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**British Council**

**Global Cultural Networks:  
The Value and Impact of  
British Council  
International Showcasing**

BOP Consulting

April 2019

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**BOP**  
Consulting



# Executive Summary

## Context and methodology

This research explores the value and impact of the British Council's Showcasing work, with a focus on activities since 2013. It was based on four core objectives:

1. Through some additional targeted primary research develop the criteria and undertake an assessment of what has been the value to UK arts and cultural organisations of the British Council's arts showcasing work over the past 5 years (Considering economic value, artistic value, new relationships / connections developed etc.)
2. Consider how other cultural relations organisations approach their arts showcasing, how they deliver arts showcasing and what has been the impact from their arts showcasing work as compared to the British Council's approach
3. Explore how the British Council's arts showcasing makes a contribution to UK soft power and cultural relations (UK reputation, influence and attraction) drawing on the latest thinking; what were the particular features of the showcasing programmes and contexts that made a difference?
4. Provide a set of considered recommendations for the future development of our arts showcasing work informed by the evidence collected and analysed

It is based on a document review of existing research and evaluation of showcasing work, a survey of participants taking part in showcasing activities within and beyond the UK (n=103), interviews with a subsample of these participants, and interviews with 'strategic stakeholders' (i.e. other cultural relations organisations, UK Government and national arts councils in the UK).

## Findings

A review of the existing evidence base indicated that indicators of impacts of showcasing work were relatively limited and mostly consisted of the following:

- Scale of activities and audiences reached
- Extent of involvement from UK and in-country arts and cultural professionals

- Levels of engagement in activity (i.e. descriptive statistics of number of sessions provided and so forth)
- Reaction to activity from public and cultural professionals (although this tended to be limited to positive/negative, and in some cases to broader perceptions of the UK).

- Scale of media coverage

There were limited explorations of the types of longer-term outcomes that may be more closely related to soft power impacts such as:

- Intention to work together after engagement in activity
- Growth of active professional networks
- Change in perception of UK
- Attribution of the above dimensions to British Council activity

Our survey findings showed strong outcomes across a range of dimensions for those taking part in showcasing activities in the past five years:

- A large majority (91%) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the British Council showcasing experiences increased their understanding of arts and cultural professionals working in a different country
- 83% extended their professional networks in a way that has had tangible benefits for their work
- 73% agreed that the opportunities offered a good level of return for the resources they invested
- 81% increased their trust of arts and cultural professionals operating in a different country
- Asking respondents to list their active networks since taking part corresponds to around 17 new contacts being established on average per participant as a result of British Council showcasing activities
- The number of 'inward' contacts to the UK reported is also significant, with an average of 9 new contacts within the UK per participant

- 37% of respondents reported having engaged in business development activities with these contacts since meeting and there was a consensus that the connections are likely to lead to more opportunities in the future
- 90% agreed that the programmes provide an opportunity for the UK to share its cultural values with the rest of the world
- 78% agreed that the programme created a safe space for complex and contested intercultural values to be explored
- 73% of respondents indicated that they have worked with the British Council on something else since taking part in the showcasing work and continue to develop ideas and plans together

Our interviews with ‘strategic stakeholders’ indicated a number of ways in which the British Council’s showcasing work has clear value, as well as suggestions on how things could be changed to increase positive impact in the future.

The showcasing work of the British Council is considered high quality, drawing on well-established professional networks across global regions and conducted with valuable independence from UK Government.

It was suggested there could be greater clarity in communicating how the showcasing work is seeking to represent and promote ‘UK values’, as well as a need to better distinguish between cultural work setting out to provide space for exploring global identities, and so-called ‘firework moments’ to promote British cultural outputs.

It was suggested that a more strategic approach could be taken to the showcasing work, focusing on longer-term preparation, activation and evaluation. Linked to this, it was suggested that more could be done to engage with a cultural community that is truly representative of the UK regions and nations. A clearer way of matching in-country needs and expectations with what the UK cultural sector can offer was also suggested.

Overall, the links between showcasing activity and soft power effects were apparent to most that we spoke to, and this was not considered problematic. The main finding was that soft power aims should be made more explicit at all levels of engagement (i.e. UK cultural actors and those in participating countries). It was also suggested that freedom of expression across broad cultural forms is a core British value, and its promotion globally is a cornerstone

of soft power impact. In short; people like the UK because of its open and diverse cultural production and output.

Ultimately, showcasing activities are effective because cultural professionals are being strongly linked together into global networks where cultural values are explored, contested and negotiated. Enabling the safety and freedom to do this is a core value of the UK (and many other nations). The UK is therefore considered positively when it is seen to be promoting these networks, opportunities and spaces via the work of the British Council.

While we don’t have the extent of evidence required to say this is true of all cultural relations organisations, we can presume they offer a similar function. Therefore a shared aim for the future should be for these organisations and their activities to complement each other and enable the process of safe and free exchange and network building wherever possible (this research shows some emerging evidence of this taking place, for example, where an opportunity provided to a cultural organisation by British Council has been developed further with the Goethe-Institut).

Our research concluded that within the context of increasingly fragile democracies across nation states, the challenge remains to enable positive cultural relations impacts for an improved global society, alongside, and beyond the UK national interest.

“Soft power is a two-way street, and there is a danger of this getting lost in the current race to demonstrate the value to the UK. Trust, reciprocity and mutuality also come from the UK better understanding and being attracted to work with its global peers. (Strategic Stakeholder)

## Recommendations

- Provide longer planning and run-in time to showcasing projects to enable ‘matching’ of needs and offers between UK and international partners.
- Consider surveying and canvassing needs, expectations and existing perceptions of participants in advance of involvement.

- Commission evaluation from the beginning of projects and allow for longitudinal data collection at the end to better understand the contribution chain and which aspects of activities are more closely linked to particular outcomes.
- Provide greater clarity about which aspects of UK values are being shared, promoted and exchanged. This may be different for different initiatives, but greater clarity will enable stronger impact.
- Consider convening seminars or discussions on the basis of these findings with strategic stakeholders (i.e. arts councils, UK Government, cultural relations organisations), and with existing showcasing partners, to further explore and clarify the contribution chain and make soft power aims more clearly defined and articulated (alongside other aims).
- Consider how to increase collaboration with European cultural relations organisations, recognising shared aims (although different methods), and seeking to promote the value of improved global cultural relations.
- Seek to repeat this survey and research exercise every 2-3 years to explore longer-term impact on those taking part in showcasing work in recent years, including those currently engaging and scheduled to do so. This research can act as a baseline and template for future approaches. It will be necessary to keep a close record of contact details for those taking part in showcasing work historically and in the future for this approach to be successful.

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# 1. Introduction and methodology

This research explores the value and impact of the British Council's Showcasing work, with a focus on activities since 2013.

## 1.2 Defining the research context

'Showcasing' is a broad concept that includes seasons and festivals, 'Year Of' bilateral exchange and promotion projects, as well as the following regular British Council programmes:

- British Council Art Collection
- Venice Art and Architecture Biennales
- The Selector (music podcast)
- Shakespeare Lives
- Edinburgh Showcase and Momentum Edinburgh exchange programme

Across each of these projects and programmes there is an intention to promote UK cultural outputs and engage the global community in discussions related to the cultural outputs being promoted. Given the broad range of activities that each of the programmes already listed engage in, rather than tightly define showcasing as a particular set of activities, for the purposes of this research it includes cultural programmes and activities that use art and culture as pivotal dimensions of developing positive international cultural relations.

It is also useful to precisely define 'cultural relations', given its functional significance for this research.

“Cultural relations are understood as reciprocal transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities conducted by state and/or

non-state actors within the space of culture and civil society. The overall outcomes of cultural relations are greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between people and cultures, shaped through engagement and attraction rather than coercion.<sup>1</sup>

The latter part of this definition describes another concept becoming increasingly explicit in cultural relations policy, research and evaluation; soft power.

Soft power as a concept was popularised by Joseph Nye in the early 90s<sup>2</sup> and has since become mainstreamed as a way of thinking about, exploring and measuring a country's international influence. Nye's concept originally focused on exploring three pillars related to the source of a country's soft power (political values, culture and foreign policy). Since then, the concept has received significant further theoretical and methodological attention, with at least four existing indices regularly measuring soft power globally. One of these, Portland's Soft Power 30, extends Nye's definition as follows:

“soft power describes the use of positive attraction and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives. Soft power shuns the traditional foreign policy tools of carrot and stick, seeking instead to achieve influence by building networks, communicating compelling narratives, establishing international rules, and drawing on the resources that make a country naturally attractive to the world<sup>3</sup>

There have been a number of further publications in recent years that have explored how UK soft power is related to the work of the British Council. McPherson *et al.* (2017) conducted a literature review exploring how arts and

<sup>1</sup> British Council and Goethe Institut (2019), Cultural Value: Cultural Relations in Societies in Transition, A literature review (p7).

<sup>2</sup> Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft power. *Foreign policy*, (80), 153-171.

<sup>3</sup> <https://softpower30.com/what-is-soft-power/>

culture activities are related to soft power outcomes (including British Council and non-British Council work), and made the following observations:

- Arts and cultural activities should be more clearly tied to soft power outcomes and objectives if this is a core aim of project funding
- The causal relationship between other intended outcomes and impacts to soft power impacts should be further clarified
- Clarifying intended outcomes in this way has to be done before project activity begins (e.g. accidental soft power outcomes exist but could be far more focused and higher impact if explicitly acknowledged from the start)
- Longer-term approaches to project funding and evaluation are crucial if these effects are to be seriously measured. Local arts and culture organisations (i.e. often the beneficiaries) are unlikely to be equipped to adequately measure soft power impacts or contributory factors<sup>4</sup>

More recently, research by the Institute for International Cultural Relations at the University of Edinburgh was based on statistical regression techniques that sought to identify the variables that are independently related to soft power impacts (as measured by international student numbers, tourism and foreign direct investment (FDI)). The findings were clear that the extent of international cultural relations work carried out by organisations, including the British Council, was directly linked to increased FDI, foreign student numbers and that a high culture ranking is directly linked to 'hard power' outcomes such as GDP (although this is a correlational relationship).

