

BRITISH COUNCIL NARRATIVE

**WHERE WE CAME FROM.  
WHERE WE ARE GOING.**

## WHERE WE CAME FROM

In 1934, Europe was being threatened by the after effects of a financial crisis, a rise in extreme ideologies, cultural intolerance and the gathering storm clouds of the Second World War which would kill millions.

The UK's influence and its trade with the world had fallen sharply. We needed new ways to share our belief in universal values of tolerance, openness and mutual respect, to secure our influence and to form strong relationships internationally. This led to a growing coalition of voices in parliament and wider society calling for the establishment of an institution to respond to the demand for access to UK excellence in arts and culture, education, science and the English language. The desire was to create possibilities for collaboration, bringing people together to exchange ideas and nurture shared understanding – recognising that this would also secure the UK's global influence and security.

So the British Council was formed with the declared purpose of creating 'a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding of the people of the UK', a purpose that still holds true today.

In 1940, the British Council was awarded a Royal Charter which established it as 'a permanent institution of the realm'. This gave the organisation a higher degree of operational independence with a formal separation of roles between cultural programmes undertaken by the British Council and the international work of the Ministry of Information undertaken by HMG. While continuing to be strategically aligned, this operational independence helps build trust in our work internationally as we are not seen as an instrument of the short-term objectives of government. In addition, it allows us to deliver a large economic benefit back to the UK beyond the funding provided to us by HMG.

Over the following decades, the British Council's work has expanded to cover over 110 countries and territories around the world, reaching over 600m people each year through our wide range of programmes. We are now one of the UK's best known international organisations and the UK's largest charity. Over the last 80 years we have built unparalleled networks and connections around the world with institutions, governments and communities, as well as with individuals. They include many global leaders and decision makers in business, politics, education, culture and civil society who have learned English with the British Council, grown up using our libraries or participated in our exchanges, scholarships and cultural programmes – and thus have a positive and respectful attitude towards the UK.

The Royal Charter which governs our work sets out the objects for which we exist. These are: '[to] advance for the public benefit any purpose which is exclusively charitable and which shall:

- a. promote cultural relationships and the understanding of different cultures between people and peoples of the United Kingdom and other countries
- b. promote a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom
- c. develop a wider knowledge of the English language
- d. encourage cultural, scientific, technological and other educational co-operation between the United Kingdom and other countries, or
- e. otherwise promote the advancement of education'



## PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE SOFT POWER AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

There is a wide spectrum of ways in which the UK influences global developments and secures its international interests.

Our work contributes to what is known as ‘soft power’. We define soft power as, ‘a nation’s ability to achieve its international objectives by gaining a more sympathetic appreciation of its policies and actions not through military might or other forms of coercion but through attraction and co-option. A nation creates soft power through the international connections made by people and institutions who represent its most attractive resources, including culture, education, language and values.’ Our work complements other areas of activity that build soft power such as supporting international development, public diplomacy and campaigns run by ministries of foreign affairs, defence engagement and international promotional campaigns to support tourism, trade or inward investment.

Cultural relations develops people’s trust in and attraction towards the UK, its values and people. It is fundamentally about building people-to-people and institution-to-institution engagement and opportunity, rather than direct one-way government-to-people influence.

It is therefore distinct from Public Diplomacy – direct influence of people in other countries by governments – and from the Cultural Diplomacy/campaigns approach that seeks to market a country’s assets.

Cultural Relations, the focus of our work, is based on the important principle of people working together for mutual benefit – enabling people and institutions both in the UK and the countries around the world to directly benefit from taking part. Because Cultural Relations places emphasis on a two-way exchange of ideas, it is effective at fostering understanding between cultures, mutual trust, long-term relationships and an appreciation of different values and ways of living.

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Through our work in arts and culture, education, English language, sport, science and civil society, the British Council makes a positive contribution to the people, institutions and governments of the countries it works with. This changes lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. In turn these relationships contribute to the UK’s long-term prosperity, security and influence in the world, whilst enriching UK culture and society.

This is not to say that cultural relations or soft power replace the need for hard power. It is one lens through which to look at international relations, available to a state to build trust, form mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships, and create shared lived experiences with the people of other nations. These contribute to enhanced security, prosperity and influence of the UK.

