

THE UK IN THE WORLD

THE UK'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

The UK continues to seek and need a major role and profile in the modern world. No country is more internationally connected than the UK, or has more reasons to stay internationally connected if we wish to remain a 'top table' nation in world affairs (G8, Security Council, EU, Commonwealth) or make a difference to global prosperity and security through nation-building, sustainability, stability, international partnerships and international development.

The changing nature of influence in the world

The entire international landscape is being transformed by hyperconnectivity, social media, and the very rapid rise of direct people-to-people social and cultural exchange, unmediated by states. This is beginning to alter the fabric of relations between nations.

The growing importance of 'soft power'

The rise of people-to-people influence requires the recognition that persuasion, influence, trust and what other people think of the UK matter to our future more and more. We will need to go beyond the traditional international relations armoury of force, diplomacy and aid to develop the UK's reputation, promote UK prosperity and promote the UK's place in a highly competitive world – and also ensure our security in an age of instability, street protest and regular warfare.

The UK is a 'soft power superpower'

As Foreign Secretary William Hague recently wrote, 'the UK remains a modern day cultural superpower. The UK is fortunate to have some immense assets and advantages in this area: the English language, connecting us to billions of people; links to almost every other nation on earth through our history and diverse society; skills in financial services, engineering, science and technology that are second to none; and fine institutions like the British Council, BBC World Service and our historic universities which are beacons for democratic values around the world. Staying competitive in 'soft power' for decades to come means nurturing these assets and valuing them as much as our military, economic and diplomatic advantages. Government must play a full part in helping to liberate that ingenuity and talent across our national life, and champion it all over the world.'

UK government has an enabling role in UK 'soft power'

The think tank DEMOS recently concluded, that the level of resources invested in 'soft power' by countries matters, but enabling a genuine and open exchange of culture and ideas is far more important in staying ahead in the race for 'soft power'. In future the most successful nations will be those that are flexible and open to other cultures, responding quickly to changing dynamics and global trends. The implication for UK government is that it should continue to create the conditions for broad and deep cultural exchange to flourish. The government should also pay as much attention to incoming as to outgoing cultural relations – the UK needs a culturally literate and globally aware population.

Excellent, aligned, independent cultural institutions are the UK's best 'soft power' assets

The UK should continue to support cultural exchange through well-aligned, independent, autonomous agencies and brands like the British Council, the BBC, the Premier League, universities, and the UK's national theatres, galleries and museums. DEMOS argue that direct government involvement invites suspicion and hostility. The trust that these institutions generate via the UK's artists, educators, sportspeople, curators and broadcasters supports the UK's trade, creative industries and tourism, and builds the relationships and environment for them to flourish in both the short and long term.

The UK's 'mixed economy' model is a national asset

No country gets more leverage in creativity, impact and economic return on its investment in culture and education than the UK. Because the UK does not wholly publically-fund or 'state control' its best cultural bodies and universities, they earn income, innovate, partner and are entrepreneurial in pursuit of their mission. Because most also have some core public funding they are 'interdependent' and more aligned with UK government and national policy than in countries where there is no connection. The UK's very effective 'soft power' is a direct result of our 'mixed economy' model.

The British Council is a national asset

The British Council is a charity governed by a Royal Charter and is aligned with the FCO with board-level representation. The British Council has retained the same mission for which it was founded in 1934 but has transformed its economic model. UK government grant now represents less than 25 per cent of the British Council's turnover; entrepreneurship delivers the rest through 'paid for' services, partnerships and work under contract to donors and funders.

The British Council builds trust for the UK by sharing English, the arts and education, and supports stronger societies through work with state and public education systems and support for governance and international development.

The British Council is directly connected through its governance to the UK's long term foreign policy interests. It creates the context which supports and informs the UK's knowledge, relationships, understanding and influence in the world – millions of English speakers, UK-educated world leaders, global expertise and 'thought leadership'; and millions of people and thousands of institutions connected to the UK.

The British Council delivers the UK's national interest, by being aligned with – but at arm's length from – UK government, being entrepreneurial, and being both for and from the people of the UK.

The British Council Approach

The British Council shares the UK's great cultural assets with the world. The critical element in our approach is being on the ground where it matters, bringing mutual benefit and becoming part of the fabric of the countries and societies in which we work.

Lasting 'soft power' cannot be achieved by showcasing the UK's assets alone; it is built by sharing and improving those assets, and by supporting reciprocal benefit and the exchange of knowledge, ideas, creativity and culture.

Through this work the British Council:

- builds trust in the people and institutions of the UK and supports prosperity and security around the world
- encourages people to visit, study in, and do business with the UK
- attracts people who really matter to all our futures to visit and engage with the UK.

The UK's international influence is built on a spectrum of international interventions. At one end is aid and development, where the UK is recognised as a world leader. At the other is the UK's considerable diplomatic, military and economic hard power. The UK has strengths right across this spectrum, with leading international aid charities, global assets like the British Council and the BBC, world-leading cultural and educational institutions, and widely respected diplomatic and defence assets.

Similarly, there is a spectrum of different approaches within 'soft power'. In many of the countries in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, development work is the prime means by which the British Council builds trust in the UK through teaching English, supporting education systems, building capacity in justice systems or working with young people and civil society institutions.

