

International work

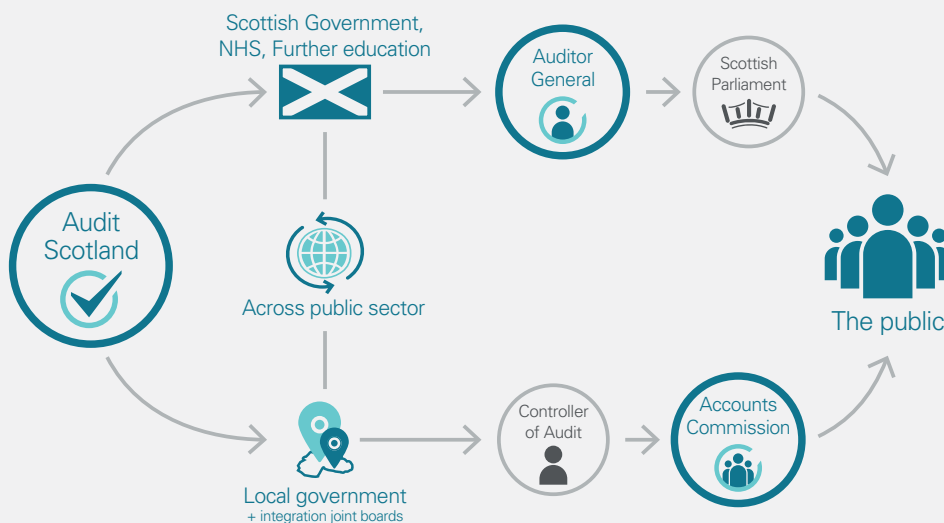
2019/20



Who we are

The Auditor General, the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland work together to deliver public audit in Scotland:

- **Audit Scotland** is governed by a board, consisting of the Auditor General, the chair of the Accounts Commission, a non-executive board chair, and two non-executive members appointed by the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, a commission of the Scottish Parliament.
- The **Auditor General** is an independent crown appointment, made on the recommendation of the Scottish Parliament, to audit the Scottish Government, NHS and other bodies and report to Parliament on their financial health and performance.
- The **Accounts Commission** is an independent public body appointed by Scottish ministers to hold local government to account. The Controller of Audit is an independent post established by statute, with powers to report directly to the Commission on the audit of local government.



About us

Our vision is to be a world-class audit organisation that improves the use of public money.

Through our work for the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission, we provide independent assurance to the people of Scotland that public money is spent properly and provides value. We aim to achieve this by:

- carrying out relevant and timely audits of the way the public sector manages and spends money
- reporting our findings and conclusions in public
- identifying risks, making clear and relevant recommendations.

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Welcome

Sharing knowledge and good practice continues to be a key feature of our international work. Over the last year we have seen interest in Audit Scotland's international activity from a wide range of organisations from across the world. Common themes that have emerged from this year's international work have included fraud, digital services, auditing outcomes and how national audit bodies engage with their parliaments to ensure that audit work is supporting effective scrutiny.

We have made real progress this year in ensuring our international activity informs our audit work and adds value to others. For example, we strengthened the messages in our digital audit work to reflect international good practice. We also shared messages from our audit work in digital through attending a workshop event in the Republic of North Macedonia for potential EU-enlargement countries.

Involving colleagues in international work helps to keep our organisation outward-looking and more in-tune with what good practice can look like. One highlight for us this year was attending the EUROSAI Youth conference event in London. The theme was 'relevance' and two of our younger representatives shared information from the event across Audit Scotland.

Some of my personal highlights over 2019/20 have been the further strengthening of our relationship with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and our partner audit agencies in Australia, building on contacts we made in 2018.

The COVID-19 pandemic has of course impacted on our international work. We are yet to see the long-term impact that COVID-19 will have on the world we live in and our daily business. What we can say, however, is that it has, by necessity, helped us to explore alternative means of communicating and sharing messages which we will want to continue to develop and deploy in the future. We will widen our international contacts to draw on good practice to help us support public services as they respond to the challenges of a post-COVID world.

