netherlands, focuses on alumni career advancement and is a group open to all alumni who studied in Dutch institutions, therefore is primarily an alumni-focused universal network. Conversely, the Swedish Institute Alumni Network, is specifically for SI scholarship/programme alumni and focuses its efforts on initiatives that align with SI priorities, including events that align to sustainable development, therefore it is primarily a priority-focused select network. These alumni networks may still cross quadrants, however, this is a way to conceptualise the way a network may be established and concentrate its work.

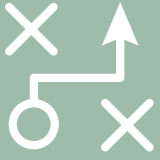


Summary of Learning

This section could be helpful as a summary for national agencies/regions or cities considering a coordinated effort with their alumni.

1. Explore the purpose for establishing a global alumni network and articulate its key benefits to Ireland, to alumni and to key stakeholders (why)
 - *What are the key reasons to coordinate alumni efforts nationally to benefit Ireland?*
 - *How would a national-led global alumni programme for Ireland benefit alumni directly?*
2. Create a strategy to identify the mission, vision, objectives and strategic actions based on modes of work (inter/intra alumni engagement; high tech, high touch) to yield the results that meet the purpose and benefits towards impact (what)
 - *What type of engagement between alumni and between key alumni stakeholders is required?*
 - *What level of high tech and high touch work is desirable among international alumni and would best suit an Irish model?*
3. Choose the most appropriate definition of alumni for Ireland and whether these alumni identify themselves as Irish educated alumni (who)
 - *How does Ireland define its Ireland alumni, given the identified national priorities?*
4. Identify the lead department and supportive departments and agencies (who)
 - *Who is the lead partner and key partners for a global alumni network for Ireland?*
5. Map out Ireland's strategic locations for a global alumni network that may include: international student recruitment, concentration of existing international alumni and Irish-educated diaspora abroad, including existing Ireland alumni networks (where)
 - *Where are the strategic locations for international student recruitment, concentration of international alumni and/or concentration of Irish diaspora?*
 - *How could existing Ireland Alumni networks benefit from a nationally coordinated approach?*

6. Consider the role of alumni volunteers play in establishing and maintaining alumni engagement in a coordinated global alumni programme, online and in local alumni associations. (when)
 - *How can alumni volunteers help advance Irish priorities and their own needs?*
 - *Is there a benefit to a nationally coordinated alumni programme for Irish scholarship alumni? (e.g. Irish Aid, Government of Ireland)*
7. Assess the best strategy and models (priority/alumni focused; select/universal scope) that best meet the purpose and benefits desired, including for engaging alumni volunteers and a phased approach (how)
 - a. *Given the existing outreach to Irish diaspora and by HEIs to alumni, what model is best suited to Ireland?*
8. Identify the resources (funding, personnel, IT support, action plans, toolkits) to build a visionary global alumni strategy and thriving network (how)
 - a. *Given the model selected for Ireland, what investment and resources are available?*



‘In order to make the most of Holland Alumni’s potential, a joint approach is required. A strategy that connects education, knowledge exchange, innovation and investment and trade promotion.’

—A National Alumni Strategy for the Netherlands
(Nuffic 2018, p.3)

‘This strategy must sufficiently serve and connect both the interests of the Netherlands and the interests of alumni themselves.’

—A National Alumni Strategy for the Netherlands,
(Nuffic 2018, p.3)

Section 2 - The Strategy

This section focuses on the two recognised national alumni strategies in The Netherlands and Australia. These examples show that a national alumni strategy clarifies the reasons to engage with alumni, and their role to contribute to national interests, to secure cross-departmental government support. Both national strategies demonstrate the clear purpose and coordinated priorities (including regional priorities) for alumni engagement. These strategies and subsequent implementation of alumni networks are aligned to the key national priority branding: for the Netherlands it is the Study in Holland brand; for Australia, the Austrade brand. In other international models, alumni are as part of a wider organisational strategy, with initiatives involving alumni aligning to national priorities.

A NATIONAL ALUMNI STRATEGY: THE NETHERLANDS



The context for building a National Alumni Strategy emanates from the potential of Holland Alumni as a promoters of Dutch higher education, with over 100,000 students travelling to the Netherlands each year to study. What is particularly interesting is this National Alumni Strategy was published nine years after Nuffic established the Holland Alumni network and a year after launching the Holland Alumni network- Netherlands. Thus, the strategy reinforces the messages and the priorities of the Holland Alumni Network as it has emerged since its inception in 2009 and aligns with the Nuffic restructuring to include an Alumni and Careers Section.

This Dutch National Alumni Strategy has gone beyond the initial internationalisation of higher education priority to include four pillars of work:

1. Knowledge exchange & innovation;
2. Promoting education and binding talent;
3. Public diplomacy & local knowledge building;
4. Promoting trade.

While the report outlines potential suggestions for implementation across these pillars of work, what is clear is that the Holland Alumni network is overarching coordinating body for alumni across the Dutch government; Dutch policy documents refer to the Holland Alumni network and alumni engagement to achieve particular policy and diplomacy aims.

The National Alumni Strategy remains a phased approach, focusing first on geographic areas of Southern Africa, China, Indonesia (Southeast Asia) and Germany. Moreover, there are key sectors that are of priority: energy transition; sustainability; agriculture; water; food and quantum; high tech/nano/photonics.¹⁸ Created and monitored by Nuffic, the Strategy however does not determine the timeframe of the strategy nor the key actors that are involved to realise some areas for implementation. There is a recognition that alumni involvement permeates across Foreign Affairs, the Dutch business sector, trade, employment and public diplomacy along with NGO-related sustainability activity.

“Australia’s diverse and talented global alumni are a vital diplomatic asset.”

—Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy, (DFAT 2016, p.3)

AUSTRALIA GLOBAL ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2016-2020

“Connect, Mobilise, Celebrate” are the key themes of the Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2016. The Australia Global Alumni is described as a ‘whole-of-government strategy’¹⁹ and alongside HEIs, the government partners cited for the Australia Global Alumni include: Austrade (the Australian Trade and Investment Commission); Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research – Australia Awards; Department of Education and Training- Australia Awards Endeavour; DFAT – Australia Awards and New Colombo Plan, that includes some 90,000 alumni. These partners align to the purpose for meaningful engagement with alumni:

1. Strengthening our diplomatic access and influence;
2. Growing our trade, investment and business linkages;
3. Promoting our capabilities and credentials in education, science, research and innovation;
4. Showcasing Australia as a contemporary, innovative, open society.²⁰

It is recognised that each state, territory and universities were approaching alumni engagement on their own and this presented some confusion to overseas international students, prospective students and alumni in terms of messaging from/about Australia. After a wide consultation, it was agreed that a considered, coordinated alumni strategy would focus on Australia national interests and then the more individualised segmented messages (e.g. state, university) could emanate from this overarching strategy.



