**Covid-19 Response Strategy**

*v1.5: Last updated 16th April 2020*

**Executive Summary:**

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a significant challenge to Scotland and Malawi, and consequently for the SMP. We have moved quickly since mid-March to disseminate news and information to Members and to prepare ourselves for a period of home-working. So far, our systems are working well, with all staff supported to work from home and face-to-face meetings and engagements successfully moved to digital platforms: we have already started convening digital forums for Covid-19 information sharing.

However, we recognize that the sheer scale of the crisis, the fact that there is currently no travel between Scotland and Malawi, and the fact we will likely not be able to convene face-to-face meetings for a number of months, all means that we need to think strategically about how we as a national network respond. It is not enough to simply move our existing plans to digital platforms. Instead, we are thinking afresh what support, services and advice we should most usefully be offering our members in this challenging new reality.

We are operating on the assumption that travel and social distancing restrictions will continue until the summer, meaning homeworking will continue for several months, and all engagements will need to remain digital. We hope that key major events in the autumn, including the AGM, Youth Congress and the re-scheduled SMP Alexander McCall Smith operetta, will be able to go ahead as planned – but this assumption will be kept under review.

This Covid-19 Response Strategy outlines four key strategic priorities which will underpin our work through the coming year:

* ***CONTINUITY:*** We will adapt and evolve our current work and plans to ensure business continuity, wherever this desirable, appropriate and possible.
* ***SUPPORT:*** We will deliver additional, tailored support to those affected by the crisis, including: members, those in Malawi, travel partners, and our staff.
* ***INNOVATION:*** We recognise that there are many challenges but also opportunities, including to develop innovative new digital modes of support and sharing. We will specifically look to develop innovative new services and support for school and youth groups who have had to cancel long-planned Malawi trips.
* ***INSPIRATION:*** We will look to inspire our members, the public and the media with stories of Scotland-Malawi collaboration, to keep members’ spirits up and ensure we remain an outward-looking country, investing in the future of our 160-year old friendship with Malawi.

Rather than update the existing organisational risk register, the situation is so exceptional and far reaching, that the Partnership has developed a new supplementary Covid-19 Risk Register which, like this Strategy, is [publically available](https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/covid-19/how-the-smp-is-responding/). This is a live document which will be regularly updated and shared with key stakeholders.

The Register examines risk across three categories: (1) Risk within the SMP, where the SMP has *direct* risk exposure. This is broken down into: (1a) internal risks, (1b) operational risks, and (1c) financial risks; (2) Risk with Members, where the SMP has *indirect* risk exposure and needs to offer support, and; (3) Risk with Malawi, again, where the SMP has *indirect* risk exposure. For each, the Register quantifies risk, gives commentary, and identifies mitigating and adaptive actions.

The Risk Register shows that the SMP has acted quickly and effectively to date to mitigate the worst risk as far as it can be ascertained. It is now well positioned to continue to deliver core services, adapted to this new reality and to coordinate, represent and support Scotland’s links with Malawi.

**Introduction:**

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic presents a unique set of challenges for Scotland and Malawi, and the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) - as it does for all organisations. The SMP is keen to respond quickly and effectively to this challenge, making changes to its work based on our best understanding of the needs of our members, the priorities in the bilateral relationship, and our responsibilities to support the national response to this crisis.

This document summarises the key aspects of the SMP’s response to the crisis. It is an exceptional additional layer of planning, within the wider 2020-23 Strategic Plan. This is an evolving document which will be updated through 2020, as the situation evolves.

We hope that by sharing this document publicly, we are able to inform and reassure members, partners and funders, and potentially help our smaller members who are themselves urgently considering how best to respond to this public health crisis.

**Immediate actions taken in March 2020:**

Between mid-March and the start of April, the SMP took important, urgent steps to prepare for this crisis, including:

1. Using our bulletin, [website](https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/covid-19/) and social media channels to disseminate Covid-19 news and updates to members, including changes to FCO travel advice.
2. Asking members what support they needed and keeping in regular contact with key stakeholders.
3. Engaging and sharing with other networks in Scotland and our sister network the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP) in Malawi.
4. Moving to home-working, adopting the necessary technology and systems for remote access to shared drives, emails and other systems.
5. Consulting all staff on the support they need to work in a safe, sustainable and comfortable way from home.
6. Postponing the SMP Alexander McCall Smith David Livingstone operetta and our four-country videographer trip, as part of the David Livingstone Centre video legacy commission (both due to take place in April).
7. Moving all meetings and forums to digital platforms.
8. Rewriting the 31st March Health Forum agenda, to focus on Covid-19 preparedness in Malawi, bringing in key health leaders in Malawi.
9. Supporting clarity from the Scottish Government on their position regards funds for pre-agreed Malawi development projects.

