

Title: Forging connections between Scotland, Ireland and Germany

Fund: International Collaboration Fund

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In early 2025, our team at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) were successful in receiving a grant from the International Collaboration Fund, along with colleagues from the University of Bremen (Germany) and South East Technological University (SETU, Ireland). The collaboration arose from a shared research interest in effective ways to support the health and wellbeing of marginalised and disadvantaged communities. Building on our existing research with marginalised groups (e.g. disadvantaged men, LGBTQ+ communities, and veterans), we were keen to explore whether a 'one size fits all' approach to community interventions was suitable when meeting the needs of those deemed 'hard to reach' or 'underserved'.

The funding allowed our GCU team to undertake a 3-day visit to Bremen, Germany, in early February 2025 to meet with University of Bremen colleagues. The trip included time at two of Germany's first ever Men's Sheds, located in deprived areas in central Bremen and the coastal area of Bremerhaven. During these visits, we presented our research on community-led initiatives, discussed the similarities and differences between German and Scottish men, and explored Sheddars' health and wellbeing needs. We also visited a community social enterprise café employing homeless populations, where we enjoyed delicious local produce. The trip also gave us valuable time for in-person workshops and idea development for a future joint funding bid with our German colleagues.



Photo of the GCU research team in rainy Bremen; Julie Cowie, Dani Hutcheon, Artur Steiner

Following our trip to Bremen, the fund facilitated a trip for our Irish colleagues from SETU to visit Glasgow for 2 days. During this time, we took the SETU team to Men Matter in Drumchapel, a community-led organisation tackling men's mental health, where they were given a tour. We also visited Govan Men's Shed, where we had coffee, cake, and lively discussion with Sheddors about why they attended the Shed and what they gained from it. While in Glasgow, SETU colleagues kindly delivered a Yunus Centre seminar about their extensive work in Ireland on men's health research from Men's Sheds to physical activity interventions. We also held a series of meetings to further workshop ideas for future joint research proposals and fed back what we had learnt from our trip to Germany.



Photo of academic teams from Glasgow Caledonian University and South East Technological University; Noel Richardson, Aisling McGrath, Dani Hutcheon, Julie Cowie, Niamh Murphy

Following our series of in-person visits, we decided to focus our research attention on male-oriented community-led initiatives, and we continued to collaborate online to produce two joint funding proposals. Firstly, a GCU and SETU colleagues submitted a collaborative proposal on delivering and evaluating a men's mental wellbeing programme across Scotland and Ireland, to the National Institute of Health Research in August 2025. Secondly, the GCU and University of Bremen teams submitted a joint proposal to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)/Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) Research Grants call in October 2025 to explore how creative male-friendly community activities help men to build social connection and social capital across different communities in the UK and Germany.

Overall, the funding enabled us to build meaningful international collaborations with our colleagues in Ireland and Germany, while also providing the opportunity to explore contextual differences between community initiatives by broadening our research across different countries, cultures, and settings.