

*Do you think the proposed National Outcomes align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals? Please explain your answer.*

## **Summary and Introduction:<sup>1</sup>**

This evidence submission responds to the question through an exercise to map SDG targets against the expanded text of the International Outcome that “We are connected, open, show leadership and make a positive contribution globally”.<sup>2</sup> It takes, as its starting point, the idea that the detailed texts for the new Outcomes are important in determining SDG alignment, and that SDG alignment can offer insights into how to better understand and measure the Outcomes. It also offers an initial version of a method that could be more widely used across the National Outcomes to test SDG alignment.

Overall, this submission finds:

- (i) that the International outcome is broadly well-aligned to the SDGs, though with reservations, particularly, around the emphasis on prosperity through international supply chains
- (ii) that the outcome is strongly interlinked with other national outcomes, especially climate action, environment, and wellbeing economy.
- (iii) that reflection on these two elements identifies some key ways forward for how the outcome should be understood, and the indicators attached to it.

The submission begins with a short section discussing the idea of “alignment” and how it has been used by countries. The core of the submission has three sections. **First**, it maps SDG targets onto the detailed text of the International Outcome. Dividing this detail text into four paragraphs, and then each paragraph into further elements, I identify relevant SDG targets per element and offer a reflection on the strength of the alignment – *strong*, *weak*, or *disaligned*. **Second**, it examines the broader set of national outcomes to offer an initial analysis of how the international outcome is linked to others. **Third**, the paper discusses why SDG alignment could be important, highlighting ways in which the SDGs can shed light on future development and measurement.

### **The concept of Alignment**

The idea of “alignment” with the SDGs is widely used by governments and other stakeholders across the world – in part, reflecting the prominence and value of the SDGs as a global framework in which to situate national plans and frameworks.<sup>3</sup> Claims of alignment are

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<sup>2</sup> Using the Revised National Outcomes and accompanying expanded text in Annex 4 of [Parliamentary report - Review of National Outcomes - complete with annexes](#)

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. [Policy Brief - Accelerating 2030 Agenda Integration: Aligning National Development Plans with the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

commonplace in national and stakeholder reporting on the SDGs,<sup>4</sup> but it is important to note that because the SDGs reflect a common agenda of sustainable development, and allow for flexibility in how they are understood and prioritised in national contexts, there is a sense in which “basic” alignment to the SDGs is very easily established: every government that claims to practice good governance can claim to be aligned to the SDGs to a certain degree. Alignment can be used for a number of purposes and is itself is a contested idea. At the very least, alignment can vary in *kind and scope*, as well as *degree*.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of *kind*, one meaning of alignment concerns how two things ‘map’ against each other. In such an exercise, components of a national framework or plan are “mapped against” the SDGs to show congruence. This is one important kind of alignment very commonly undertaken by states. I term this “passive” alignment, since it requires only that a link can be drawn. It can be present, for example, even when a plan was established well before the SDGs. This is to be contrasted with “active” alignment – that is, a conscious effort to bend policies towards the SDGs. In some respects, active alignment shows a more meaningful kind of engagement with the SDGs – the SDGs being used as a tool to challenge and change existing policies and frameworks.

In terms of *scope*, alignment can be addressed, narrowly, to the text of the SDG goals and targets (and indicators). Alignment to a broad goal is easier to establish, and arguably less meaningful, than alignment at target level. But in either case this narrow alignment can be contrasted with an approach that seeks alignment not just with the text of the targets, but also the *ideals and principles* of the SDGs, such as leave no one behind, indivisibility and participation, and the *institutions and processes* that accompany the SDGs – e.g. the commitments in Agenda 2030 on follow up, review, and governance.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of *degree*, there are clearly judgements to be made about how strong the relationship is, and whether it is easy or hard to determine fit between an element of the SDGs, and an element of a particular (national) framework, and these are the focus of the analysis below.