This annual report marks the end of our current International Strategy (2017/20). We will be refreshing our strategy during 2020, reflecting on our work to date and adapting to the pressing demands that lie ahead.

Whatever the future brings, we remain as keen as ever to continue connecting, sharing and learning from our colleagues from around the globe.



Antony Clark
Audit Director



Antony Clark
Audit Director
Performance Audit
and Best Value

Our priorities

Learning from good audit practice beyond Scotland is key to our ambition of being a world-class audit organisation. It helps keep our work relevant and make a greater impact on improving public services.

Our [International Strategy for 2017-20](#) sets out our approach to international work. It focuses on how we can apply our learning from overseas to improve the use of public money. As such it aligns closely with our [Corporate plan](#) and our aim to deliver world-class audit. The following summarises how we use our international work to improve our work and develop as an organisation:

- Knowledge of overseas good practice helps us scope our audits and shape our recommendations to increase their impact.
- We use international audit standards and good practice networks to improve how we carry out our audits.
- Promoting our work within the UK and internationally helps us build good practice networks and improve as an audit organisation.
- Getting involved in international work is a powerful learning opportunity for our staff, building on their skills and broadening the outlook they bring to our work.

Audit Scotland aims to 'give something back' through its work. We welcome opportunities to contribute to good public governance in other countries. This year we shared our experience of digital auditing with prospective EU-enlargement countries.

In sharing good practice, we have found that countries with similar governance and audit regimes to our own are the most relevant to us. As we note elsewhere in this report, these often include countries not in easy reach of Scotland such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. In a post-COVID world and one that is increasingly environmentally aware, we will look to new means of engaging with our overseas colleagues. In the coming year we will place greater emphasis on electronic communication as an alternative to physical travel and the inevitable environment impact it has on our planet.

Staying connected

Social media is now a hugely important part of how we communicate with the world outside of our offices. We aim to make greater use of social media to promote our work and share good practice. We use social media posts to reach a wider audience with news and updates of our international work. So far this year we have reached an audience of over 10,000 through Twitter and other social media postings. It is interesting to note that Audit Scotland's website has been viewed by over 170 different countries.

[Going Global](#) is the public-facing web page for our international work. Over the last 12 months it has attracted around 480 views from around 30 countries, with the most frequent views coming from the UK, USA, Ireland, Australia, France, Cayman Islands, New Zealand, and Canada.

Sharing messages within Audit Scotland is an important part of our learning for our own staff. We use online networking groups to share information across a range of topics. One of these relates to our international work and provides updates on events including points of interest and lessons learned.



International
Strategy for
2017-2020 [↓](#)
June 2017



Corporate Plan
2019/20 update [↓](#)
June 2019



Going global
webpage [↗](#)

2019/20 in review

Highlights of the Year



Visits by international delegations

We hosted delegates from audit institutions and governments across the world interested in hearing more about our work including Australia, China, Georgia, South Korea and New Zealand.



Sharing our expertise

We presented at international conferences on topics of digital audit and education outcomes.

We supported a workshop for potential EU-enlargement countries to share our experience in digital audit.



Learning from overseas

We make use of an international database on audit good practice. We attended relevant events on public sector debt, fraud and anti-corruption.

We have included international good practice comparisons in our work in digital audit.

Working with others

This year, a strong feature of our international activities was 'giving something back' by working directly with others to share our expertise. In June, we hosted a delegation from the Parliament of Western Australia's Public Audit Committee. They were keen to hear about how we work with parliament, and our capital and digital audit work.

We are keen to build on our relationship with our audit peers from Australia and New Zealand. We see these as valuable partners. We share a similar model of parliamentary governance and, of course, our common language ([Case study 1](#)).