**Operating assumptions:**

This is a difficult and dynamic time, with a high degree of uncertainty in both Scotland and Malawi as to how long current restrictions will be in place for. This Strategic Plan will be updated as further information becomes apparent but we are working on the operating assumption that:

1. Government social distancing restrictions will continue, in some form, until June-August, meaning face-to-face events and engagements will remain impossible or undesirable in this period.
2. Edinburgh City Chambers will remain closed until June-August, meaning all SMP staff will be homeworking until well into the summer.
3. Key major events in the autumn, including the AGM (early October), the Youth Congress (November) and the re-scheduled SMP Alexander McCall Smith operetta (Oct-Dec, tbc), will be able to go ahead as planned – but this assumption will be kept under review. The Youth Congress and Operetta can be moved to 2021 if needed but the AGM would likely go ahead in October, moved to a digital format if need be.

**Strategic priorities:**

Responding to the risks identified in the formal Risk Register, the SMP’s Covid-19 response will be led by four key priorities: ***continuity, support, innovation*** *and* ***inspiration.***

***CONTINUITY:***

***We will adapt and evolve our current work and plans to ensure business continuity, where this desirable, appropriate.***

Specifically, we look to:

* Operate a **remote office**, with our six staff each working from home and given all appropriate support.
* Publish a detailed and clear **Covid-19 Response Strategy**, making clear how the SMP will operate through this more challenging chapter.
* Publish a full **Covid-19 Risk Register**, with a detailed assessment of the direct risks to the SMP and the indirect risks to our members and their partners in Malawi.
* Migrate our events, forums and other face-to-face engagements to appropriate **digital platforms** while social distancing is required.
* **Build resilience**, as far as is possible, within our current systems, recognizing the high degree of uncertainty which will continue for a number of months.
* Work closely with the **Scottish Government**, sharing this strategy, and offering enhanced support as part of its core funding.
* With the agreement of funders, **adapt 2020 project work**, including the David Livingstone Centre legacy video commission and the British Council Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning grant, in light of travel restrictions and social distancing requirements.
* **De-prioritise certain planned areas of work** for 2020 in order to make capacity for additional Covid-19 areas of work, including
  + Updated University of Edinburgh/SMP study on the scale of bilateral links.
  + Roll-out of Local Authorities Malawi linking Toolkit.
  + [*Malawi at COP26*](https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/news-events/past-events/malawi-at-cop26-planning-meeting/) campaign – this will still go ahead but, given COP26 has been moved to 2021 with no date yet confirmed, we will push back our plans by at least six months.
  + [*2020 Year of Governance Strengthening*](https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/get-involved/year-of-governance-strengthening/) – We will keep this under review but it is likely some elements may need to be pushed back.
* Continue to strategically prioritise work, potentially reducing other services and activities, if required, in response to reduced capacity, staff sickness or reduced funding.

***SUPPORT:***

***We will deliver support to those affected by the crisis, including: members, those in Malawi, travel partners, and our own staff.***

For Members we will look to:

* Share our own **Covid-19 Response Strategy** **and Risk Register** to assist members’ own strategic thinking in this area.
* Seek regular information and **feedback from members** as to Covid-19 impact on their work, their priorities and how the SMP can assist.
* Offer support, advice and information relating to homeworking systems and relevant **communications technologies.**
* Host **Covid-19 Zoom meetings,** open to all members, to update on what the SMP is doing and what we can offer, to listen to our members’ experiences and needs, and create a space to share between members.
* Signpost to **funding opportunities** for those affected by Covid-19 and wider sources of information, advice and resources in the sector.
* Promote and support members’ own Coronavirus-related **fundraising appeals.**
* Support **coordination and collaboration** between members.
* Map all groups, including schools, due to travel to Malawi who have had **trips postponed or cancelled**, working with group leaders to understand their priorities and explore what useful function the SMP can offer those affected.
* Lobby government to continue Malawi funding and making a positive case that:

(a) funded projects which have to be suspended due to the impact of Covid-19 in Malawi, but can likely be re-started in the future, should have funding paused rather than cancelled.

(b) funded projects should be supported to re-purpose, where possible and appropriate, funds in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, to best achieve the original outcomes.

(c) seek to ensure government is supportive, understanding and flexible, with clear communications to grant-holders.