This initial paper is largely focused on narrow and passive alignment – how the International Outcome text maps to the targets of the SDGs. But in discussing how the SDGs might matter for development of this Outcome and policy and measurement around it, it gradually moves on to employ a wider and more active idea.

## **(1) Mapping the international outcome to SDG targets**

### **Methodology:**

An experienced assessor examined the expanded/detailed text of the ‘International’ National Outcome, breaking down each of the four paragraphs into a series of ‘elements’, and offering an assessment for each element of (i) which SDG targets the elements were aligned to, and (ii) how

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. South Africa’s mapping and alignment exercise: [Mapping of the National Development Plan \(NDP, Vision 2030\) to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs 2030\) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063](#); also UN Compact: [Align your business with the SDGs in five steps](#)

<sup>5</sup> We introduce this idea on p10 of [The impacts of COVID-19 on SDG Stakeholder Engagement \(un.org\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

strongly. Summarised in table 1 below, SDG targets were identified that mapped on to, or were closely connected to, each element in terms of the topic or issue covered – “coverage”, and also the nature of the aspiration – “ambition”. Up to three SDG targets were identified in the first instance. These were selected largely on the closeness of the fit in terms of coverage and ambition but also, to a lesser degree, to reflect the different goals that were related (where links could be drawn to many targets across multiple goals). This is further discussed in the analysis below.

Each element is given a rating, indicated by a colour in the “element ID” column:

**Green** indicates the element is strongly aligned with one or more SDG targets in ambition and coverage, so that realising this element of the Scottish National Outcome would make a material contribution to the SDG target, or else an outcome that exceeds the SDG targets in its ambition or coverage.

**Yellow** indicates the element is weakly aligned with one or more SDG targets in ambition and coverage, so that realising the outcome *could, but would not necessarily* make a material contribution to the SDG targets. Conversely, this categorisation also includes the possibility that realising the National Outcome *might* block or detract from achievement of an SDG targets.

**Red** indicates the element is *disaligned* with one or more SDG targets, so that achieving the Outcome would block or detract from achievement of an SDG target.

Table 1 below summarises the results this analysis. The more detailed working document is available to view at [New NPF Outcomes - Google Docs](#).

Element ID	Text of Element	Summary of Alignment
<b>1</b>	Being a good global citizen is a responsibility we all share. We recognise that we are all interconnected, within Scotland and across the globe. We understand that the decisions that impact our own wellbeing here and now will also have wider effects internationally and in the future.	<b>Strongly aligned</b> with SDG targets on policy coherence and global partnership (17.14 and 17.16)
<b>2.1</b>	We are committed to promoting peace, democracy and HRs globally	<b>Strongly aligned</b> with SDG targets on peace, democracy and human rights (16.3, 16.10, 16.b)
<b>2.2</b>	We provide global leadership through positive international relations, our support for international development and our climate action	<b>Strongly aligned</b> with SDG targets on climate action and international development assistance (e.g. 13.1, 17.2, 1.a)

<b>3.1</b>	We promote our place in the world and deepen our relationships with others, building influence and exchange networks	<b>Weakly aligned</b> with SDG target on global partnership (17.16)
<b>3.2</b>	We collaborate to maximise the contribution of our research and innovation	<b>Weakly aligned</b> with targets on technology and research cooperation and transfer (e.g. 17.6, 9.b)
<b>3.3</b>	We enhance our prosperity, and that of our businesses and industry, through international trade and supply chains	<b>Strongly aligned</b> with SDG target on economic prosperity (e.g. 8.1). <b>Weakly aligned</b> with targets on global trade and trade for low-income countries (17.10; 17.11). <b>Potentially misaligned</b> with targets on global environment, and labour rights (e.g. 8.4.; 8.7; 8.8)
<b>4</b>	We welcome all who choose to visit, live and work in Scotland and value the positive contribution they make	<b>Strongly aligned</b> with SDG targets on migration (10.7, 10.c) and human trafficking and modern slavery (8.7)

Table 1: Alignment of Elements of detailed National Outcome text to the SDGs.