There are three fundamental principles to observe in building strong, authentic and effective cultural and educational relationships: **mutuality**, **consistency** and **relevance**.

The founders of the British Council spoke of the importance of the interchange (not the broadcast) of knowledge, ideas and discoveries. Mutual learning, shared insight and joint activities are fundamental to building meaningful relationships and engendering trust. The power comes from both parties acting as equals representing a wide variety of opinions, tastes and preferences, and ensuring constituency between values and behaviour. Our work relies on harnessing the expertise of our diverse partners, using creativity to adapt our work to deliver programmes together, to convene discussions and to share knowledge. We work with others across the fields of arts, science, sport, teaching, exams and civil society, bringing together our unparalleled networks and experience with those of others to ensure the greatest impact. Mutuality is a key principle we observe internally and externally.

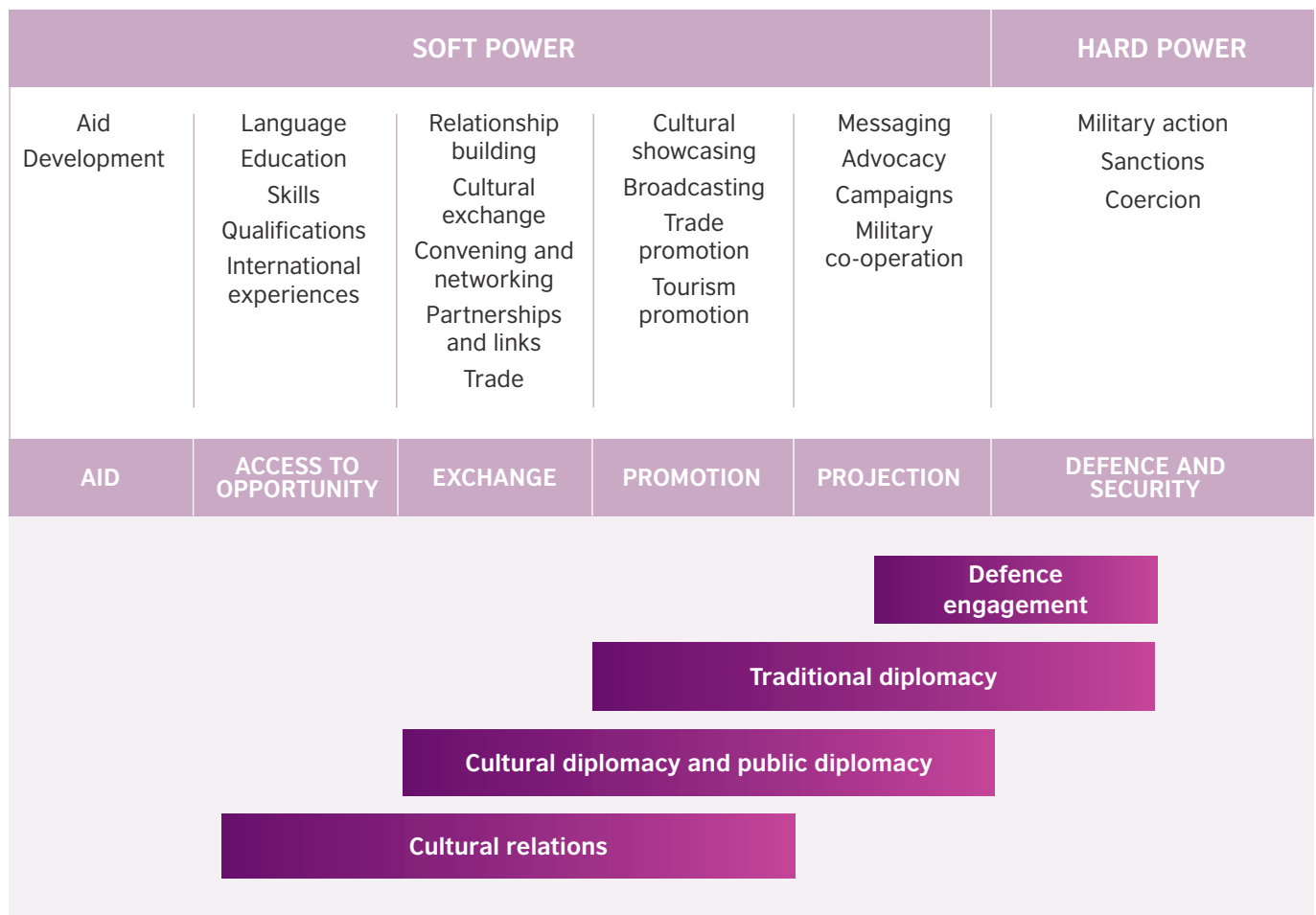
The second principle is consistent and sustained activity. This is about being present in a country through its good and bad times, sustaining activity and relations over time. Building strong and lasting connections and mutual trust requires a steady stream of joint activities – maturing, changing and adapting as the need determines. As with compound interest, it is the cumulative sum of activity which results in dramatically increased impact and value.