“ Cultural institutions, like the British Council and Goethe-Institut, were found to be influential for attracting international students, international tourists, and FDI. The more countries that host a cultural institute, the better the return for the parent state. For example, a 1% increase in

the number of countries a cultural institution from country X covers results in almost 0.66 percent increase in FDI for that country. In 2016 such a rise would have been worth £1.3bn for the UK, which recorded £197bn of foreign investment. It also prompts a 0.73% increase in international students for its country of origin. Using the latest UK figures from 2015/16, this equates to almost 3,200 additional international students. Finally, a country's cultural ranking in the world also matters for attracting FDI and for political influence in the world. The impact of a high culture rank is higher than any of the other factors in the models presented for voting in the UN General Assembly – including the hard power of a state's economic strength as measured in GDP.<sup>5</sup>

The limits of correlational links in measuring the impact of soft power activities was also highlighted by Crossick and Kaszynska (2016)<sup>6</sup> in their discussion of the work of Copenhagen Economics. This model identified a link between public diplomacy activities and economic growth in the home country, but these were considered among many other assumptions and could not be causally related. That said, the work indicates that mutual trust, talent exchange and improved image and perception are crucial contributory factors to how cultural relations activities by one country are related to mutual bilateral benefits.

### 1.3 Defining the research objectives and methodology

Within this context, this research explores the various aspects of value that have been created and reported across the British Council projects and

<sup>4</sup> McPherson et al. and British Council (2017) Arts, Cultural Relations and Soft Power: Developing an Evidence Base

<sup>5</sup> University of Edinburgh and British Council (2019) Soft Power Today, Measuring the Influences and Effects

<sup>6</sup> Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) Understanding the value of arts and culture, The AHRC Cultural Value Project (p57)

programmes that fall within the ‘showcasing’ strand of work. Specifically, the research objectives were as follows:

1. Through some additional targeted primary research develop the criteria and undertake an assessment of what has been the value to UK arts and cultural organisations of the British Council’s arts showcasing work over the past 5 years (Considering economic value, artistic value, new relationships / connections developed etc.)
2. Consider how other cultural relations organisations approach their arts showcasing, how they deliver arts showcasing and what has been the impact from their arts showcasing work as compared to the British Council’s approach
3. Explore how the British Council’s arts showcasing makes a contribution to UK soft power and cultural relations (UK reputation, influence and attraction) drawing on the latest thinking; what were the particular features of the showcasing programmes and contexts that made a difference?
4. Provide a set of considered recommendations for the future development of our arts showcasing work informed by the evidence collected and analysed

Table 2 (on the following page) outlines the methodology we applied in order to meet these objectives, including a review of existing research and evaluation of showcasing work from the past five years, a survey of UK and in-country participants (focusing on Brazil, the Middle East, and Nigeria), interviews with participants, British Council staff and ‘strategic stakeholders’, including representatives from other cultural relations organisations, representatives from each of the UK arts councils, UK Government and others. A full list of interviewees and sample sizes is provided in the appendix.

From the existing research and the brief for this research we were aware of five mechanisms by which arts showcasing work is likely to have an impact on cultural relations outcome (including soft power). We therefore designed the

research tools to explore reported value against each of these mechanisms, considering how this value could be reported as artistic, cultural, professional and economic (and recognising the overlap that exists between these categories).

**Table 1 - Areas of value to explore in relation to established research on influence and attraction effects**

Mechanism	Main areas of value to explore
— Extent of networks established, maintained and grown, including perceived strength and value of networks and collaborations	Artistic Cultural Professional Economic
— Professional development catalysed by participation	Professional Economic
— Levels of understanding of cultural sector in partner country/countries	Cultural Professional Economic
— Cultural learning and interculturality	Cultural
— Perceptions of trust and potential for future collaboration or investment	Cultural Economic Professional

From the outset we knew It was unlikely that this research would lead to an equation or matrix that enables anyone to predict ‘levels’ of cultural relations or soft power impact based on levels or types of input. However, the intention has been to enable a greater understanding of how arts showcasing work operates in the process of developing cultural relations, influence and attraction.

**Table 2 - Research objectives and methods designed and applied**

Evaluation question	Method
1. Through some additional targeted primary research develop the criteria and undertake an assessment of what has been the <b>value to UK arts and cultural organisations</b> of the British Council's arts showcasing work over the past 5 years (Considering economic value, artistic value, new relationships / connections developed etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Surveys with UK and in-country organisations and professionals who have participated in British Council showcasing programmes in the previous five years (n=103).</li> <li>— 'Opt-in' depth interviews with participants and a range of British Council staff.</li> <li>— Desk research of previous research and evaluation exploring types of activity, mechanisms, reported outcomes and impact.</li> </ul>
2. Consider how other cultural relations organisations approach their arts showcasing, how they deliver arts showcasing and what has been the impact from their arts showcasing work as comparison to the British Council's approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Interviews with Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes and other international art and cultural relations stakeholders</li> <li>— Document review of externally published research and evaluation relating to showcasing work by these organisations</li> </ul>
3. Explore how the British Council's arts showcasing's <b>makes a contribution to UK soft power and cultural relations</b> (UK reputation, influence and attraction) drawing on the latest thinking; what were the particular features of the showcasing programmes and contexts that made a difference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Desk research of previous research and evaluation exploring types of activity, mechanisms, reported outcomes and impact. Testing this framework through surveys and interviews with participants</li> <li>— Refining the framework in conversation with stakeholders, partners and international peers</li> </ul>
4. Provide a set of <b>considered recommendations</b> for the future development of our arts showcasing work informed by the evidence collected and analysed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Through the analysis of each of these sources of data we provide a set of recommendations based on where we see effects have been most strongly demonstrated and the factors that have contributed to this.</li> </ul>

## 2. Document review

As a first stage in the research we reviewed 27 documents relating to showcasing programmes in the previous five years. This included full-scale external evaluations of British Council programmes, as well as internally produced reviews, and relevant reports produced by other organisations (a full list of documents reviewed is included in the appendix). These were reviewed while also being mindful of the recent reports by University of the West of Scotland, University of Edinburgh, and the British Council itself discussing some of the theoretical and applied connections between promoting arts and culture internationally and UK soft power.

This section highlights some of the key considerations from this document review on the design and implementation of this research exercise exploring the value and impact of British Council showcasing programmes. The document review process also informed the design of the survey and the interview topic guides.

### 2.1 Main findings from document review

Many documents outlined a need to engage with delegates and participants to explore any follow-on engagement within or between nations after initial activity takes place, this was generally out of scope for the research and evaluation reviewed (but is a clear intention of the current research).

Much evidence of the impact of showcasing is limited to media and online coverage and footprint which, while a useful indicator of publicity, does not extend to any impact on perception change. This raises a question about the extent to which a focus on public impact of seasons and festivals is always necessary. Stronger evidence is provided of changes taking place with cultural actors and policy makers (i.e. producers, programmers and 'taste-makers'), therefore further focus should go on exploring effects within these groups, and then potentially attempting to capture knock-on impact on publics and audiences.

If focusing on media reach, engagement and sentiment is to remain as a method for exploring impact, further work may need to be done to engage with broadcast partners in the UK and target countries. For example, the Spirit of '47

evaluation discussed how the partnership between British Council, Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC *could have* created greater impact before, during and after programmed events, but this potential was not realised due to a lack of clear responsibilities across the partnership. There is a need to consider the implications of this for how media partners are engaged with in the future (within and beyond the UK).

It was also implicit in many of the findings that there is a need to engage with individuals and organisations not already connected to or involved with the British Council (both within the UK and internationally). A question is raised as to how engagement with UK stakeholders can be made more strategic. This could be done through canvassing equivalents in the targeted countries in advance to clarify which UK organisations and individuals could add the most value in planned exchanges.

Overall, much of the programming summarised in the reports appeared quite reactive rather than strategic (i.e. responding to opportunities rather than proactively establishing them based on previous learning), further preparatory and lead-in work is required to ensure that the contribution-chain (i.e. how showcasing work may lead to soft power outcomes) is understood and established before programming takes place and events are held (e.g. in showcasing work, there was little evidence that the aims, objectives or intentions of delegates were explored systematically in advance).

It remained unclear whether programmes are promoting 'UK values' internationally, or to what extent 'UK values' can be said to exist as a concept. Some showcasing programmes were described as providing an opportunity to explore and debate shared global values via art and culture and acknowledging and celebrating difference, which it could be said represents 'UK values', however there was a prevailing lack of clarity about what the cultural outputs were intended to represent about the UK, if anything.

Across the programmes reviewed, making the UK attractive as a place to visit and work based on a reputation for producing interesting arts and culture (i.e. cultural output that is challenging, engaging, and entertaining, globally-leading) seemed to be the dominant assumption, although this was rarely presented as a critical objective (i.e. it was generally implicit rather than explicit).

In measuring the impact of cultural relations there is a need to recognise the existing cultural context of target countries and the status of different cultural outputs (e.g. literature, theatre). There are limitations in using the same impact measurement if value will be conceived of differently (e.g. Shakespeare will likely have a different cultural value in Russia, China and the Horn of Africa).

There was an interesting tension between reported fondness among foreign publics for British heritage and well-known cultural symbols (e.g. the Queen, ancient buildings, Shakespeare) and recognition of contemporary UK cultural output. There may be a need in programme planning to provide opportunities and activities that enable initial interest in the UK based on traditional symbols into an active introduction to contemporary forms.

Linked to this, it was raised in a few documents that some of the 'dialogue' in showcasing programmes can be a bit serious in tone. Sometimes the element of fun and entertainment, which can be more universally appealing, is lost or overlooked in the interests of more 'worthy' impact (e.g. Spirit of '47). As with understanding the cultural context in target countries it was noted that for many large-scale audience engagement projects the 'offer' has to be entertaining if seeking to appeal to broad publics.

Based on the findings reported, more 'traditional' showcasing work (i.e. in UK; Fashion/Edinburgh/Music) seems to have lower impact in terms of changing or improving perceptions of the UK abroad, despite clear business generation potential. Those non-UK individuals and organisations involved tend to already understand and appreciate the UK's cultural outputs and potential. There was also less evidence of in-country follow-on activities in the evaluations reviewed.

In most of the documents reviewed UK and in-country organisations recognise and report the value of new relationships, but this tends to be regarded as implicit and rarely discussed explicitly or with set aims on where this may lead.

Overall there was a lack of data directly linking showcasing work to long-term outcomes related to UK influence, attraction or soft power. Indeed, just five of the 27 documents reviewed explicitly referred to soft power as an outcome or area of interest.