The initial strategy to 2020 prioritises the Indo-Pacific region and its purpose as a crucial building of public diplomacy. Alumni engagement is the focus of Australia’s alumni strategy. The timeframe and the initiatives seem to be primarily focused on offering support to Australia’s national and internationalisation.

The four-year strategy focuses on these three key themes of connect, mobilise and celebrate, involving the embassies—in particular in the target region—in tailoring an alumni strategy, events and communications that best suits the country’s alumni base.

Through the Australia Global Alumni online community is a members’ only “practitioners’ hub,” for alumni professionals in the universities, designated consultants, diplomatic mission personnel with an alumni brief. This hub provides an information sharing section with more detailed government action plan documents, country-specific alumni strategic plans and Australia Global Alumni factsheets. This is also a place to share events and data between missions and HEIs in particular in a secure environment. This enables the Australia Global Alumni to be the coordinating hub for key events, including in mission locations so all key stakeholders who indicate an interest in a theme or location are aware of an event. Invitations, list of event attendees and follow-up (including photos) are on this ‘back-end’ of the site, are shared in restricted groups, meeting Australia’s strict data protection parameters.

The LinkedIn page, with over 8,000 followers, is the main way to communicate to the Australia Global Alumni audience. There is also a developing members only section for alumni (focusing on the Australia Awards and NCP scholars) to: “recruit fellow-alumni for projects and collaborations; connect with other researchers; develop plans for their own alumni association, or find an association to join; read alumni success stories, perspectives, and ideas.”²¹ Consistent across all alumni relations work, alumni engagement remains the biggest challenge for Australia Global Alumni. To respond, the network is developing more social media avenues (including We Chat, popular in Asia) to increase alumni engagement, especially among new graduates.

“The Australian by Degree – Australian Global Alumni video profile series is the result of a new partnership between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) International Television... The video profile series captures the inspirational first-person stories of successful alumni from the Indo-Pacific and Africa who are now making a positive difference back in their home countries.”

— DFAT Government of Australia

Universities have also welcomed the support and targeted approach from the Australia Global Alumni programme. In particular, ‘second tier’ universities, those with limited resources available to have a robust international footprint found that the Australia Global Alumni is an avenue to signpost international alumni for local engagement. Invitations for Australia Global Alumni events are often distributed to the relevant segmented alumni groups by universities (for embassy-led events for example). Australia Global Alumni also have the capacity to organise and launch national promotional campaigns like “Australian by Degree” is a series of videos featuring international alumni, their achievements and their reflections on how their Australian education experience impacted their career.²²

The research suggests that key leadership within an Embassy/Consulate is key to advancing a local international alumni programme. The missions with thriving alumni programmes have a designated alumni manager as part of the mission personnel, such as in Beijing, to coordinate the existing alumni group. This leads to successful events and workshops for and with alumni, as alumni tend to emerge as alumni volunteer leaders when they know there is mission organisational support.

Resources for the national strategy are aligned to the broad nature of the plans ambitions. Four full-time civil servants in the Department of Affairs and Trade manage Australia Global Alumni, with three additional civil servants in the Department that offer operational support to this team. This core team manages the seed funding allocation available to missions to engage with alumni. For instance, the Australia Awards Indonesia offers an Alumni Grants Scheme for up to \$15,000 AUD for Australia Awards recipients to complete projects to strengthen the link between Australia and the home country and create impact in the alum’s professional field, organisation and community. There is additional funding available for the New Colombo Plan programme and alumni as a special area of priority of the strategy.

Since 2016, the Australia Global Alumni coordinates the Australian alumni message internationally and shortly the Study in Australia brand will also be aligned (at the moment the Australia Global Alumni is aligned to the Austrade brand). The Australia Global Alumni strategy has provided the impetus to build bridges with key Australian educated alumni abroad, willing to actively promote Australian values and education along with alumni who wish to invest in or build business in Australia. *The Australian Global Alumni Engagement Strategy First Report* outlines that one of the key findings was ‘alumni hold influential positions in Australia and around the world, and are a valuable soft power asset.’²³ The Australia Global Alumni Strategy distinguishes between three types of alumni: highly influential alumni, established alumni and new alumni, with a leadership focus to create actions to connect, mobilise and celebrate alumni.²⁴

GLOBAL ALUMNI NETWORKS INTEGRATED INTO STRATEGY

In other EU countries, the establishment of a national-led global alumni programme emanated from other government or agency strategies. Alumni engagement is a core function or key action to address other key needs identified within the report.

DANIDA ALUMNI NETWORK (DENMARK)

The Danida Fellowship Centre has a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to manage the Danida Alumni Network, among its other work managing and communicating on development research and the Danida fellowship.

Danida
Fellowship
Centre



The SDGs from *Transforming Our World: the 2030 for Sustainable Development*,²⁵ are the blueprint for guiding the Danida Fellowship Centre work and this is also reinforced in the alumni network activity. As building capacity in the countries that Denmark collaborates with in low- and middle income countries remain the priority of the strategy—both in research and institutional capacity building—the alumni network is viewed as a key partner to recognise impact.

The Danida Alumni Prize is a way that Denmark can annually recognise a Danish-educated alum, who has made a clear and distinct impact in his/her community in his/her home country or sector of profession. Established in 2017, the first Danida Prize winner was Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the World Health Organization Director-General. The Danish Minister of Development Cooperation and State Secretary for Development Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark have presented and awarded the prize.

Members of the alumni networks are referred to in the Strategy as fellows, reinforcing the alumni's special connection to Denmark and strategic role as ambassadors Denmark. The alumni network's online platform is a place for potentially more than 25,000 fellows to join and interact, exchange knowledge, provide professional support and build local or community capacity through identifying relevant development experts or project partners.