Case study 1

Building on our networks with Australia and New Zealand

In March 2018, our performance audit director, Fraser McKinlay spoke at the International Meeting of Performance Audit Critical Thinkers (IMPACT) conference in Australia.

Audit Scotland was due to be a keynote speaker on 'Building Trust in Public Audit' at this year's conference (IMPACT 2020). Regrettably, this conference was cancelled owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have maintained our connections with our Australian peers through video conferencing with the state of Victoria's Parliament and Auditor General's Office to share good practice in performance audit topic selection, support for parliamentarians and international auditing standards.

In July 2019 we welcomed a representative from New Zealand's Treasury to discuss how performance reporting and budgeting can apply to outcomes and wellbeing.



We have also seen a growing interest in fraud and anti-corruption through our international work. In November we met with a representative from South Korea's Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission. This was one of several visits the delegation was undertaking in the UK for International Fraud Week. The visitors were very interested in our counter-fraud work including the National Fraud Initiative as well as the anti-corruption policies in place in Scotland.

Digital audit

We have continued to work with countries that have less well-developed public audit regimes than our own. This year we have built on this aspect of our work through our connection with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In November, we supported a digital audit network of supreme audit institutions of enlargement countries (comprising the republics of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey) at their meeting in Skopje to discuss our work in this area.

We also continue to draw on international good practice through our digital audit work, including key messages in our published audit reports ([Case study 2](#)).

Case study 2

Enabling digital government

This year we published our [Enabling digital government](#) performance audit report. Transforming public services is a challenging task. Drawing on work from other audit agencies and governments around the world helps us understand common barriers to progress and how these can be overcome.

We looked at how governments in Australia, Canada, Denmark and New Zealand are trying to transform public services, and how digital technologies can support this. Our report includes an international examples supplement to highlight good practice around the world. This signposts practice in:

- open data and standards to share information and practice across agencies
- the need for user-centred design to meet the needs of service users
- digital investment and whole-life costing.

We will again look to examples from other countries as we scope our future performance audit work in areas such as the use of digital technology in health and local government. This will help us assess how our services here in Scotland are making the most of the opportunities presented by digital technologies.

Knowledge sharing events

We attended two European Organisation of Regional External Public Audit Institutions (EURORAI) seminars this year. These events feature speakers from more than nine different countries and are useful to learn of audit practice in Europe and beyond. In May, we attended the EURORAI seminar on public debt in Warsaw; and in October, we presented messages from our recently published higher education report to the EURORAI seminar in Austria.

In November 2019, two of our younger employees attended the EUROSAI (European Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions) Youth conference in London. This event had 'relevance' as its theme and brought together representatives from across audit agencies world-wide. This was a great opportunity and our delegates shared messages widely across Audit Scotland.

representatives from: the Ministry of Finance, China National Audit Office, Shanghai Municipal Audit Bureau, and the Jiangxi Audit Bureau. The focus of these meetings was on financial audit, and our audit of the Scottish Government. In October we met with Henan Province Audit Bureau to discuss our audit of Scotland's new social security powers.

These exchanges help to develop our staff and share learning. Our social security team members welcomed the opportunity to discuss their work and learn of practice in Henan Province:

'the exchange highlighted similarities in the way in which we audit ...they asked a range of questions from women in the workplace, to recruitment, to how we complete a systems audit. This was a great experience and allowed us to have an insight into how audit is in China.'

However, it is not always easy to accommodate visits given other work commitments. We therefore prioritise visits that add value and offer mutual learning opportunities.

On a less positive note, the COVID-19 pandemic has cut short some planned visits to Audit Scotland. We have, however, increased our capability to host discussions and information exchanges digitally and these are options we will be exploring further. Learning from good practice in this way will become an increasingly important dimension to our work as we strive to add value and keep our audit relevant in these challenging times.



Representatives from the Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China visiting Audit Scotland.

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2019/20

This report is available in PDF and RTF formats, along with a podcast summary at:

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk 

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