*Rationale and discussion:*

- Overall, the alignment can be described as good. The systemic fit with the Goals – so that the “international” outcome is largely found to map against the agenda of Goal 17 on global partnership and global ‘means of implementation’ - is appropriate. Four elements, including the first paragraph which clearly aligns to key ideas of the SDGs on policy coherence for sustainable development and global partnership, are rated as “strongly aligned”. Three elements are rated as “weakly aligned”.
- In the case of 3.1 and 3.2, there was a question over the terms on which research and innovation, and influence and network-building, take place. The SDGs have a clear vision of equitable partnership around technology and research transfer as a vector for sustainable development in countries outside the global north. **Element 3.2** could contribute to this, but only on an understanding of “collaboration” and “contribution” that reflected this vision. The SDGs, again, have a clear vision of equitable and inclusive global governance that **element 3.1**, focused on Scotland’s place in the world, did not necessarily address - even though Scotland’s place in the world, if taken in conjunction with other elements, *could* make an important contribution to more equitable global partnership.
- The case of **element 3.3** is more complex. Whilst the focus on the contribution to Scotland’s prosperity clearly aligns with the domestic prosperity focus of parts of the

SDG agenda, it less clearly addresses the SDGs’ vision of reformed, equitable global trade and supply chains. There is clear potential for negative environmental and social “spillovers” from Scotland domestic consumption and production, and its global supply chains: not least, the UK as a whole ranks especially poorly in terms of such spillovers.<sup>7</sup> If this outcome was pursued without due care, it would harm SDG targets elsewhere – e.g. on labour rights and safe working, forced labour, decent pay, and environmental damage. The overall judgement of “weakly aligned” reflects a balancing of these components.

## (2) The International outcome across other national outcomes

An initial scan identified 26 elements from the detailed texts of other proposed National Outcomes that were linked to the international Outcome.

These elements are broken down in Table 2 below:

<b>National Outcome</b>	<b>No. of elements</b>
Climate Action	10
Environment	6
Wellbeing Economy	6
Education	1
Equality and Human Rights	2
Health	1

Table 2: Count of elements from other national outcomes linked to the International Outcome

- This initial analysis shows how strongly related the international outcome is to the other outcomes, and also gives an initial “at a glance” perspective on where those interlinkages are most numerous. Each of these elements can be mapped against SDG targets themselves, and the strength of alignment mapped.
- The extent of overlap between the international outcome, and those on climate and environment is to be expected - given that these are areas where Scotland’s National Outcomes yield especially important *global* outcomes, too.
- That not every element of every national outcome is closely related to the International outcome is also to be expected. Many of the Outcomes are rightly focused on Scotland’s domestic context. At the same time, almost any aspect of Scotland’s domestic policy *could* have global impact, meaning that this assessment had to set a relatively high bar for a linkage to be judged as relevant.
- Because these elements elsewhere in the National Outcomes framework also matter for SDG alignment, it is impossible to give a full judgement on the “alignment” of an individual outcome without taking into account these additional, interlinked, elements.

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<sup>7</sup> See [Measuring Scotlands Global Impact in the NPF](#)

### **(3) SDG alignment and ways forward**

#### ***(i) An interlinked agenda and the need for policy coherence***

In determining alignment, the linkages between elements within and across Outcomes are critical. On the one hand, it is possible for the ‘international’ Outcome to undermine commitments made in the long text of these other areas. E.g. where Scotland’s prosperity and international trade do not address environmental spillovers, the international Outcome could undermine achievement of the “climate” and “environment” Outcomes – and so, in the future, undercut the health and rights of future Scottish citizens. This also poses the possibility of incoherence *within this* National Outcome, where efforts to “enhance our prosperity” (element 3.3) might clearly have negative “wider effects internationally and in the future” (element 1).

On the other hand, the relatively concrete elements of other Outcomes that specify the ambitions around wellbeing economy, environment and climate change could be linked so as to give greater specificity to the international outcome and how it would be brought about. This would *strengthen* its the alignment to the SDGs, and alignment within the framework, by addressing some of the reasons for a judgement of “weak alignment” above in elements 3.2 and 3.3.