The majority of the reported outcomes related to the development of more interesting, novel or creative cultural outputs and programming either in the UK or in the target countries. This is a valuable outcome in itself, but the evidence

base of recent years did little to explore how this may be related to shifts in perception, empathy or trust. Similarly, total audience numbers where public facing outputs were a significant feature of the programme were reported, but rarely alongside significant attempts to explore perception change within these populations.

The existing evidence base was stronger on demonstrating the following indicators and outcomes of arts showcasing work:

- Scale of activity and audience
- Extent of involvement from UK and in-country arts and cultural professionals
- Levels of engagement in activity (i.e. descriptive statistics)
- Reaction to activity from public and cultural professionals (although this tended to be limited to positive/negative, and in some cases to broader perceptions of the UK).
- Scale of media coverage

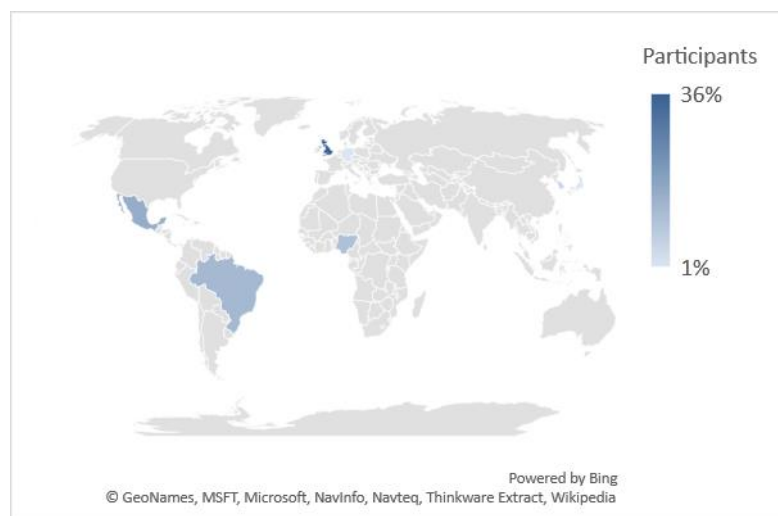
There were limited explorations of the types of longer-term outcomes that may be more closely related to soft power impacts such as:

- Intention to work together after activity
- Growth of active professional networks
- Positive change in perception of UK
- Attribution of the above to British Council activity

### 3. Value of arts showcasing work to UK and in-country arts and cultural organisations

To contribute to some of these gaps we surveyed UK and in-country participants who were involved in British Council Showcasing programmes in the past five years. The survey was available in four languages (English, Portuguese, Arabic and Chinese) and a total of 103 survey responses were received. In addition, we conducted follow-up in-depth interviews with six participants who opted-in to discuss their experience further.

**Figure 1 Current country of residents of survey respondents**



Source: BOP Consulting (2019)

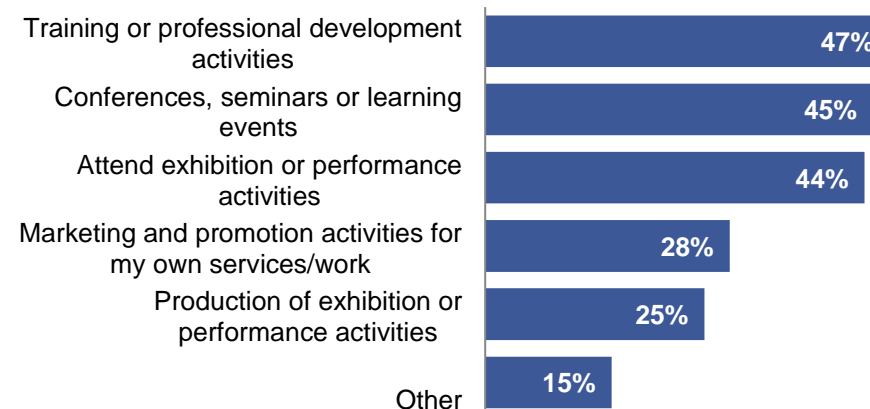
Survey respondents represented a wide geography of recent British Council showcasing activity. European participants were mainly from the UK (36%); of which 18% were from Scotland. 29% of participants were from Latin America (16% Mexico and 13% Brazil). 12% of participants came from Asia – South Korea (6%), Armenia (5%) and Japan (1%). Two other significant in-country

participant groups include Qatar (12%) and Nigeria (11%). The full table is included in the appendix.

66% of the survey respondents were involved in British Council's showcasing programme as organisations. These organisations were mainly small to medium size (1-200 full-time employees or equivalent), with mostly small organisations (65%) being represented. The programmes and initiatives represented among respondents are also included in the appendix.

The types of activities participants were mainly involved in were training and professional development activities (47%); conferences, seminars or learning events (45%); and attending exhibition or performances (44%).

**Figure 2 Types of activities participated (N=103)**

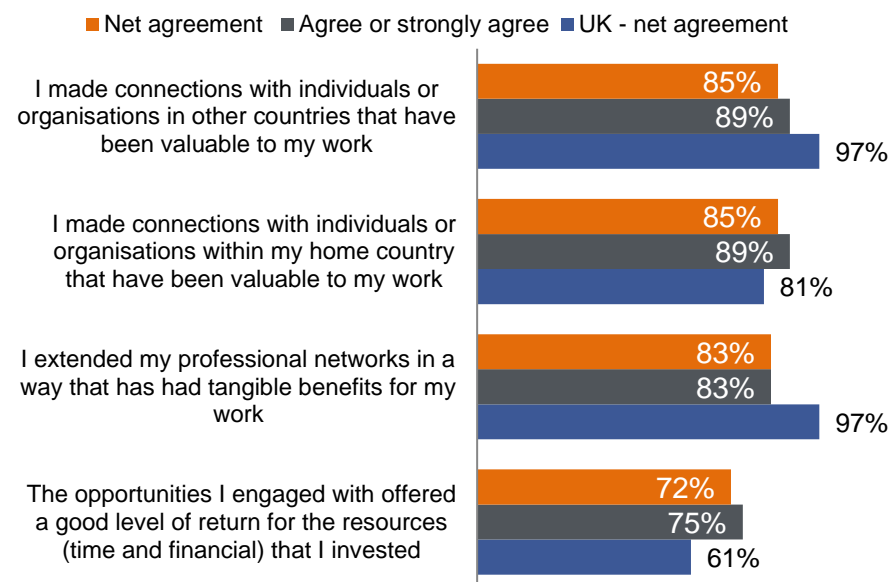


Source: BOP Consulting (2019)

### 3.1 Extent of networks established, maintained and grown, including perceived strength and value of networks and collaborations

Networks and networking is regularly identified as the most valuable aspect of British Council showcasing programmes. Extended from these networks are the benefits of knowledge exchange and collaboration, which were also identified as significant benefits to the participants.

**Figure 3 Impact on participants' professional networks (N=88; UK only N=33)<sup>7</sup>**



Source: BOP Consulting (2019)

Survey findings show that participants have made valuable professional contacts in other countries and domestically as a result of taking part in

showcasing activities. Participants also felt that these contacts have had 'tangible' benefits for their work, particularly those based in the UK (97% and the biggest difference between UK and non-UK participants). Scores were lower for whether the opportunities offered a good level of return for the time and financial resources expended but remained overwhelmingly positive (75% of all participants agreeing).

Although fewer people agreed that the opportunities offered a good level of return (value for money), *no one disagreed* that their professional networks had been extended in a way that has brought tangible benefits for their work. Each of which indicates that those surveyed considered their involvement in these projects in the past five years as having significant value for their on-going work.

85% of survey respondents reported that they had made connections with individuals or organisations that have been valuable to their work. Of these, 40 respondents from six countries provided the number of active contacts they have made per country and reported over 900 new contacts from over 30 countries. When adjusted for outliers, this corresponds to around 17 new active global contacts being established on average per participant as a result of British Council showcasing activities. The number of 'inward' contacts to the UK reported is also significant, with 36 non-UK based respondents reporting 329 contacts in the UK (an average of 9.1 per participant).

The location of the newly established contacts and the global network catalysed by the British Council showcasing activities are presented in Figures 4 and 5. Both demonstrate the effects of British Council showcasing activity for establishing and strengthening ties for the UK, as well as the significant catalysing effect for countries to establish new international connections.

<sup>7</sup> Note: Net agreement is calculated by subtracting the percentage of agreed or strongly agreed from disagreed and strongly disagreed. It gives an indication of how polarised the views are. 'UK net agreement' relates to responses from professionals based in the UK as compared to the full sample.

**Figure 4 - Number and location of new live contacts reported by British Council Showcasing participants (2013-2019, n=40)**