SWEDISH INSTITUTE

In the Swedish Institute's Strategic Focus 2018-2020, the alumni network is a conduit to realise the vision and mission, in particular Sweden's role in public diplomacy and in undertaking its expert roles:

- Monitoring and analysing Sweden's relevance in other countries
- Sharing narratives about Sweden, Swedish skills and experience
- Strengthening talents, opinion-formers and decision-makers in other countries
- Developing and maintaining networks for lasting international relations²⁷

With relationship building and network building as core tenets of SI strategic work, the Swedish Institute Alumni Network can work in partnership with Swedish missions abroad in 'strategically-selected countries' to focus on the promotion of sustainable development and Swedish values.²⁸

UNITED KINGDOM



"They blazed a trail- are you next?" asks the British Council Alumni Awards video.²⁹ This section is particularly relevant to strategy as the Corporate Plan for the British Council 2017-20³⁰ makes limited reference to building alumni networks and the updated 2018-20 does not make any explicit reference to alumni or even to graduates. However, the strategy is clear on maintaining a customer/stakeholder perspective to its work, and the Alumni Awards is one way to celebrate the achievements of those who studied in the UK, and opening doors for alumni award winners to access networks and organisations within the UK to maximise and build on their achievements.

The Chevening Awards, the UK international awards programme funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has over 50,000 alumni from over 140 countries.³¹ Since 2015, the alumni online platform Chevening Connect, powered by one of the

"Public diplomacy
— understanding,
informing, influencing
and developing relations
with people in other
countries in order to
create influence,
closer relationships
or change."²⁶

—SI Strategic Focus
2018–20, (SI, 2017)



many off-the-shelf alumni online platforms available,³² has over 8,000 alumni registered on the system. Chevening Connect allows alumni to network with each other in themed country groups. This platform also raises awareness of the Chevening Alumni Programme Fund (CAPF) scheme to create a project that brings alumni together on a local, regional or global basis.

For instance, the Bulgarian Chevening Association, with support from CAPF scheme, launched Shapers of Tomorrow Mentorship Programme to offer online and face-to-face mentorship over a 4-month period, to “prepare students and young graduates to enter the workforce in Bulgaria with confidence.”³³

Another example of a CAPF supported initiative is the Chevening Brunei Association’s forum entitled ‘Unravelling the Creative Industry’. With 20 speakers, 120 stakeholders in attendance, the goal of the forum was to “open up discussion surrounding the creative industry ecosystem.”³⁴ A noticeable theme of leadership permeates the Chevening strategy. The Chevening alumni initiatives, supported by three staff of the Chevening Secretariat and a group of international alumni volunteers, reinforce the strategic leadership message by creating and sustaining a community for international leaders worldwide.

Learning for Ireland

Many Irish policy documents and reports make reference to alumni, usually as a supportive action or outcome, outlined in more detail in The Impact section. While Ireland recognised the strategic nature of alumni to realise strategic aims, there remains an opportunity to coordinate this work nationally as a core national function. Other countries have recognised and embedded alumni activity as a mainstream nationally-coordinated function to contribute to the overall policy aims or state objectives. Two different options related to strategic planning were presented here: one where a concerted alumni strategy is published and involves one lead department or agency as the driver with recognition of inter-agency as contributors and beneficiaries. The other option is embedding alumni programming into wider organisational strategy, acknowledging alumni as a leading—not supporting—role in realising strategic organisational or state objectives and addressing the wider SDGs and sustainable development agenda.

A summary of the learning on The Strategy section for Ireland is as follows:

- Alumni can have help consolidating already existing efforts and connect this to wider national policy or priority aims;
- Involving alumni must involve elements where the alum derives as much benefit (professionally or personally) from engaging in the alumni activity;
- A strategy is a way to celebrate the achievements of alumni, such as an alumni award or prize, along with a strategy to identify and feature alumni promoted to fellow alumni and prospective students.
- Tailor the type of strategy and actions for new, established and senior (highly influential) alumni
- Resources align with the ambitions of a strategy, including personnel, ICT requirements and budget needs.





Section 3 - The Sector

During this research gathering period, there has been extensive consultation across government departments and agencies, international and alumni relations professionals in HEIs, international students, alumni along with corporate alumni and industry-based organisations with a diaspora or alumni remit. This section offers a synthesis of these contributions focusing on the Irish context drawing on the four key themes identified in The Model section:

FIGURE 2: ALUMNI INVOLVEMENT: STATE-FOCUSED VERSUS ALUMNI-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

THEME	STATE-FOCUS	ALUMNI-FOCUS
Building Reputation for Internationalisation and Education	Build Ireland's international reputation international higher education footprint;	Raise the reputation of the Ireland's higher education qualifications abroad
Supporting Talent for Economic Development	Develop a key talent pool for industry, investment, education and entrepreneurship	Support the career advancement for alumni, in industry, investment capacity education and entrepreneurship
Sharing knowledge for research and innovation opportunities	Share knowledge, research and innovation aligned to national priorities	Provide a platform to enable alumni to share knowledge, research and innovation in key areas of interest or expertise
Fostering Public Diplomacy for Irish values, culture and sustainable development	Foster public diplomacy by building active advocates for Irish values and culture and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) abroad;	Foster alumni as civic actors, leaders and advocates for a Irish values and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) abroad through active engagement;



Building Reputation for Internationalisation and Education

With the emphasis on internationalisation in Irish higher education, HEIs wish to distinguish their institutions within the wider Education in Ireland collective brand abroad. Alumni are recognised as a key HEI brand ambassador, providing testimonials in the college prospectus, responding to prospective student queries at educational fairs or even interactive app technology. What has emerged in this research is some of the collective aspirations for engaging alumni at a global alumni network level align to the initiatives of the individual institutions.

Therefore, the research suggests that two largely polarised groups emerge when discussing global alumni national networks. First are some HEIs (mainly large universities) who have invested resources in developing a very distinct branding offering for international students. This brand is also distinct from Ireland's collective Education in Ireland brand. These HEIs have also tended to invest in resources for direct alumni engagement globally, including supporting global/regional/city based alumni chapters (associations). There is concern that a national-led global alumni network may dilute a university's effort to foster alumni-alma mater connections. That said, it was acknowledged that even at the largest institutions, resources remain limited and investment in global alumni efforts focuses on key countries, cities and regions. These priority areas are determined based the focus for student recruitment, the highest concentration of alumni, along with research, innovation and partnership connections. Therefore, there is merit in developing a wider global alumni network to offer a standardised and coordinated approach, including less prioritised countries, countries with only a few graduates or limited interest from international students.

On the other hand, many smaller HEIs or those with emerging international offices or limited alumni relations functions, expressed the view that a global alumni network abroad would provide a resource to support their own alumni abroad. Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) affiliated institutions also welcomed a coordinated international alumni effort. The global alumni network would also create a more strategic approach to for HEIs: they monitor activity in certain countries, prioritise attending or participating in key global alumni network events and identify potential HEI alumni leaders to support student recruitment efforts or to establish local alumni chapters.