*Policy coherence for sustainable development* – which calls for evaluation of policy in exactly these kinds of terms – is central to the SDGs and their approach to governance. The alignment with this Outcome is strong in this respect: element 1 of the detailed outcome sets out precisely this idea of policy coherence – the evaluation of Scotland’s policies in terms of their impacts not just ‘here and now, but ‘elsewhere’ and ‘in the future’.<sup>8</sup> But more broadly, it is clear that there has to be coordination in policymaking in order for each Outcome to be reached in a way that does not risk undercutting others. Reflecting a key theme of the SDGs, consideration of *synergies and trade-offs* will be key to effectively realising the National Outcomes, and a mapping against the SDGs can help to identify such linkages.

#### ***(ii) Directions for indicator selection and policymaking***

The alignment of the elements of the Outcome text to the SDGs points the way forward for target-setting, policy making and indicator selection around the National Outcomes:

- Where alignment is strong - for example, with element 1 and the SDG target on policy coherence – this might make SDG indicator 17.14.1 on how political institutions support and enable coherent policymaking a blueprint for a relevant Scottish indicator (with the National outcomes and NPF themselves scoring well on such an indicator). In terms of support for “international support” (Element 2.2), the SDGs offer a detailed account of how that support is best targeted, what forms it should take and what principles it should operate on.
- Where alignment is weaker, adopting indicators that reflect the relevant SDG target would strengthen alignment (and constitute a more “active” alignment effort). For

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<sup>8</sup> [OECD pcsd guidance note](#)

example, an indicator on supply chain compliance with international labour standards would strengthen alignment between element 3.3 and the SDGs; an indicator on a mechanism for equitable tech transfer and research cooperation, again, would strengthen alignment for element 3.2.

- SDG alignment also offers direction on how Outcomes might require a focus on particular marginalised groups. For example, the element on experiences of all those who choose to “visit, live and work” invites consideration of disaggregated data on migrants, and particularly migrant women’s experience of precarious and unsafe work (as per the text of target 8.7); on remittance channels as an important component of that experience (10.c), and on human trafficking as a human rights and justice concern (8.7).
- These SDG components could usefully form a framework against which to check Scottish policies, targets and indicators, and a context in which they could be developed. Clearly, scrutinising Outcomes with reference to vulnerable and marginalised populations demands disaggregated data, participation of those populations, and political will. Where the SDGs spur such scrutiny, alignment would be “active” and “wide”.
- Of note, this work has found SDG targets that map to the elements of this Outcome but has not attempted the reverse – to see what gaps remain after the National Outcomes have been mapped to the SDGs. This is a consideration for future work.

## Conclusion

Overall, this initial work on the International Outcome shows the value of engaging with the detailed text, and with the SDGs. It allows for testing the alignment of the National Outcomes, but also prompts important discussion of coherence within and across outcomes, and ways forward for measurement and policymaking.

The good level of overall alignment supports the Scottish government’s claim that the National Outcomes and accompanying NPF is “Scotland’s way to localise the SDGs”.<sup>9</sup> This submission has examined alignment with the SDGs, in terms of the distinctions set out at the beginning, largely in a “narrow” and “passive” sense. A more ‘active’ alignment with a wider SDG agenda, though – in terms of informing the future direction of policy and indicator development, are important for current debates around the revised National Outcomes, how they should be measured, and what policies should be adopted to realise them.

The SDGs commit each country to developing an “ambitious national response” to Agenda 2030. There are clear signs of such an approach in the International Outcome. However, exactly what the ambition should be, and how comprehensively the Outcomes can be expected to map against the SDGs or be oriented towards them, is a much larger question. This paper has also outlined a method for broader analysis of SDG alignment across all National Outcomes that would be a useful contribution to such future work.

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<sup>9</sup> [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals | National Performance Framework](#)