The third principle is relevance. Cultural relations must be in context, relevant to the government or society in which it takes place. Working with the next generation of leaders means listening to their needs and adapting programmes to meet their priorities. Some of

those young leaders may want to enhance their business skills while others may want to undertake community development programmes. One education ministry may be focused on English proficiency, another on critical thinking. No ‘one size fits all’ approach can work in a complex and fast changing world.

These three principles in action result in cultural relations programmes which are jointly developed, are part of a long-term commitment to relationships with individuals and institutions, and, while looking different in various places at various times, always bring the most relevant UK assets to societies and bring back ideas, learning and friendships to the UK.

### SMART POWER COMBINES A FULL SPECTRUM OF AVAILABLE RESPONSES



## OUR RELEVANCE IN TODAY'S WORLD

We are living through uncertain times. The world is experiencing an era of major change in economics and technology, in politics and society.

While we are more interconnected, live in more diverse societies, are better educated and less likely to live in poverty, we also face powerful global trends such as a growing rift between rich and poor, a rise of extreme ideologies, political polarisation and significant demographic challenges which require global collective action. With political populism increasingly dominating discourse on social media as well as in governments, universal values of openness, tolerance and mutual respect are being questioned. In the UK Brexit presents both opportunities and risks as the UK seeks a new partnership with EU countries and redefines its role on the world stage.

Cultural relations can make a huge contribution to the challenges facing the UK and the wider world in the 21st Century. Culture, while it differentiates, can also connect. We must continue to build relationships and trust in the UK, gaining the influence needed for the future, whilst simultaneously helping to tackle key shared global challenges by providing opportunities for young people, education, development, science and building the social economy. We must harness technological advances and adapt to meet new challenges as the balance of power moves from West to East, new ideologies emerge, expectations grow and civil attitudes change.

The British Council runs programmes and provides an effective international platform and partnerships for UK education and cultural organisations to:

- Engage with the next generation of young people in the Middle East and North Africa
- Build stronger, respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with the people of Russia and neighbouring countries
- Strengthen relationships with emerging economies
- Secure strong relationships and ties with people and institutions across the European Union
- Promote an international outlook amongst the UK's young people with the ultimate ambition that every young person in the UK should have an international experience in their education

These priorities were developed building on the knowledge and experience of our people across 177 cities in 107 (ck) countries, our global programme of research and policy insight, and consultation with UK and global institutions and governments. They will make a positive contribution the people, institutions and governments of the countries where we work changing lives, creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust, whilst also supporting the global influence of the UK and shared prosperity and security globally.

## OUR STRENGTHS

Our work would not be possible without our greatest asset: our 10,000 people who have local knowledge and insight, deliver high quality programmes and build relationships with and for the UK education, cultural and civil society sectors and their counterparts overseas.