Moreover, the Colleges Ontario international partnership with the THEA has enabled over 500 Canadian students to complete their honours degrees in Ireland. This is a specialised group of alumni that has developed an affinity for Ireland. Many Ontario alumni participate actively as volunteer recruitment ambassadors for their alma mater and some are Education in Ireland student (now alumni) ambassadors. The research suggests the sector desires a coordinated mechanism to identify and connect with such potential alumni volunteers.

Overall, HEIs recognise that a global alumni network could support international alumni in career advancement. While there is work to provide career support to all HEI graduates, HEIs continue to have limited resources to conduct targeted career support to international alumni. Moreover, with the current government strategy of one year of "stay-back" to remain in Ireland to work after undergraduate studies and two years after postgraduate studies, this is an attractive prospect in the education market. However, it was reported that employers in Ireland need to be better informed about this eligibility for international graduates to be employed in Ireland. Themed career support (such as seminars on specific job markets such as engineering, data analytics) through a global alumni network would also be welcomed both in Ireland and key locations abroad. Therefore, global alumni network online or in Ireland may assist in addressing the challenges facing alumni to secure jobs in Ireland or to prepare for returning to the job market in their home or elsewhere, and these efforts may contribute informally to recommendations by alumni to others to study in Ireland.

The main challenge is to secure the confidence and create the ownership of a global alumni network with advantages for all. The global alumni network potentially offers HEIs with a wide, strategic and coordinated message to Ireland alumni of the world, with an imprint no single institution even with extensive resources can achieve alone.

CASE STUDY: IRELAND CHINA ALUMNI NETWORK



In 2014, Enterprise Ireland launched the Ireland China Alumni Network (ICAN), with two events in the Embassy of Ireland in Beijing and Consulate in Shanghai with over 200 alumni in attendance. Since inception, over 3000 alumni have joined the network, with an online database of members managed by Enterprise Ireland. Through events and online interactive posts through social groups online (including We Chat), groups of alumni interact informally, especially to hear about job postings, internship or employment opportunities. As a country-wide network, ICAN enables Education in Ireland to draw on local alumni to attend international education fairs across China, to enable Ireland to have a regular presence as a study option for Chinese students.

Alumni volunteers take this role of education ambassador very seriously. They view it as an excellent addition to their CV, enhancing their skills and work experience. ICAN is a micro-example of a “priority universal” network, establishment according to the network model matrix, to address issues of student recruitment across the vast country of China and had developed organically to provide benefits for alumni in particular in career advancement, moving towards a “alumni-focused universal” model.



Supporting Talent for Economic Development

Alumni remain an underdeveloped key talent pool for Ireland. The research suggests that not only is this a direct talent pool of Ireland alumni for Irish companies, it is also creating market access, whereby Ireland alumni abroad can provide the links to other talent for Irish companies abroad. This opening of doors by global alumni is also crucial to better understand international markets, with the cultural nuances, advice and guidance of business in a particular country.

Alumni relations is growing as a core function of HEIs (or their affiliated foundations), especially over the past five years. Therefore, universities in particular have established and support alumni chapters, usually alumni-led, to foster networking and run social events. There is potential that a coordinated global alumni network could support Irish-educated alumni abroad with career-facing development, such as seminars or webinars. In turn, this activity can support the building of alumni talent that may consider returning to Ireland or working for an Irish business abroad.

When building alumni relationships—whether this is by the State or HEIs or both—accurate and detailed information about alumni helps to identify prospects with an interest in giving to their alma mater or their country of study. Data on alumni held by HEIs has become even more sensitive since the enactment of GDPR in 2018. At universities, this alumni data is a powerful tool to build alumni profiles and prospects towards securing their involvement or philanthropic gift. Therefore, there is concern multiple messages from Ireland—HEI, global alumni network—to individual international alumni, may dilute the university’s message. A global alumni network presents an opportunity for strategic collaboration between HEIs, alumni and national policy objectives.

Irish educated alumni are also increasingly in decision-making positions abroad. When Irish officials and Ministers are involved in international missions abroad, data mining on these Irish educated alumni is crucial to have a comprehensive and strategic brief to know that the country government officials or key company leaders are part of the Irish educated alumni. Findings from this study suggest that conversations about data—held by HEIs and by a global alumni network—could be the most challenging to overcome. However, by taking alumni-centred view from abroad, one central place to connect with alumni events and initiatives may be an attractive way to build a network that is not homogenous to one institution but spans all those with a shared Irish educated experience. The global alumni network, based on alumni supplied data may outline HEI, areas of interest, geographic location, which could trigger separate links of suggestions that they may want to consider including those within their specific HEI.

A practitioners’ hub, similar to the Australia Global Alumni, would enable HEIs to post events specifically for their alumni on the global alumni network system calendar. Alumni who sign-up with the Ireland Global Alumni Network would also be triggered, based on their input on HEI of graduation, to sign-up to their HEI’s alumni online community or join a local alumni chapter. Alumni data—self-selected by alumni—can be a way to create a tailored experience for talent acquisition and support, based on alumni’s own motivations and affinity.

When consulting the wider sector, it was recognised that another barrier to accessing talent amongst alumni is the recognition of qualifications. In a recent report *Ethnicity and Nationality in the Irish Labour Force Market* outline:

While Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) provides assistance to non-Irish nationals in having qualifications recognised, it is crucial that awareness of this system is promoted among both immigrants and employers to prevent skills being underutilised and facilitate occupational mobility.³⁵

For alumni originally from abroad or Irish alumni with qualifications from abroad in Ireland this remains an ongoing issue. A coordinated approach to raising awareness of the systems for qualification recognition through coordinated global alumni effort in Ireland could prove to be an advantage.

Finally, the research suggests, with the number of Irish moving abroad, in particular after graduation, there is a younger diaspora that may not entirely resonate with the traditional Irish abroad organisations—sporting and social—and may opt instead to have a professional outlet to meet other Irish abroad focusing on career development.

A global alumni network could also provide an international online platform that is a gateway for other alumni engagement options. Once alumni sign up with their details (e.g. location, alma mater), they can be sent suggested links to prompt their action: connecting with a local alumni association, sign-up to their alma mater’s online community or connect with the local HEI alumni chapter as relevant.

CASE STUDY: KADER ASMAL ALUMNI

The Irish Aid supported Kader Asmal Fellowship alumni association was launched in 2017, open to past fellows and Ireland alumni in South Africa. Kader Asmal Alumni (KAA), as it is known, is a small group of fellows—less than 50 to date—that was initially established in 2013.