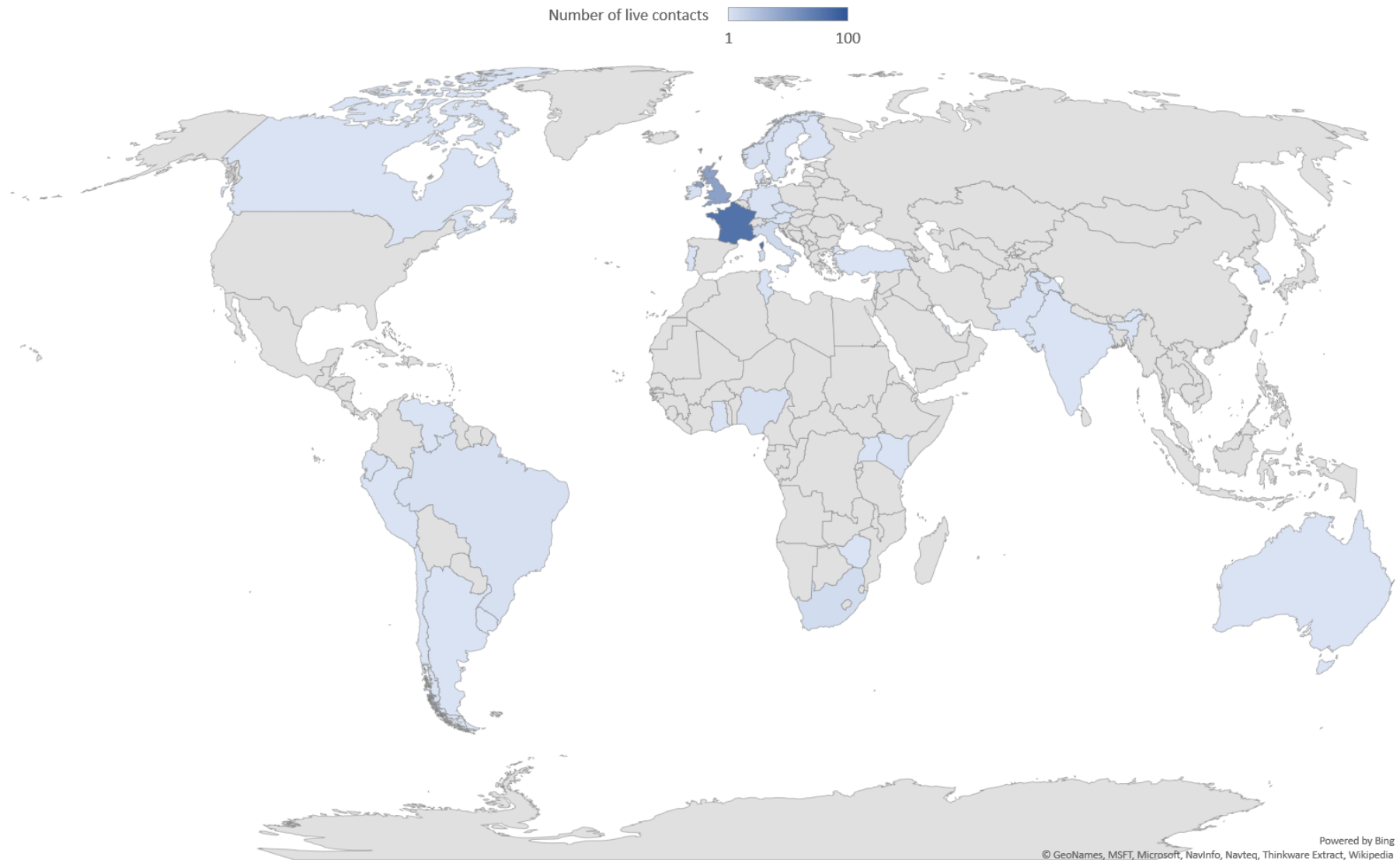
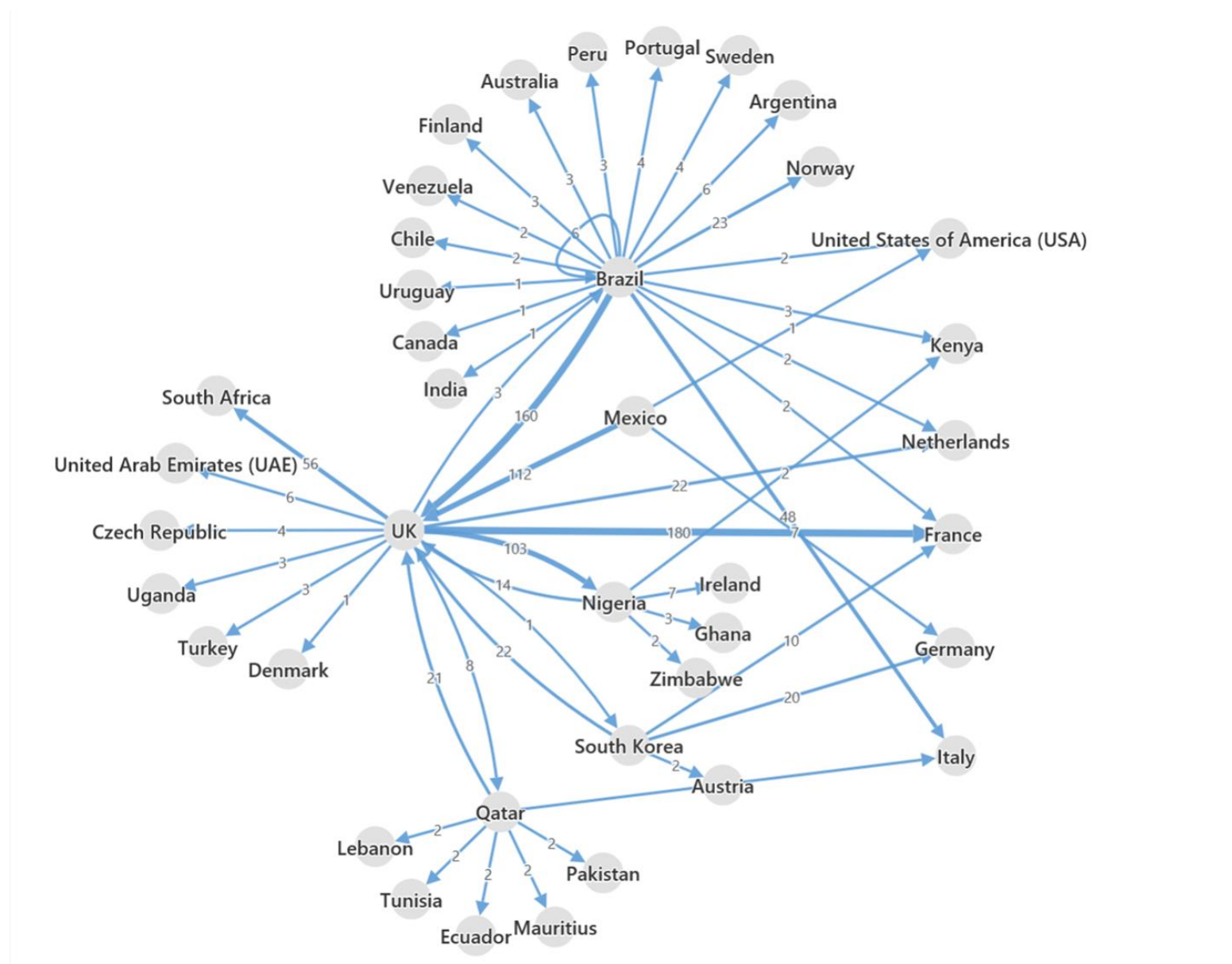


Figure 5 - Reported number and location of new live contacts as a result of British Council showcasing work (2013-2019, n=40)



When asked what was most valuable about the connections they had made, survey respondents valued the opportunities to exchange information, and keeping up-to-date about the latest developments in their sectors in other countries. Sharing knowledge, new approaches and best practice were also listed as benefits of the established contacts. Many respondents have also explored opportunities for closer collaboration with international contacts. 37% of respondents reported having engaged in business development activities with these contacts since meeting and there was a consensus that the connections are likely to lead to more opportunities in the future. Some examples included:

- A collaboration between Belfast and Nigeria for theatre producers working in disadvantaged communities sharing arts skills with young people in five diverse locations
- One respondent received an invitation to direct a future theatre production in China
- Collaboration on international publications and journalistic work

Another reported impact from establishing these networks was around developing a sense of community at the international level *and* domestically. In some cases participation in showcasing activities also improved the visibility and reputation of participants among their peers.

“ It has contributed to the realisation that different organisations work towards a same goal: to foster British excellence throughout all arts forms, and to create opportunities for makers and the public. It reinforced a sense of connection on a national [UK] level.

“ Our involvement in this created a good perception within the UK creative community of us being involved in this space - it helps emphasise our interest and our place in the creative community in the UK.

## 3.2 Professional development catalysed by participation

On average survey respondents rated 83 (out of 100), when being asked to rate the value of these activities to their professional development.

In addition to the value of the networks, involvement in the British Council showcasing activities contributed to the capacity building of the participating organisations and individuals. These capacity building aspects included learning other countries' practices, sharing notes on projects, and seeking informal advice. Anecdotally organisations which were involved in organising in-country activities benefitted from working alongside the British Council which improved their understanding of partnerships and capacity to partner with other prominent organisations.

“ I have acquired a broad vision of how much a queer festival can be comprehensive and aggregate for a city. I also had the opportunity to present my collective projects to a much wider international community than I had previously, creating new possibilities for exchange.

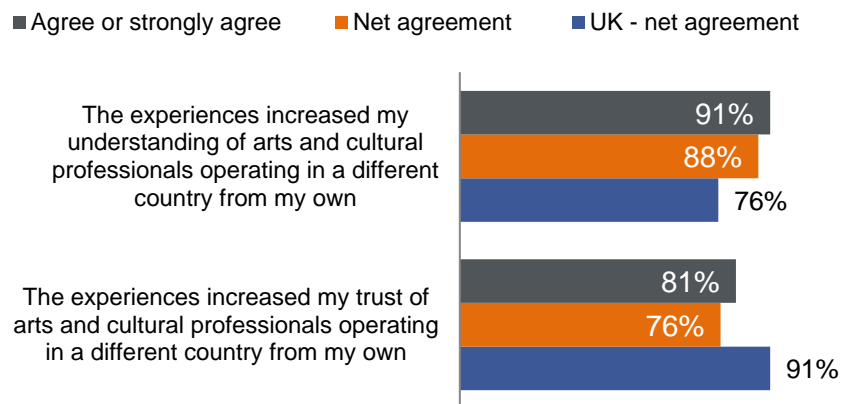
“ Our understanding about partnership has changed. In the past we thought of British Council as a resource provider (e.g. flight tickets); now, even though this might still be the case we would ask why, what for, what will be the big results. There is now a sense of collaboration, it's taking a new direction we now wish to promote and to give knowledge to our local communities, we want the documentary society to spread the voice, to share knowledge and experiences and to potentialize the possibilities and capacities of joining up society - non-governmental organisations and filmmakers to explore the impact of film.

### 3.3 Levels of understanding of cultural sector in partner countries

There was a strong consensus that the showcasing activities increased participants' understanding of arts and cultural professionals working in a different country (91%). Respondents' comments also mentioned gaining better knowledge about the region. The consensus was slightly lower that the experience increased participants' trust of international peers. The findings for the latter were significantly higher for UK organisations compared to international respondents (91% against 76%).

“Our work here which intersects arts and culture helped me be better able to understand where the common understanding is right now in Korea, where the sector is right now, what they're interested in, what

**Figure 6 Impact on understanding of cultural sector in partner countries (N=88; UK only N=33)**



Source: BOP Consulting (2019)

preparation or what needs to be done to prepare our UK artists to collaborate with Korea, how to brief the artists.

“When I first went to Brighton six years ago, it influenced a lot my way of thinking about the music market. I saw what music can do for society. I was a journalist-turned-music-producer. At that time I had a music festival for 13 years and now since I was there I created another music festival, the experience I had this year helps me a lot to think about my own work, what kind of programme I can do, a lot of new ideas of venues.

### 3.4 Cultural learning and interculturality

91% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the showcasing programme created an opportunity to share UK 'cultural values' with other countries, with only 1% of the respondents holding an opposite view.