Sharing English and showcasing vibrant – and at times challenging – aspects of UK arts and culture is a proven way to engage and build trust in established and emerging economies like Russia, the Gulf and many European countries. Major education links forge lasting connections in a range of developed and emerging economies. At the 'harder' end of the spectrum, the British Council works with Ministries of Defence and peacekeeping forces from Afghanistan to South Sudan to improve English and enable those institutions to use English to support peacekeeping and build peace and stability. It is the British Council's capacity to work across the full spectrum of 'soft power' with English, the arts, education and society programmes which enables the UK to punch well above its weight in 'soft power'.

EXAMPLES OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S WORK

English and Exams

- Project English has benefited more than 27 million young learners across India, brought opportunities for professional development to more than 650,000 teachers and 6,000 teacher trainers, and engaged more than 100 policy makers.
- The British Council and Intel are working together to support English language education in 100 countries by placing 100 million PCs and devices featuring British Council LearnEnglish content in classrooms and homes.
- We work with Russia's 200,000 English language teachers, policy makers and other professionals to improve the quality of English teaching – particularly in the state sector, where English is taught to an estimated 15 million learners in more than 60,000 schools.
- Our provision of UK exams and qualifications are worth £60 million in export earnings for UK exam boards.
- We are working with the Rwandan government to train English language teacher trainers following the country's adoption of English as an official language.
- We opened our office in South Sudan as soon as the country was established. We have been supporting the development of the South Sudan Police Service for many years, through professional development and English training. We are bringing English language tuition to public servants, including many former combatants, helping them to move from conflict to public service.

Arts

- In 2012, we launched UK Now, the largest festival of UK arts and culture ever held in China. Events took place in 29 cities across China, including Hong Kong and Macao, and featured almost 800 UK artists performing across 166 venues. More than four million people attended events, and millions more participated through the website and social media channels.
- To respond to Brazil's emergence as a major economic and political world power, the British Council is running a four-year programme called Transform, which will reinvigorate arts work between both countries and create foundations for a permanently strengthened bilateral relationship, and not just in the creative industries. Transform will build on the UK government's GREAT campaign to permanently strengthen the bilateral relationship between our two countries. It is the biggest ever programme to unite Brazilian and UK creative professionals, creating new opportunities which will have a wide-reaching artistic, social and economic impact.
- In Russia, almost 700,000 people visited our exhibitions by William Blake and Henry Moore in Moscow and Antony Gormley in St Petersburg in the past year.

EXAMPLES OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL'S WORK (continued)

Education and Society

- We work with the education ministries of each of the four UK countries to raise young people's global awareness, skills and ambitions. In 2011–12 we worked with 30 per cent of UK schools, 50 per cent of UK colleges and 90 per cent of UK universities.
- The British Council's Services for International Education Marketing is a global programme to support UK education institutions in their international work. Services for International Education Marketing operates in 41 countries, providing market intelligence and services for international student recruitment, and enabling the development of working relationships with institutions internationally. International Higher Education brings £14 billion to the UK economy per annum.
- We are the UK's National Agency for large-scale EU-funded mobility programmes in education and training – Comenius, Erasmus and Youth in Action – enabling more than 200,000 young people from the UK to gain international experience and skills each year.
- We established the UK–India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) which brings together Indian and UK academic institutions, government and industry to share innovation, strengthen leadership and international co-operation in the higher education sector, impart more skills and improve academic mobility. So far, more than 600 successful partnerships have been created across the education sector.
- Through our Young Arab Voices programme, funded by the Arab Partnership Initiative, we have helped more than 25,000 young Egyptians, Tunisians and Jordanians to develop the debating skills needed to help drive social change and build new institutions.
- In Afghanistan, we are delivering a £23 million contract for DFID and Nordic donors to strengthen selected civil society organisations and improve government accountability, responsiveness and respect for human rights.
- In Bangladesh this year, we celebrated the 10,000th participant in our programme to help young people deal with challenges in their communities. Alongside partners, and working with the Bangladesh parliament, we piloted the first ever Bangladesh Youth Parliament. The inaugural session was watched on television by 60 million people.
- In Burma, we offer uncensored access to the internet (and did so even before the recent reforms), with a quarter of a million users coming to our libraries each year. Here, people can learn English and experience UK and international culture and freedom of expression in a safe, open environment. We have initiated a programme to train 10,000 English teachers a year in partnership with Burma's Ministry of Education that will improve the teaching of English for two million young Burmese people each year.
- In Brazil we have used sport to help young people boost their citizenship skills, community engagement and self-esteem. In partnership with the UK's Youth Sport Trust and the Ministry of Sports, we have brought specialist training to more than one million young people. The programme has been so successful that the ministry has extended it with a goal of reaching more than 45,000 schools and an estimated 13.5 million children.
- International Inspiration, our 2012 Olympic and Paralympic legacy programme, has now reached 13 million young people in 20 countries around the world. Working with partners such as UNICEF, UK Sport and Department for International Development, we play a central role, focused on Physical Education (PE) curriculum reform and exchange of best practice in PE and school sport.
- Premier Skills, a partnership with the Premier League, helps young people develop life skills, coaching skills and English language skills through the medium of community-focused football. Premier Skills has already trained 2,300 coaches and referees and reached 400,000 young people across 20 countries. It aims to support a further 100,000 young people this year, and at least 500,000 teachers and learners through English language resources.