Formalised registered in South Africa as a non-profit, KAA’s primary objective is ‘linking Irish educated graduates with employers in South Africa and within the region.’³⁶ This objective is especially important for KAA members as the unemployment rate remains high in South Africa. Through the efforts by the KAA to showcase alumni is proving to be a contributing factor in assisting alumni to source employment for almost all the alumni to date. Their first publication, supported by the Embassy of Ireland and Higher Education & Training Department of South Africa, features profiles of all Kader Asmal Fellowship alumni to date, including their postgraduate course and HEI of study in Ireland, their current employment, volunteering and/or interests. This booklet (both hard copy and electronic versions) becomes a promotional tool used by KAA members as a wider business card. As KAA alumni seek employment they are also advocating for their fellow KAA alumni, enabling prospective employers to realise the breadth of other KAA members with particular skills and knowledge interested in advancing their career.

KAA’s secondary objective is to promote Ireland as a study destination and support current scholars as they navigate life in Ireland. The KAA maintain a very active WhatsApp group that includes job postings and KAA events of interest (including the association’s Annual General Meeting). Through support from ICOS (Irish Council for International Students), the KAA was featured in the Irish Aid Alumni Newsletter leading to requests from other African countries with Irish Aid Fellowship graduates seeking advice on alumni engagement. This local alumni association, driven by volunteer alumni, serves as an effective model for other Irish Aid fellowship groups and the wider global alumni context for Ireland. In addition, the KAA uses its local knowledge to provide a service to support its alumni, while also ensuring a component of their work is giving back to Ireland as ambassadors and advisors for current students.



Sharing Knowledge for Research and Innovation Opportunities

Across the sector, there is immense potential for alumni to support knowledge exchange, to promote research and to foster innovation. However, in many cases, mobilising alumni has proved to be a challenge, in particular because of understanding the best way to initiate alumni engagement in this area and sustain the motivation of alumni to stay involved. As with fostering any relationship, there needs to be an incentive to remain connected and it not be only one side benefitting—in this case Irish organisations—from alumni advice and engagement.

What can Ireland provide in exchange to alumni? One key advantage is the access to other alumni to exchange ideas and create synergies in key sectors of priority. This could be facilitated online between alumni or could also include HEI academics (many of whom may have international experience) or key sectoral business leaders who may wish to explore certain topics collectively. This knowledge exchange is connected closely to research, and Irish educated alumni are an ideal group to promote the potential for doctoral studies in Ireland or pursuing research in Ireland.

Irish-educated alumni provide a valuable input for innovation in two ways. First, with Irish companies outside of Ireland seeking market access, by working with the company about local knowledge, culture, potentially through a mentorship scheme. Next, in Ireland, providing leads for foreign direct investment for Ireland through their contacts in their home country or their current employer abroad. As Ireland builds relationships with key international high tech and biopharmaceutical companies in Ireland, new Irish educated alumni may be at the vanguard of these next companies abroad. As they stay connected with Ireland and build a relationship with Ireland they may consider returning to invest, to start a business or to expand a business in Ireland. The international student identity can also include other EU students who studied in Ireland—potentially on Erasmus exchange or on full courses of study. Widening the global alumni effort for Ireland to all EU students with time studied in Ireland broadens the attractive talent prospects for business, employment, research development and foreign direct investment into Ireland.

CASE STUDY: ALUMNI OF IRELAND – POTENTIAL IN BRAZIL

The Brazilian government funded the Science without Borders initiative until 2017, which led to significant number of science and engineering graduates across Irish HEIs. The Consulate in São Paulo has expressed an interest in connecting with Ireland alumni, especially from a cultural perspective and promoting Ireland as a study destination. In May 2019, this Consulate undertook a survey of Ireland alumni in Brazil. In May 2019, the Consulate undertook a survey of Ireland alumni in Brazil. The majority of respondents indicated they wished to have going engagement with the Consulate.³⁷ While the majority of respondents were from the Science Without Borders cohort, all of the respondents have completed their studies in the last decade.

Continue Case Study...

Continuation of Case Study:

Therefore, the desire for alumni engagement by these Ireland alumni is for career advancement, including networking and future educational opportunities. Interestingly, despite the large cohort of Ireland alumni in Brazil, they are a variety of different HEIs, therefore this is not a prioritised country for global alumni work in any of the Irish HEIs. As recent alumni, many are still at junior career level, (primarily in engineering), however, some have continued their studies and entered academia. There is scope then to consider potential research collaborations, further postgraduate and funding opportunities and also enterprise partnerships while fostering these alumni relationships for mutual benefit.

A global alumni network with an online community for intra-alumni connections but also for inter-alumni connection from the mission, from key employers or Irish HEIs would provide Irish educated Brazilian alumni with a one-stop shop for career advancement support, information about potential future study postgraduate study in Ireland or for connections to local Irish social and cultural activities.



Fostering Public Diplomacy for Irish Values, Culture and Sustainable Development

Ireland alumni can play a key role in public diplomacy worldwide. Irish-educated international alumni with their time spent in Ireland have been exposed to the wider values of Irish society. For instance, human rights, social justice and gender equality are some Irish values that align well to the wider SDGs. A global alumni network is a potential platform to examine and promote these values through alumni in their home countries as new advocates for Irish public diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy is a key distinct characteristic of Ireland that permeates the discussions, policy and reports related to global Ireland alumni. Described as a ‘door opener,’³⁸ Irish culture not only attracts interest to study from students abroad, but can be a determining factor in their decision to stay and work in Ireland, invest in Ireland, stay connected with Irish cultural activities in their home country as they feel this affinity that could be aligned with that of any other diaspora group.

The Irish Aid Fellowships support alumni associations in countries worldwide, in particular in Africa and Vietnam, and these local alumni associations can begin to have an impact on sustainable development initiatives in their local communities. Leadership and support from the mission enables the formalisation and growth of alumni initiatives, especially those with a public diplomacy and sustainable development focus. With many of these alumni associations rely on alumni volunteers to operate and remain vibrant. The diplomatic mission support may provide the strategic direction and concentrate on aligning the alumni work to the interests of Ireland while also having a positive impact on the alumni and their communities, especially addressing the SDGs and education for sustainable development work.