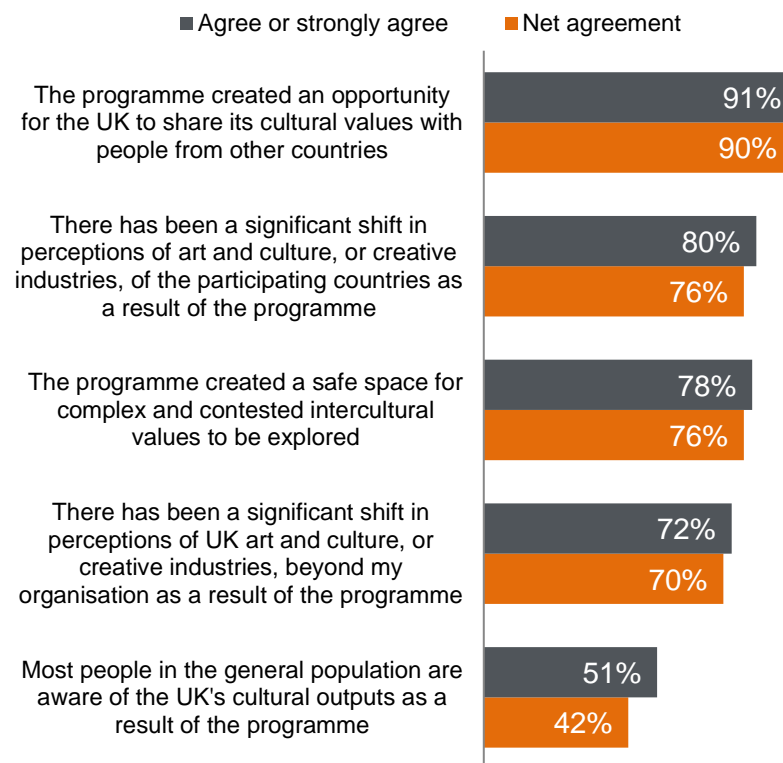
Showcasing projects are also reported as effective at shifting perceptions of the cultural industries of participating countries (80% agreement), and the UK (72% agreement). The net agreement of 78% that the programme created a safe space for complex and contested intercultural values to be explored is also significant, given the need for exchange work of this nature not to become politicised (despite regularly involving work in 'politically sensitive' geographic locations).

Impact on raising the general population's awareness of UK cultural output was weaker, however a significant proportion agreed that there was likely an impact among the general population (42% net agreement). As with the other findings, this is strongly related to the design of the showcasing activity and if there were activities seeking to engage with the general population or not. The findings from this section support the idea that establishing strong working relationships

between cultural professionals will likely achieve stronger impacts than aiming to create change among large portions of the population.

“ I know much more about the British Council’s work. What has impressed me is how much the UK has invested in the British Council and how effectively they are in being the ambassador and advocate for British culture.

**Figure 7 Impact on cultural learning and interculturality (N=83)**



Source: BOP Consulting (2019)

## 3.5 Perceptions of trust and potential for future collaboration or investment

### 3.5.1 Exploring cultural difference

Cultural difference was not only presented in artistic expression but also difference in practices and working style. Interviewees mentioned the value of this as a learning curve that enabled them to better understand the cultural context of potential partners.

“Most interesting point [learning] is actually learning about the countries we’re working with. We have good relationships working with European countries already. Indonesia is pretty recent to us and has been our focus recently and with the UK:ID work. We learned a lot about working with different cultures, how to manage difficult partners e.g. last-minute planning, late planning.... With UK:ID programme we were very lucky that we worked with similar partners as the previous year [Discover Indonesia]. We know how each other work and have built trust. That made organising UK:ID a lot smoother.

“There’s another important aspect about developing their [artist in residence] own artistic culture and embedding knowledge on both sides. We have an artist in residence with us. We try to develop them and let them come to our meetings so that they can meet our contacts, present their work as well as give better understanding about their culture.

### 3.5.2 Added value of British Council

Interviewees agreed that in-country British Council are well connected and embedded locally. Their local expertise helped participants to navigate through some initial cultural differences and contextualise their activities and engagement.

“Without the support of British Council we wouldn’t be able to execute these activities – not only on funding but also other resources and knowledge. A lot of these relationships are long term. By being able to work with each other there are opportunities for future projects. This is also valuable for staff development as they learn to work internationally with different countries, it helps develop the organisation.

“Both British Council in UK and British Council in Korea come to play [in making the exchange effective]. It’s really great British Council UK being slightly independent from British Council in-country but still working on the same team. UK British Council can tell us this is happening, help us frame expectations and be our sounding boards. Whilst the in-country British Council has the local contacts and knowledge. In that sense it works really well.

“British Council very closely understands Qatar. It’s well connected and has a strong presence. I have seen qualitatively that the Council is helping us reaching out to the community, bringing people who

hadn't been to our hall before.... An equally dramatic way that the British Council supported us is have publicised through their social media, emails, publicise event we're doing with them. They'll publicise it and there'll be a big bump in our ticket sales, this has happened more than once.

applied to West Africa work based on the same model.

73% of respondents indicated that they have worked with the British Council on something else since taking part in the showcasing work and continue to develop ideas and plans together. This indicates how the links made through this work can lead to ongoing collaboration, not just between cultural actors within and between nations, but with the British Council itself.

### 3.5.3 Creating safe spaces and trust

Interviewees articulated how the British Council provided trust and space for partner organisations to develop their programme of activities. In-country organisations were able to learn from previous work and use the additional funding from the British Council to develop a more effective programme.

“ After this we built the confidence to propose to Goethe Institut with details and results we did with British Council and did the... programme with Germany in 2016.... Regarding the importance of joining up and brainstorming ideas together with institutions such as British Council, to make them partners on this initiative, without their trust and confidence would be basically harder to work and develop a programme as this.

“ Within our residencies programme we focused on personal development. No results are expected from artists, but we encourage artists to share ideas to other artists. It is hugely successful. We started working with the format of bilateral exchange, presentation and sharing have influenced our activities with Argentina and developed as a model [of practice]. Our idea of Argentina has now been

## 4. How other countries approach showcasing and stakeholders' understanding of the value of the British Council's showcasing work

### 4.1 Reflections on the role and function of British Council showcasing work

The other international cultural relations organisations that we spoke to recognised the benefits of sharing strategies and impact findings with the British Council. Although neither of their approaches directly replicated that taken by the British Council, intended outcomes do overlap with some British Council showcasing work. The other international organisations tended to include these activities in other programmes, alongside promoting individual seasons, festivals and event-based interventions.

Overall, the international representatives we spoke to universally supported the idea of cultural relations organisations working together to achieve shared goals, maintaining space for each to meet specific organisational objectives, but recognising that the challenges these programmes are seeking to address tend to be shared, rather than country specific.

“I'm personally convinced that the time for acting unilaterally is over – the global situation calls for collaboration – regardless of Brexit. If Europe wants to continue to gain trust it has to work together. We can't cooperate with other continents, if Europe refuses to work in this way.

Everyone we spoke to was able to identify the value of the showcasing work recently supported by the British Council. The 'immediate' value identified by

strategic stakeholders referred to the need to support bilateral and multilateral cultural exchange as a core way of broadening dialogue between countries and across the international community in general. Value in this sense did not relate directly to soft power outcomes, but instead to the need to maintain open dialogue in an increasingly complex and globalised world.

“The British Council approach is quite progressive. We have the New European Agenda for Culture and External Relations, but British Council is already there, working closely with people. It also has a clear international approach to inputs and who is involved.

“Thank goodness we have the British Council doing this and doing what they do. All their work is very high class and thoughtful. The quality is never questioned.

“British Council can make a difference in strengthening bilateral dialogue. Politics and trade are at the centre of Brexit, but language and culture is what binds people together across nations. It's important for countries to be seen working together – highlighting shared culture and celebrating difference. Press and marketing is always important for this too.

For the UK Government it is useful to work via an intermediary organisation who can engage with cross-cutting policy sectors in countries around the world in a way that direct Government representatives cannot. In this way, priorities can be aligned but not at the expense of the independence of the British Council

which, as highlighted in the findings above, is essential in building trust, and therefore more representative engagement in programmes of activity.

“One of the great things that British Council does, is networks – Department for International Trade (DIT) could never achieve this as they are so narrow. Indonesia for example, chances are the British Council will have significant resources and networks, which is invaluable to DIT. It's much easier to tap into British Council expertise than via the UK Government, so this is really valuable.

The goal of all seasons, festivals and showcasing work is to establish reciprocal relationships but this is not always possible due to the non-equivalence of the cultural policy context in partner countries (e.g. some don't have a culture department or national funding agency). This means that on occasion intended activities and aims simply don't get off the ground. Nevertheless, attempts are made to engage with a broad range of countries across global regions, and it was not felt by those we spoke to that there were regional restrictions in which countries are invited to collaborate in showcasing work.

## 4.2 Exploring global identities

Interviewees discussed how showcasing work creates opportunities for exploring shared and contested identities. Much of the UK and in-country's cultural outputs and process is focused on providing safe, mutually respected, spaces for engaging in narrative explorations of identity, which in turn can enable deeper moments of engagement in cultural relations work (i.e. finding common ground, developing empathy, and shared emotional responses).

“Arts engagement and participation can act as an 'exploratory glue' for bringing diverse sets of interests together and exploring contested ideas in a safe way. In that sense art and culture can really link the local

to the global. Using culturally specific forms to engage with global audiences is a really interesting way of connecting people together and getting beyond local or national limitations

This focus on 'identity work' in showcasing programmes is a clear asset, however there is also a danger of conflating agendas between promoting the UK as the producer of attractive entertainment and positioning the UK as the enablers of effective cultural relations work between countries' cultural actors and organisations.

It was mentioned by several interviewees that large proportions of the population mainly engage in cultural outputs as a form of entertainment and distraction, not as a way of intentionally exploring the cultural values of the country of origin or engaging in 'identity work'. It was advised that the British Council considers separate strategies for promoting UK cultural productions among large public audiences and more targeted work that seeks to engage specific, usually culturally engaged, audiences, sectors and actors.

Linked to this, one of the principles of the arts and culture work generally featured in British Council showcasing is freedom of expression. This is not something that is supported in all countries of the world, and can potentially create a mis-match, especially when artistic content is critical of domestic Government policy. The question remains whether, in promoting UK cultural output as indicative of UK values, freedom of expression must be a shared principle in deciding where to work and how to programme.