For those in Malawi we will look to:

* **Disseminate information** about Covid-19 in Malawi through the Bulletin, social media, and a dedicated web-page potentially co-curated by a volunteer member with relevant medical expertise.
* Facilitate support and **two-way sharing** between Scotland and Malawi relating to strategies to fight Covid-19.
* **Share key documents and resources** (including, for example, hand-washing guidance, posters etc)
* Establish a space for members’ partners to **share their own experiences locally**, ensuring we are listening to a range of voices across Malawi, including the remote and rural.
* Raise awareness of **what members are doing** to support Malawi’s response to the crisis.
* Amplify **Malawi-led advice** about how members can support their partners.
* Establish a dedicated **WhatsApp group** for the sharing of information about Covid-19 spread and the Malawi response, amongst key stakeholders active in this area.
* Host **Covid-19 Zoom meetings**, to share information about the situation in Malawi and ask questions to, and connect with, key individuals helping fight the outbreak.
* Ensure all our work follows the principle of ***do no harm***, specifically, ensuring that we are NOT:
  + confusing, complicating or straying from Government of Malawi advice as they manage their national response;
  + causing unnecessary or unhelpful alarm or distress, or sharing updates we are not entirely confident are from a credible source;
  + unnecessarily taking away key senior or frontline health staff in Malawi from their jobs, to keep us updated;
  + giving our own (SMP) medical or other advice where this is beyond our expertise;
  + forgetting that while there is much that usefully can be shared between Scotland and Malawi, there are significant differences as well - especially in geographies and movements, health systems, demographics, culture and climate - all of which will likely impact on the crisis.

For Travel, tourism and business partners we will look to:

* Offer support, information and promotion to those **businesses which support the Malawian economy** but are seriously affected by the pandemic.
* Promote Scotland-Malawi business, investment and tourism after the crisis, to help **re-build the economy**.

For Staff we will look to:

* Offer **flexibility, understanding and comradery**, recognizing the many practical challenges each team member faces as they balance work alongside family and caring requirements, especially those with children or elderly relatives.
* Ensure staff have a **safe, sustainable and comfortable workplace.**
* Offer staff **extra leave** after restrictions have ended, to compensate for public holidays during lockdown, allowing them to recuperate after a sustained period of confinement, stress and homeworking.

***INNOVATION:***

***We will recognise that this is a fundamental change in landscape, with many challenges but also opportunities, including to develop new digital modes of support.***

Specifically, we look to:

* Create **digital spaces for member-to-member networking and sharing**: moving existing member forums to digital platforms but also exploring new, less formal and more regular interactive digital spaces for sharing.
* Explore digital ways of delivering Chichewa and Chitumbuka training, potentially working with colleagues in the diaspora to develop a ‘**Chichewa Challenge**’ – challenging members to use this period of home-confinement to increase their Malawi language skills.
* Explore a major new initiative looking at **digital expertise sharing** – how the SMP can encourage members to identify areas where they have valuable experience relating to a Scotland-Malawi link and support them to record short videos sharing this experience.
* Explore developing digital resources and engagements specifically for **schools and young people who were due to travel** to Malawi but have had trips cancelled or postponed. Looking to emulate some of the experiential and learning outcomes they would have gained in Malawi in different forms, and maintaining their interest and engagement for a future visit after travel restrictions have been lifted.

***INSPIRATION:***

***We will look to inspire our members, the public and the media with stories of Scotland-Malawi collaboration, to keep members’ spirits up and ensure we remain an outward-looking country, investing in the future of our 160-year old friendship with Malawi.***

Specifically, we will:

* Encourage members to record and **share their own digital assets** (videos, photos, short case studies), highlighting what they find most inspiring and uplifting about Scotland-Malawi cooperation.
* Aim to ensure our bulletin and social media feeds **continue to have positive stories**, even through these difficult times.
* Encourage members, especially at a community level, to **keep their Malawi links going**, however possible.
* Aim to keep a steady **drip-feed of good news stories**, even if just historic, in our social media and wider media.
* Continue to actively **engage the media**, maintaining public interest, engagement and support, and pro-actively making the inspiring case for Scotland’s friendship with Malawi as a defining aspect of Scottish internationalism and identity.
* Encourage the Scottish and UK governments to **maintain levels of international development funding**, especially with Malawi.
* Maintain and mobilise **all-party political support** in Holyrood and Westminster, through the CPG and APPG, in support of Scottish internationalism and specifically Scotland’s work with Malawi