In fact, a recent study by Campbell and Baxter on alumni associations for scholarship winners show that to advance the social change agenda, the association needed to shift from a group of alumni with a shared programme experience, to one ‘that sought to influence and educate those outside of their own membership.’³⁹

The research from the sector suggests that there is potential to develop activity or events grants for alumni associations to begin or continue this role as an actor of social change, advocate for sustainable development and even public diplomacy work. However, the first challenge is that the alumni associations, maintained by alumni volunteers, are only as strong as the involvement by the volunteers. While Irish Aid outlines the key governance structures required for an alumni association, including the responsibilities of each of the players in the process—former study fellows, embassies and ICOS (Irish Council for International Students)—there is a challenge to keep the associations within these governance parameters, even with start-up funding available for alumni associations.⁴⁰

The potential for mission-led alumni initiatives is not limited to Brazil or Irish Aid-initiated alumni associations. In 2017, the Embassy of Ireland, Nigeria launched an Ireland Alumni Network for all those who have studied in Ireland from primary school, secondary school and higher education.⁴¹ In the same year, the Network Irlandii, was launched by the Embassy of Ireland, Poland, and to date there are over 350 members on a closed LinkedIn group.⁴²

CASE STUDY: VIETNAM IRELAND ALUMNI NETWORK

In 2012, the Vietnam Ireland Alumni Network was launched with 40 Ireland alumni and the Irish Ambassador in attendance. This is in response to the growing number of scholarships (IDEAS and IVVI- Ireland-Vietnam blood-borne Virus Initiative scholarship at UCD) to Vietnamese students and the view of Vietnam as a growing study destination for Ireland.⁴³ A year later, a report outlines a survey of Vietnam Ireland Alumni Network members, an assessment of Vietnam Ireland alumni activities. The alumni respondents of a survey in 2013 showed an interest in career advancement activities and initiatives, and also demonstrated an interest in seminars by Irish academics on various developments in research along with networking events with Irish companies in Hanoi.⁴⁴ Since this survey was conducted, the Embassy of Ireland has remained actively engaged with Ireland alumni in Vietnam inviting them to cultural initiatives and networking events.



Section 4 - The Impact

What is the potential impact of a lifelong connection with Ireland alumni? This section focuses on this potential impact of Ireland alumni and a global alumni network for Ireland. Irish policy documents and reports are clear on the potential for alumni to support Irish interests. Through the sector consultation, however, it was evident that it was difficult to mobilise a specific alumni effort to begin to achieve the ambitious goals or derive impact. Overall, the reports and policy documents point to the potential of alumni, however, it is recognised a need to have a coordinated and strategic effort for alumni but *the how* of actually engaging alumni in activity is not clearly outlined, leaving potential for a coordinated approach of a global alumni network.



Building Reputation for Internationalisation and Education – The Impact

The *National Strategy for Higher Education* calls for inter-institutional collaboration with international alumni, in particular ‘the development of *educated in Ireland* networks of alumni.’⁴⁶ While the Education in Ireland brand and student (and alumni) ambassadors have proved to support all HEIs presence abroad, the impact of a coordinated global alumni effort for Ireland would allow for a global presence for many HEIs where resources for alumni work in all markets remain scarce.

In *Irish Education, Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020*, alumni are explicitly mentioned throughout the report, recognising the immense potential of overseas alumni and international alumni of Irish HEIs calling for ‘building and deepening relations with the alumni...for Irish third-level institutions and for the country as a whole’⁴⁷ Moreover, alumni are cited as a way to strengthen the Education in Ireland brand, as the embodiment of a successful higher education experience in Ireland. In fact, alumni are mentioned as one of the ‘networks of influence.’ To date the HEI investment in global alumni work is varied and remains prioritised in certain key student market countries. The potential impact of a global alumni network would provide an entirely global, universal and visible response for alumni engagement worldwide. To create networks of influence, requires informed alumni, and an online platform that could reiterate key messages about Ireland’s international education, in particular in emerging recruitment markets.

As individuals are the greatest influencers for choosing a specific institution, according to the findings of *The Internationalisation of Irish Higher Education* report,⁴⁸ with 17% of prospective students citing alumni as playing a role in choosing an institution or course of study.⁴⁹ This enables for a democratisation of higher education sector, enabling all alumni with an opportunity to provide their testimonial or input on their programme through the global alumni network, even if this facility is not available in their institution of study. Potentially a global alumni network could present smaller institutions or those with limited international or alumni relations budget with potential ambassadors to help build the market for all HEIs; as the saying goes, a rising tide lifts all boats. The report *Attracting and Retaining International Higher Education Students: Ireland*, reiterates as a priority the importance of a more strategic and coordinated effort on recruitment and promotional activities for Ireland –including in the engagement of alumni—to increase enrolment.⁵⁰

“building and deepening relations with the alumni... for Irish third-level institutions and for the country as a whole.”

— *Irish Educated, Globally Connected (DES 2015)*

BUILDING REPUTATION FOR INTERNATIONALISATION & EDUCATION:

The Impact of a global alumni effort for Ireland: A recognisable alumni brand and ambassadors to build the reputation of the quality of Irish higher education abroad; Showcase and celebrate Ireland alumni achievements, potentially converting alumni to returning postgraduate/PhD students and researchers.



“Networks of influence.”

—Ireland Connected:
*Trading and Investing in a
Dynamic World (DFAT 2017)*⁴⁵

Supporting Talent for Economic Development – The Impact

To deliver on an ambitious trade and investment development for Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade strategy *Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World* reinforces Ireland’s far reaching ‘networks of influence’⁵¹ including both international alumni and Irish-born alumni emigrants. *Global Ireland 2025* recognises the importance of mapping and coordinating alumni into networks that can be of advantage to Ireland.⁵² As a component of economic diplomacy, *Enterprise 2025 Renewed* states as a key goal to “...increase engagement and improve connections with our diaspora and sustain links with international education graduates as a source of skills, start-ups, inward investment and export leads.”⁵³ Therefore a coordinated global alumni effort for Ireland has the potential impact of supporting the coordination of this relationship-building efforts. Through network alumni events and initiatives, is an opportunity to identify alumni leaders to support matching international talent to Ireland’s talent needs and economic development.

In the report *Collaborating for Talent and Growth: Strategy for Higher Education-Enterprise Engagement 2015-2020*, alumni-*alma mater* relationship is recognised as a “source of valuable feedback and influence.”⁵⁴ The aspiration is that all graduates develop entrepreneurship skills within their course and there is a culture of employability embedded in course outcomes, both very attractive to retain and foster specialised alumni talent for the Irish workforce and for Irish companies abroad. Multi-national companies based in Ireland play an increasing role in supporting curriculum development, internships and work placements for courses that attract international students. This could also enhance the international graduates’ ability to secure employment after graduation that maximises their skills, knowledge and competences. The impact of a global alumni network could become a lifelong extension of the classroom, continuing to fostering these entrepreneurship skills and employability support through events and webinars. As alumni continue to build their skill set and advance their career—with support from Ireland—they may become the next collaborating partner for Ireland. A global alumni network can align to Irish Universities Association charter, signed by all Irish universities, committed to ‘nurturing international alumni.’⁵⁵

SUPPORTING TALENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Impact of a global alumni effort for Ireland: Create a conduit to promote Ireland’s talent and skills needs of today and foster the alumni talent needs of tomorrow through career advancement and networking events. As the lifelong mutually beneficial relationship continues, new alumni become established and potentially highly influential alumni, and may return to Ireland to fill skills gaps, or help initiate new investment or talent for Irish companies in Ireland and abroad.