There is a reasonable caution about aspects of showcasing work being seen to focus on 'capacity-building' in targeted countries (i.e. assuming a deficit), however, it was argued that the value is perceived of as genuinely two-way, especially for Small and Medium Size Enterprises. As highlighted in the findings from participants, this value relates to improved networks, knowledge, and markets for those participating.

Crucially this was reported as having value for all countries, despite their level of 'development'. However, it was also recognised that there is an increasing need for clarification about what the approach and aims may need to be between ODA and non-ODA countries. There is a need to continue to demonstrate how

improved cultural relations acts as a valuable means of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries, as well as having value to the UK.

“ I had a meeting at British Council on Tuesday with Bengali delegates – exchanging ideas and practice from both sides – exploring partnerships [about] Jaipur literature festival and arts residencies in India. A balanced exchange about opportunities on all sides. Our reps in India programming Indian writers. This was all set up by British Council - getting people around the table. This is fantastic – it goes well beyond perceived imbalances between developed/developing tropes.

“ Soft power matters to government. but artists don't care. That's not a driver for their work. However they understand that there are always motivations and agendas behind funding streams. People are savvy enough to know that it's there. British Council are good at this and set out to make relationships bi-lateral. But they are in a bind in relation to ODA spending – defence funding rather than need-based funding. FCO and ODA conditions are very short-term, no interest in long-term mutual co-operation.

### 4.3 Strategy and planning

It was mentioned by some that there was not always a clear line of communication between decisions made by British Council and partners in London and the expectations and priorities of in-country teams (reflecting observations made by participants but from a more critical perspective), and

that this has sometimes led to misunderstandings, delays, and in some cases, activities not taking place.

In more positive examples there was a clear demarcation of work between partners, with the 'ownership' of new relationships being attributed between partners and increasing the ease of working, and by extension, value of the relationships for all.

A need reported by almost all we spoke to was that the investment and activity tends to be too short-term. That there are some advantages to high-profile, events-based, interventions, but that more activities need to take place in advance (i.e. longer lead-in times), that there should be longer-term programmes (i.e. at least a year), and that investment in 'background activities', including evaluation, could take place for much longer after the official end of a year or season. This would likely lead to improved impacts for all.

“ Maybe look at where the country priorities are over 10-15 years, not 3-5 reactive seasons. But really committing to areas of solid engagement to allow relationships to become more self-sufficient.

“ The issue is that there is not enough early stage engagement. Quite far into the development process British Council offices make an approach, but it's far too late in the process. Artists and organisations aren't always clear about what's needed and what value they will get.

“ People are pleasantly surprised when they come back, but opportunities should be sold more clearly in advance. Key stakeholders should be involved in setting aims. From a regional perspective these seem like sometimes far from strategic decisions.

“ They could focus a bit less on Seasons and Festivals as ‘Firework Moments’ and more on brokering and supporting long-term bilateral relationships. The longer-term impact would likely be much greater.

These findings indicate that, while the mutual value of arts showcasing work is generally appreciated, there are opportunities to increase the impacts through longer-term planning and commitment to programmes. While it was appreciated that the funding of these programmes is often tied to Government or external timetables, it was also suggested that taking a longer-term approach, aligned to Government strategies, would likely increase value on all sides.

#### 4.4 Engaging a full and representative cultural sector

Several interviewees described how they felt that those cultural organisations and actors encouraged to engage in seasons and festivals did not fully represent the breadth and diversity of the UK’s cultural activity.

“ It tends to be the bigger companies and national companies that get involved in international programmes. That’s possibly to be expected given their stronger capacity but limits some of the more innovative and emerging organisations.

For UK-Japan (2019-2020) British Council provided a number of roadshows across the UK to better engage those who may be interested in participating. Interviewees suggested that this should become the rule rather than the exception and it should become normal for UK cultural actors to feel able to access opportunities to participate in showcasing activity.

Alongside roadshows, it was suggested there could be other approaches taken in promoting opportunities to be involved, including sharing opportunities across

existing (non-British Council) networks and promoting opportunities via social media.

“ They could try widening the net – cultural institutes often have to work with artists that are up and coming because they can’t afford the big names. Need to be really well connected in to the grassroots – not necessarily tied to funded programmes. Residency programmes being promoted strongly across emerging artists for example. There needs to be a culture of openness towards this too. The big orchestras don’t need the help of the [cultural relations organisation] to go on a world tour! It should also be tied into the aims of the programme from the very beginning with a long run-in time to get the right people, not just artists inviting their friends. Quality as the guiding principle. For us, a lot of the decisions are decentralised – lots of freedom to individual offices, which is very important in countries where freedom of expression and movement can be limited. We’re always working within guidelines rather than restrictions.

## 5. How the British Council's arts showcasing contributes to UK soft power and cultural relations

The Festivals and Seasons page on the British Council website describes the work as follows:

“ Helping to create a modern, vibrant and creative image of the UK

Through the promotion of arts, English, science, and education we work on high-profile international festivals and seasons to introduce millions of people around the world to the best of UK culture and innovation.<sup>8</sup>

While not explicitly stating soft power as an outcome or aim, there is a clear indication that promoting a positive image of the UK is at the core of the British Council's showcasing work. This section presents the findings from our interviews with strategic stakeholders when asked how they think showcasing work is linked to UK soft power. Overall, respondents indicated that they were relaxed about the British Council being open and explicit about seeking to achieve soft power effects. But that this should be transparent when engaging with the cultural sector in the UK and in target countries. If the aim of showcasing work is to promote the best of the UK's cultural outputs, attract people to these, and catalyse new relationships and networks, the fact that this is with an aim to strengthen the UK's international reputation and influence can be foregrounded, alongside the other mutually valuable aspects of the work.

### 5.1 Soft power tensions and a need for greater clarity in aims of showcasing work

Some interviewees noted that there is a need to approach questions of soft power and the study of its impact from a cross-disciplinary perspective. There are social, psychological, and economic drivers of soft power effects. It is therefore important to consider each of these aspects in turn to understand how soft power effects function and can be measured.

Most recent attempts to demonstrate the links between showcasing activity and soft power tend to focus on output indicators (i.e. number of new connections, audience numbers, some outcome measures, and in some cases, income generated). However, there is a need to establish measurements that consider psychological reactions to cultural activities, the range and depth of new relationships, the length of time it takes for effects to become apparent, followed by the net gains of a promoting country (in terms of foreign direct investment, overseas students, tourism or other indicators). The aims of cultural relations work are more complex than those of a tourism marketing campaign, and interviewees warned of evaluating this kind of work in a reductive way if these are conflated.

“ British Council is a cultural relations organisation, this requires long term and complex work. GREAT is a marketing campaign. The two things shouldn't be conflated, it's perfectly normal to expect longer term impact for one and shorter term [tourism] impact for the other.

“ There's a real danger around [perceptions of] Empire 2.0 as a consequence of Brexit. The GREAT campaign is at the heart of this. They [British Council] need to be very careful that UK PLC is not running

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/seasons>

the show, otherwise what UK culture is considered as becomes very reductive, and the subtlety of soft power gets lost.

Soft power as an explicit focus of activities concerns making the UK more attractive overseas. However, interviewees highlighted that this could be said to be at odds with agendas related to international cultural relations based on co-operation and mutuality.

Interviewees also mentioned how the policy imperatives for making the UK attractive as a tourist destination, an attractive and trustworthy trade partner, and a globally-leading producer of culture, are not always matched to the values of the cultural actors who are encouraged and expected to take part in showcasing work.

This highlights a tension between:

- Cultural output as investment-seeking attraction

And

- Cultural output as open artistic expression (the freedom of which may be regarded as a core 'British Value')

As discussed above, interviewees indicated that not all UK cultural voices are currently being represented, so the former can sometimes become the default option for the content of seasons, festivals and showcasing (i.e. drawing on the 'go to' cultural organisations and brands). It's not that a qualitative judgement should be made between the functions, but that greater strategic attention should be paid to this when programming showcasing work.

It was highlighted by one interviewee that this is also different from the function of much UK heritage which tends to have an attraction because of its perceived historical value. It could be argued that Shakespeare Lives, for example, was more of a global UK heritage project than a global UK arts initiative, although both would come under the umbrella of 'culture'.

The need to be clearer about which cultural outputs are selected to be represented in showcasing work and why, linked to explicit and transparent soft

power aims, may be the best way forward to acknowledge and ease these perceived tensions.

Despite these tensions arising in the research, it was also stated by interviewees that the balance currently being achieved by the British Council is generally appropriate.

“ The majority of artists and organisations are open to being convinced of the value at a micro-level – they are less concerned with the macro-level. British Council are actually very good at depoliticising involvement and not presenting artists as propaganda.

“ Maintain the current balance. Artists should not feel like sales people for UK PLC.

## 5.2 The soft power function of exporting UK values

Some interviewees mentioned that they consider soft power as being linked to existing values of and perceptions of countries based on politics, history, and in some cases current cultural outputs. They implied that it is perhaps too much to expect the British Council to be responsible for changing hearts and minds as to whether the UK is a good place to visit or work with; there are simply too many variables that contribute to these perceptions.

Interviewees suggested that influence is not the same as attraction and it should be made clearer what the overall aim of showcasing work is in this regard. If it is focused on influence, then it should be seeking to directly change the values and ideas of another culture to be more closely aligned with those of the UK. If the focus is on attraction, it is based on making the UK look like an interesting and trusted, place, to live, visit, work with, and invest in.

Interviewees suggested that the structure of the showcasing programmes needs to be more explicitly tied to one or the other of these aims. At the moment the

conflation of influence and attraction is limiting attempts to better demonstrate impact.

Linked to this, whenever the promotion of UK values was discussed as an aim of showcasing work, the concept itself was seen as problematic.

“ Is cultural diversity potentially a UK value worth exporting?

“ If it's about promoting UK values – codifying values in this way is problematic. The cultural outputs of the UK are communicating values to some degree, and arts and culture can provide a variety of ways of communicating these values. [Surely] this is a precursor to longer lasting political and commercial relationships.

Linked to this it was reported by some that there is a noticeable difference between the focus of the British Council centrally which is often on supporting artist development and international co-operation for artistic purposes but isn't always matched across in-country teams where there is a more explicit focus on UK soft power, influence and attraction (and non-arts impacts). Clarifying how these two aspects are related would lead to better outcomes for partners (e.g. UK Arts Councils and supported artists) and the British Council. The implication here is that there could be a clearer articulation of how supporting artist development is linked to soft power which may ease communication between partners and between the British Council in the UK and its in-country teams.

“ There needs to be honesty and transparency around what funding is going towards and why. It makes sense that there is a national interest in strengthening UK influence and attraction and the links this can have to trade and industry, however the

logic of how this is linked to artist development needs to be made clearer.

One other way this could be made clearer would be if British Council, Arts Council England (and other national arts councils), Department for International Trade and DCMS/GREAT were working together to articulate how showcasing work supports soft power outcomes and could agree on a standard approach to communicating the logic of UK cultural activity and soft power to their, often shared, stakeholders.

There also remains a lack of clarity as to whether the cultural relations aims of showcasing work relate more closely to enabling cultural co-operation *despite* a particular political situation, or are seeking to contribute constructively *to* a political or diplomatic situation. When considered from a soft power perspective, the argument may be that the former enables the latter. However, greater clarity from those supporting this work would likely help cultural actors and strategic stakeholders to understand their own roles and contributions and increase positive impacts.

“ Politics wise it's quite interesting. There's a reluctance from some national cultural organisations to engage with tricky countries like Russia. This implies a difference between the drivers for connecting cultural organisations across borders despite international diplomacy alongside using culture as a way of enabling and promoting international cultural diplomacy (i.e. promoting shared ground for artists despite a political situation).

### 5.3 Suggested ways forward for cultural relations and soft power effects

Interviewees made a number of suggestions as to how future approaches to showcasing work may wish to promote soft power effects.

The first was that the current model seeking to promote bilateral exchange, build trust between nations and ultimately produce stronger diplomatic and trade relationships could also function if less focused on individual nation states. Instead, if particular demographics across regions were targeted (e.g. 15-20 year olds in East Asia, or cultural professionals in South America) it may be possible to better target the impacts of showcasing work. This was suggested as particularly worth considering given the highly fluid and networked way in which people engage with culture across national borders.

Linked to this, if there is a continuing intention to focus on specific nations it was suggested by some interviewees that there could be a clearer strategy for targeting specific audiences within nations. Doing so would also enable more effective impact evaluation and measurement of soft power effects.

Another suggestion was that showcasing work could have a greater focus on cities rather than nations. Recognising the increasing interconnectedness of cities, as well as their high population and cultural asset concentrations, it may be worth considering how current showcasing work could integrate aims for impact at a city level, measured separately from country level impacts (e.g. bilateral or multilateral city exchange). This was especially mentioned in relation to UK cities who feel that their unique cultural identities and assets are lost when wrapped up in 'brand UK'.

Finally, it was suggested by two interviewees that the current showcasing approach exists within a fairly traditional cultural diplomacy paradigm, potentially at the expense of associating with truly global UK cultural exports (e.g. James Bond, David Beckham, Adele). It was suggested that UK popular culture could act as a 'way in' to more nuanced and complex cultural activities and experiences, particularly if impacts are sought at a large-scale public level within nations.

## 6. Emerging Soft Power Impact Framework

The findings presented here show that there is no 'quick win' or basic formula for connecting showcasing activities with soft power impacts. Nevertheless, the findings do indicate a number of ways in which showcasing activities contribute to the causal chain of soft power impacts.

The following 'framework' diagram (Figure 8) is an attempt to represent the findings in a way that enables clearer communication of the logic of showcasing activities and soft power impacts based on the accounts of those participating in and partnering with these programmes. It is intended as a heuristic to enable those involved in designing, promoting, or evaluating showcasing work to better conceptualise the contribution chain towards soft power impacts.

The consequent diagram (Figure 9) presents a similar approach but is based on the 'cultural relations' definition provided at the start of the report. There is clear crossover in terms of the activities and outcomes included, however it may also be argued that the 'cultural relations' contribution chain leaves more room for mutuality as opposed to leading the final impacts towards UK influence and attraction. At this stage both are included to help British Council and its stakeholders to further their thinking and discussion in relation to these types of activities.

Figure 8 - Contribution chain for showcasing work and soft power effects

## Casual Chain of Showcasing Work & Soft Power Impacts

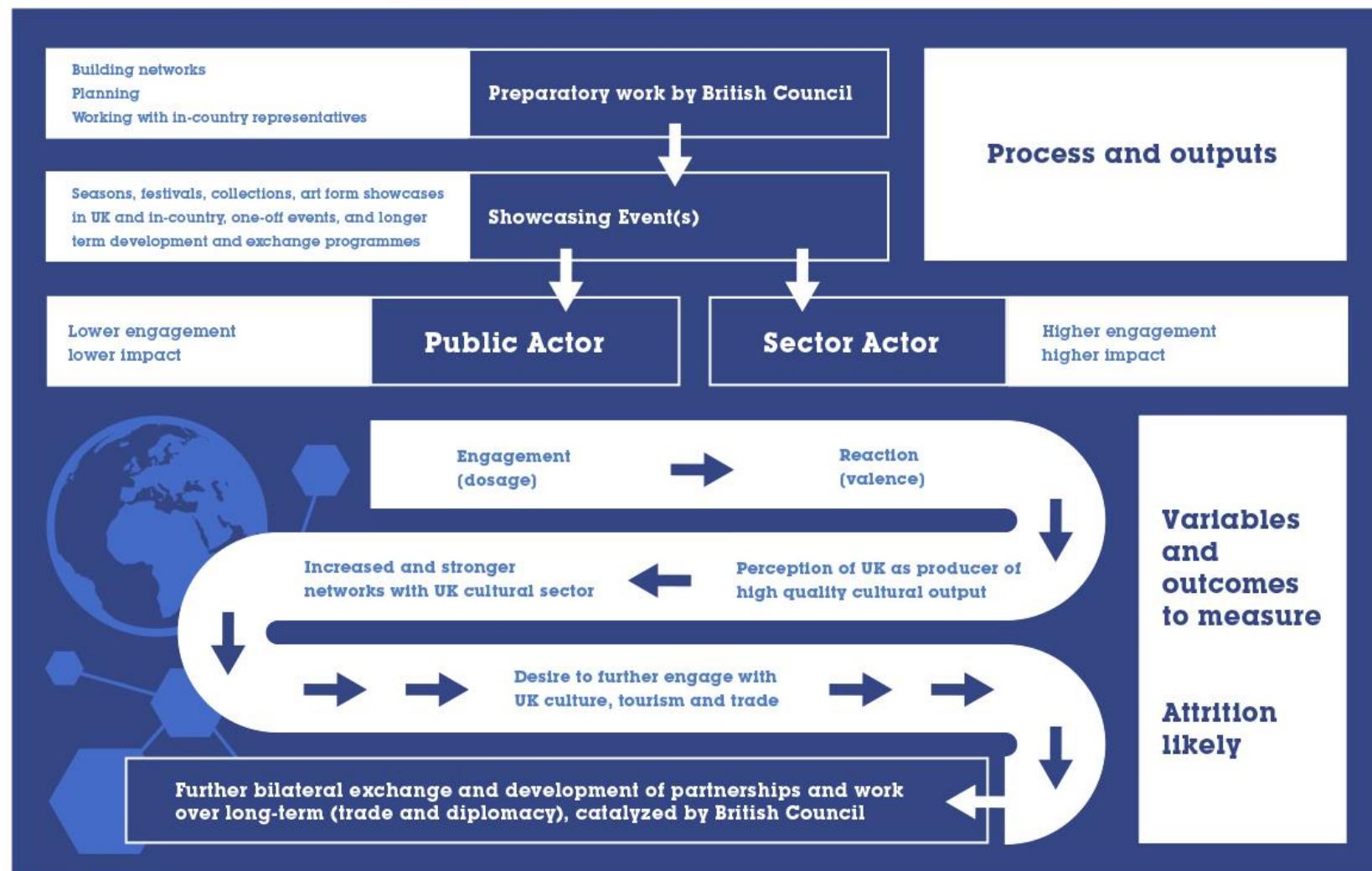
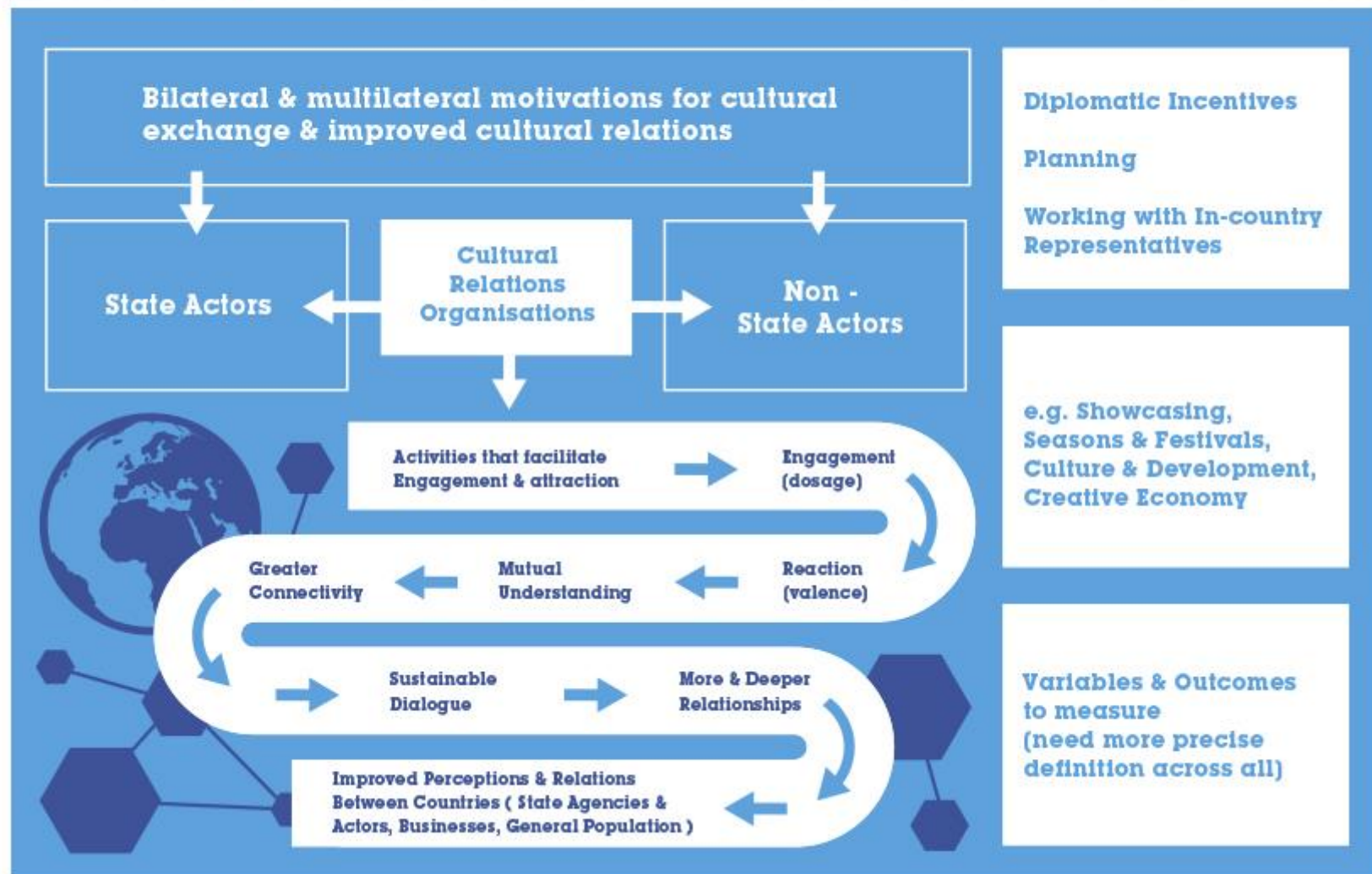