“The availability and quality of graduates is essential if we are to maintain our attractiveness as a location for investment and grow our reputation as a destination for a successful research career.”

— *Innovation 2020*
(DBEI 2015)

Sharing Knowledge for Research and Innovation Opportunities- The Impact

Alumni have a key role in sharing knowledge and celebrating achievement in Irish research, innovation, science and technology. *Innovation 2020*, states: “The availability and quality of graduates is essential if we are to maintain our attractiveness as a location for investment and grow our reputation as a destination for a successful research career.”⁵⁶ International alumni can help to build Ireland’s reputation for high quality research. Therefore, a Global Alumni Network *for* Ireland and *in* Ireland could provide a talent pool for research careers and highly skilled science and technology fields. Returning Irish diaspora (or aspiring returning diaspora) may also find the global alumni network as a professional tool for up-to-date knowledge about Irish research or investment.

According to *Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025*: “Ireland needs a solid pipeline of research skills development that supports early-stage researchers, researcher mobility into industry and internationally, as well as the development, retention and attraction of advanced researchers.”⁵⁷

In addition, attracting Irish emigrants home to meet skills demand and if these are highly skilled from HEI sector a global alumni network can be a centralised mechanism to keep alumni informed on what is available in Ireland.

It is anticipated that the impact of a global alumni network is alumni can keep abreast of research and innovation opportunities in Ireland. At the same time, agencies and departments can engage with the network to share information that preserves the best of the Irish educated talent in Ireland or working for Ireland. The potential impact of a global alumni effort for Ireland is a highly educated captive audience seeking career advancement and wider networking opportunities.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Impact of a global alumni effort for Ireland: An agile, strategic alumni network, informed on Ireland’s knowledge-led economy, on its research priorities and innovation. This engaged network becomes Ireland’s local/regional knowledge experts, advocates, investors, researchers, business leaders, influencers today and for the future.



“Our aim will be to bolster the cadre of Irish development expertise and develop strong Irish networks across the development sector globally.”

— *A Better World*
(DFAT 2019)

Fostering Public Diplomacy for Irish Values, Culture and Sustainable Development— The Impact

The *National Higher Education Strategy to 2030*, states:

...new global network of influence among Irish-educated alumni who will act as advocates and agents for Irish interests in parts of the world where we have not traditionally had strong links. It can also be a crucial part of Ireland’s ‘soft power’ in projecting Irish culture and values to a global audience.⁵⁸

This “soft power” of public diplomacy, based on a positive experience in Ireland and through Irish higher education, can be a catalyst to building connections and positive reputation abroad. In addition, As Ireland generates a new diaspora strategy, alumni are a key affinity diaspora group—whether these Ireland alumni are already diaspora or not—as they can yield immense benefit for, with and in Ireland. In addition, the relationship between Ireland and alumni is unique and often involves other partners, in particular HEIs or institutions of study.

From the sustainable development perspective, Ireland’s international development strategy, *A Better World* outlines Ireland’s SDG priorities: gender equality; reducing humanitarian need; climate action; and strengthening governance alongside interventions related to protection, food and people.⁵⁹ With so many Irish educated alumni with a commitment to sustainable development, especially amongst Irish Aid alumni fellows, Ireland’s SDG priorities can become collective priorities for Irish educated alumni. As part of the revitalisation of the Irish Aid Fellowship Programme,⁶⁰ is embedding alumni networks, to create a ripple effect in identifying future scholars, reporting on alumni fellows’ impact directly on Ireland’s SDG priorities in key countries of priority for sustainable international development work. The fellowship has already amongst its alumni, key leaders in government, sustainable development agencies and companies and this network could be leveraged to directly support Ireland’s efforts through a designated section of wider coordinated global alumni effort for Ireland.

A Better World makes ambitious connections between international development and alumni. In particular reinforcing the potential of a ‘talent pipeline’ of graduates and experts to international development positions. In addition the strategy states: “Our aim will be to bolster the cadre of Irish development expertise and develop strong Irish networks across the development sector globally.”⁶¹ There is the potential to nurture and to identify this pipeline of international development talent among international graduates, returning Irish alumni or internationally-minded alumni while also keeping alumni informed of the calibre of Ireland’s impact in international development work abroad.

FOSTERING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FOR IRISH VALUES, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Impact of a global alumni effort for Ireland: Mobilise a highly educated and highly motivated alumni network to collectively address Ireland’s sustainable development priorities, along with public, economic and cultural diplomacy. An opportunity to celebrate the achievements by Ireland alumni to inspire the next generation of socially responsible global leaders.



Specific Irish Considerations for Alumni

While the national-led alumni networks are an international trend, there are some unique components to consider for Ireland.

Irish Language learning is of growing interest on an international basis, especially amongst Ireland's diaspora. Through language programmes based in Ireland, such as Oideas Gael based in County Donegal or the Fulbright Irish Language Programme, these represent a specialised group of affinity diaspora. Born out of a love and curiosity about learning the Irish language, adults beyond the island of Ireland including from North America, other Celtic traditions, across Europe and beyond have forged an affinity to this key component of the Irish culture with time studying in Ireland. Apart from education-tourism aspects of Irish language study programmes, *The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*, recognise that with the recognition of Irish as an official EU language, augmenting the status of the language internationally—including the potential to secure employment related to this status—could be enhanced through a coordinated themed-based Irish language component for a potential Ireland global alumni context.⁶²