Figure 9 - Contribution chain for showcasing work and cultural relations effects

## Casual Chain of Cultural Relations Activities & Impacts



BOP  
Consulting



## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings from reviewing existing research and evaluation relating to showcasing work indicate that there remain gaps in linking the activities with clear cultural relations or soft power impacts. Much of the evidence base relates to scale of activities and promotional footprint. This tells us something about how many people are made aware of UK cultural outputs, but little about their longer term effects.

The research relating to impact on cultural professionals is generally of a greater depth. However, there is a dearth of longitudinal data presenting the significance of activity and networks over time. This was also a finding of the University of the West of Scotland study exploring research beyond showcasing work specifically.

This research contributes something additional by asking participants in showcasing activities to reflect on their current value, in some cases up to five years after participation took place.

The findings are overwhelmingly positive across the five main dimensions explored:

- Extent of networks established, maintained and grown, including perceived strength and value of networks and collaborations
- Professional development catalysed by participation
- Levels of understanding of cultural sector in partner country/countries
- Cultural learning and interculturality
- Perceptions of trust and potential for future collaboration or investment

Additionally, the network map showing the extensive global network catalysed by British Council activities is an impressive indicator of impact, especially as it based on just 40 responses.

As ever there are limitations posed by the fact that this sample is self-selecting and may over represent those who have had a positive experience.

Our interviews with 'strategic stakeholders' indicated a number of ways in which the British Council's showcasing work has clear value, as well as suggestions on how things could be changed to increase positive impact.

The showcasing work of the British Council is considered high quality, drawing on well established professional networks across global regions and conducted with valuable independence from UK Government.

It was suggested there could be greater clarity in communicating how the showcasing work is seeking to represent and promote 'UK values', as well as a need to better distinguish between work setting out to provide space for exploring global identity, and so-called 'firework moments'.

It was suggested that a more strategic approach could be taken to the showcasing work, focusing on longer-term preparation, activation and evaluation. Linked to this, it was suggested that more could be done to engage with a cultural community that is truly representative of the UK regions and nations. A clearer way of matching in-country needs and expectations with what the UK cultural sector can offer was also suggested.

Overall, the links between showcasing activity and soft power effects were apparent to most that we spoke to, and this was not considered as problematic. The main finding was that soft power aims should be made more explicit at all levels of engagement (i.e. UK cultural actors and those in participating countries). It was also suggested that freedom of expression across broad cultural forms is a core British value, and its promotion globally is a cornerstone of soft power impact.

Ultimately this means that the showcasing activities are effective because cultural professionals are being strongly linked together into global networks where cultural values are explored, contested and negotiated. Enabling the safety and freedom to do this is a core value of the UK (and many other nations). The UK is therefore considered positively when it is seen to be promoting these networks, opportunities and spaces via the work of the British Council.

While we don't have the extent of evidence required to say this is true of all cultural relations organisations, we can presume they offer a similar function. Therefore a shared aim for the future should be for these organisations and their activities to complement each other and enable the process of safe and

free exchange and network building wherever possible (this research shows some emerging evidence of this taking place, for example, where an opportunity provided to a cultural organisation by British Council is developed further with the Goethe-Institut).

Within the context of increasingly fragile democracies across nation states, the challenge remains to enable positive cultural relations impacts for an improved global society, alongside, and beyond the UK national interest.

“Soft power is a two-way street, and there is a danger of this getting lost in the current race to demonstrate the value to the UK – trust, reciprocity and mutuality also come from the UK better understanding and being attracted to work with its global peers.

## 7.1 Recommendations

- Provide longer planning and run-in time to showcasing projects to enable ‘matching’ of needs and offers between UK and international partners.
- Consider surveying and canvassing needs, expectations and existing perceptions of participants in advance of involvement.
- Commission evaluation from the beginning of projects and allow for longitudinal data collection at the end to better understand the contribution chain and which aspects of activities are more closely linked to particular outcomes.
- Provide greater clarity about which aspects of UK values are being shared, promoted and exchanged. This may be different for different initiatives, but greater clarity will enable stronger impact.
- Consider convening seminars or discussions on the basis of these findings with strategic stakeholders (i.e. arts councils, UK Government, cultural relations organisations), and with existing showcasing partners, to further explore and clarify the contribution chain and make soft power aims more clearly defined and articulated (alongside other aims).
- Consider how to increase collaboration with European cultural relations organisations, recognising shared aims (although different methods), and seeking to promote the value of improved global cultural relations
- Seek to repeat this survey and research exercise every 2-3 years to explore longer-term impact on those taking part in showcasing work in recent years, including those currently engaging and scheduled to do so. This research can act as a baseline and template for future approaches. It will be necessary to keep a close record of contact details for those taking part in showcasing work historically and in the future for this approach to be successful.

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Methodology

#### Documents reviewed

Document Title	Author	Date of Publication
Innovation/ZA Evaluation and Insights Report	None stated	March 2016
UK-Russia Year of Culture 2014: The UK Programme Evaluation	None stated	2015
Qatar UK 2013 Year of Culture: Final Evaluation Report	Abdi	March 2015
The World Stage: International Opportunities for UK Arts and Culture	Arts Council England	July 2017
British Council Evidence Strategy for the Arts	BOP Consulting	October 2017
UK / Nigeria 2015-16 End of Programme Report	British Council	2017
UK UAE Stakeholder Findings	British Council	September 2015
UK-ID Festival: Baseline Report: October 2015 – September 2016	British Council	November 2016
The Economic Impact of the Edinburgh Showcase	Centre for Economics and Business Research	March 2016
BC UK ID Programme 2016-18: Evaluation Project Interim Report	Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance	2019
How the British Council works with and adds value to UK Cities of Culture	Dr Beatriz Garcia, Institute of Cultural Capital Tamsin Cox, ICC Associate & DHA Head of Policy & Research	October 2017
The Work of the British Council Visual Arts Team: A report to update the Cultural Diplomacy Group on key aspects of the British Council's Visual Arts activity	Emma Dexter, Director Visual Arts	February 2019
Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project	Geoffery Crossick & Patrycja Kaszynska	March 2016
Impact of the Market Focus Cultural Programme 2011-2015: An Evaluation Report for the British Council	In2Impact	August 2019
Spirit of '47: Impact and Partnership: An Evaluation Report	In2Impact	February 2019

Connecting Ground: <i>Shakespeare Lives</i> and Perceptions of the UK in Russia, China and the Horn of Africa	Institute of Cultural Capital	2017
International Fashion Showcase 2015 Evaluation	Niamh Tuft	2015
British Council Music Showcasing Programme: Evaluation Report	Nordicity	March 2019
Assessing the Value of the UK-Ian Season of Culture	Open University	September 2015
The Cultural Value of Shakespeare Lives 2016 Research Report	Open University	May 2019
Soft Power Today: Measuring the Influences and Effects	Professor J.P. Singh, Director, Institute for International Cultural Relations, The University of Edinburgh; Stuart MacDonald, SYM Consulting	2017
Evaluation of the UK Now Festival	River Path	April 2013
Unlimited Access: Celebrating remarkable work by disabled artists in Europe	Steve Mannix	
Evaluation of “About Now   À Propos” Cultural Program	The Sutcliffe Group Incorporated	February 2019
Music and Culture, Indonesia CGF Evaluation Report 2017/18	Visit Britain	September 2019
International Showcasing Strategy For the Arts of Wales: Research Report 2019	Yvette Vaughan Jones	September 2019

### Current country of survey respondents

Country of origin	Percentage	Count
United Kingdom	36%	37
Mexico	16%	16
Brazil	13%	13
Qatar	12%	12
Nigeria	11%	11
South Korea	6%	6
Armenia	5%	5
Germany	1%	1
England and Nigeria	1%	1
Japan	1%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>103</b>

### Showcasing programmes represented in survey responses

Seasons and 'Year of'	Other showcasing programme
UK/China Year of Cultural Exchange	Edinburgh International Festival
UK/ID	Edinburgh showcase
UK/Japan	Famelab
UK/Korea	Future News Worldwide
UK/Mexico Duo Year	Great Escape
UK/Nigeria	KM3 Quartier des spectacles
UK/UAE	Partnership
	Lagos Book Festival
	Lagos Open House
	Lagos Theatre Festival
	LIFT Festival
	Momentum
	Outburst Queer Arts Festival
	Qatar British Festival
	Sesc Festival of Chamber Music
	Tilting Axis
	Transform
	Unlimited Doha Design Prize
	WOMEX Cardiff

### 'Strategic stakeholder' interviewees

Name	Role and organisation
Eimear Henry	Cultural Regeneration Manager, Belfast City Council
Gitte Zschoch	Director, EUNIC
Ignacio Peyró	Director, London, Instituto Cervantes
Katrin Sohns	Head of Programming North West Europe, Goethe-Institut
Keith Nichol	Department of Digital, Media, Culture and Sport
Laura Mackenzie Stuart	Head of Theatre, Creative Scotland
Nick McDowell	Director, International, Arts Council England
Noirin McKinney	Director of Arts, Arts Council Northern Ireland
Peter Owen	Head of Arts, Welsh Government
Richard Parry	Department for International Trade



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