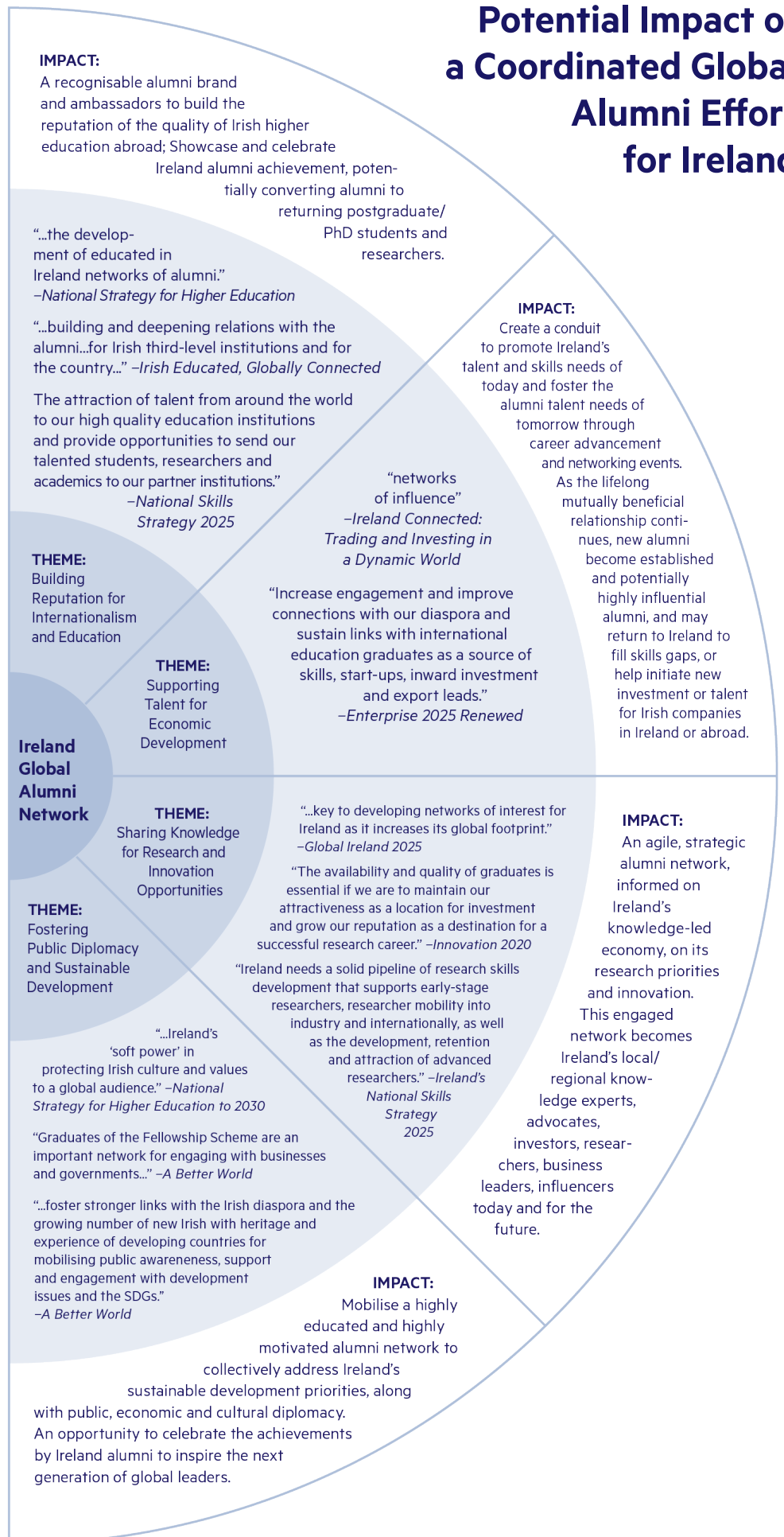
Therefore, there may be scope to initiate a bilingual special interest group of alumni that have studied the Irish language in Ireland. An Irish Language SIG could foster the vibrancy of the Irish language abroad and create a strategic captive audience to promote Irish language resources and a return to Ireland for additional Irish language programmes, initiatives and Gaeltacht area tourism.⁶³ Ireland's linguistic tradition has attracted Irish language learners worldwide and this may present another strategic stream of affinity diaspora alumni for Ireland.

In addition, there is potential to broaden the alumni definition to those with a higher education qualification abroad in Irish/Celtic studies. Many may already be members of Ireland's diaspora or have studied in Ireland as part of a study abroad programme. Initiatives such as the Ireland Canada University Foundation awards may also encourage partnership with/in Ireland and a lifelong connection could be beneficial for extending research opportunities. The Fulbright awards already have a concerted alumni network, and there could be an academic platform to examine alumni synergies across these awards.

Study abroad programmes in Irish HEIs, primarily from North America, are increasingly popular, as are students studying at an American branch campus in Ireland, such as Notre Dame's Kylemore Abbey Global Centre. Ireland also remains a popular destination for Erasmus exchange students. These short-term study programmes offer students with a specialised connection to Ireland, taking advantage of the educational and cultural elements during their time in Ireland, that could potentially be extended to a lifelong connection to Ireland through a global alumni network.

There is also scope to consider an island of Ireland approach to a definition of Ireland global alumni, whereby international graduates of Queen's University Belfast or Ulster University may wish to join the network or consider their affinity with their experience on the island of Ireland. This type of North/South relations, could be advantageous for those that self-selected to become part of a wider Ireland affinity diaspora with the potential of networking of alumni across thematic areas, for instance to create potential ideas for enterprise, investment, trade and research that would impact across the island of Ireland.

Potential Impact of a Coordinated Global Alumni Effort for Ireland



Final Thoughts - Alumni as Diaspora

Reviewing the evidence from the four subsequent sections, it is evident that national-led global alumni networks are a growing trend across Europe and the world to outreach to this affinity diaspora group. The existing strategies related to global alumni networks demonstrates the breadth of impact that alumni can have on national priorities and the network can have to support alumni career advancement.

Throughout this scoping study research it is evident the attention and the interest on the potential of alumni for Ireland. Alumni are a very special affinity diaspora group. This group is well-educated through the Irish higher education system or may have received special educational experiences unique to Ireland. During their studies, students develop a special affinity for their institution of study but also for their city, region and also for Ireland as a whole for this transformative learning experience.

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ACRONYMS

DAAD: German Academic Exchange
Service

DES: Department of Education
and Skills

DFAT: Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade

EAIE: European Association of
International Education

HAn: Holland Alumni Network

HAn-NL: Holland Alumni network-
Netherlands

HEA: Higher Education Authority

HEI: Higher Education Institution

ICAN: Ireland China Alumni Network

ICOS: Irish Council for International
Students

IGAS: Irish Graduates Association of
Singapore

laH: Internationalisation at Home

KAA: Kader Asmal Alumni

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SI: Swedish Institute

UCD: University College Dublin

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**GLOBAL ALUMNI NETWORKS AND IRELAND:
LEARNING FROM INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE**

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