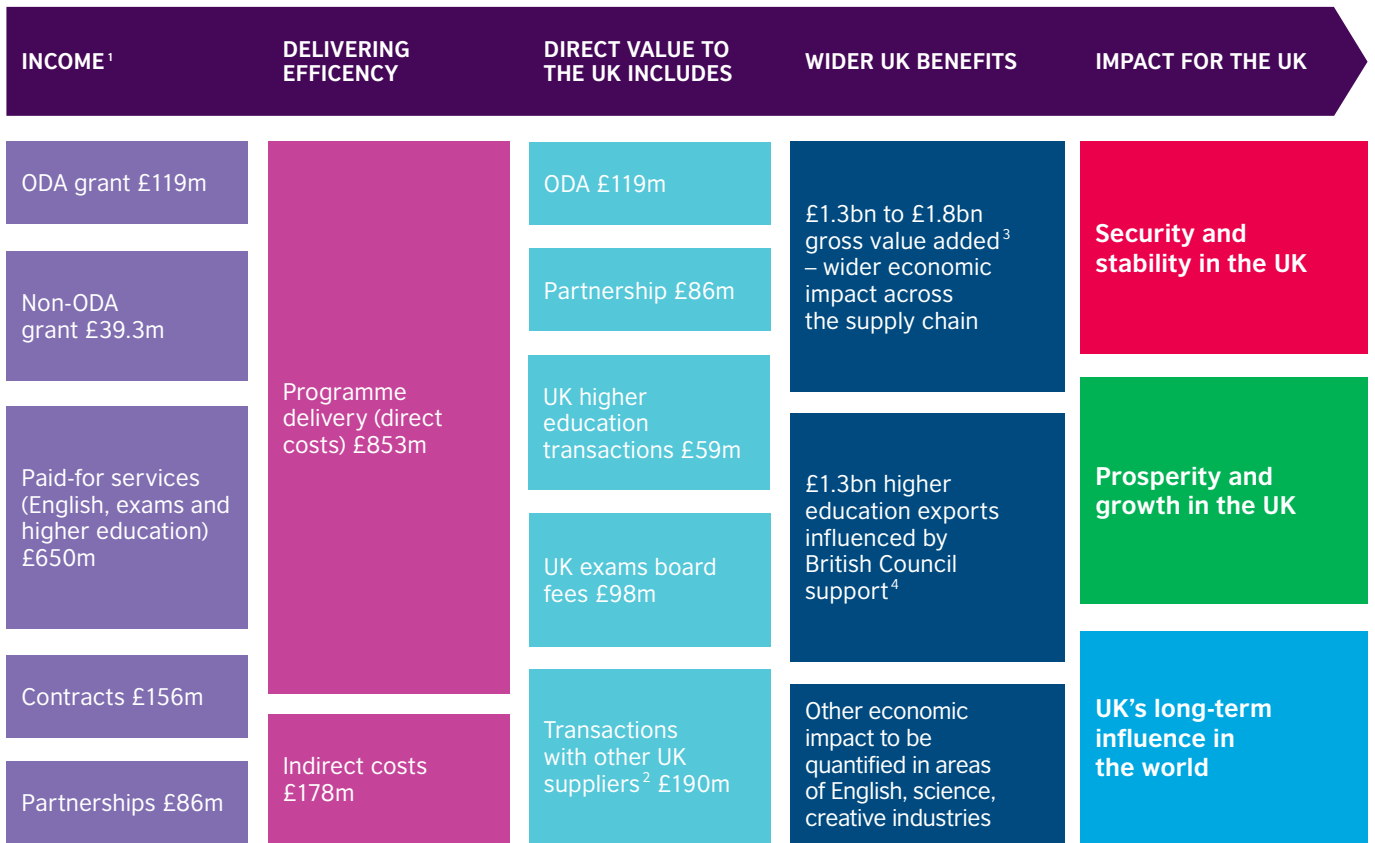
The trust we have built at community, institutional and state level allows us to do things which an NGO or indeed a capable embassy may not be able to do. We can broker programmes involving many individuals, communities and governments due to our strong belief in our purpose and our commitment in delivering our work based on our values, creating opportunities worldwide. From the start we strived to build long term, professional and trusting relationships at all levels, recognising the value of the continuity of our presence whatever the political landscape.

We also have unique capability, capacity and global connections in our selected core sectors of English language, education, society, arts and science. We are world experts in providing the teaching and assessment of English in different contexts such as through our own teaching centres, English for resilience in conflict zones and specialist teaching such as Peacekeeping English. We have deep expertise in higher education, including assessment of academic and professional qualifications, and in networking with higher education institutions around the world. We use our expertise in English to support teacher development in challenging school systems and promote

international links between school leaders. We work at scale on the active citizenship of young people globally and on 21st century skills to prepare them for employment and community development. Our Arts expertise supports creative industry development including inclusive arts practice and involving artists with disabilities. And we support scientific research links and science communication. All this combines our own expertise with that of UK and international partners, and develop the resulting programmes through our uniquely informed global network.

Our work must always be in context, relevant to the society in which it takes place. In some areas we work with a background of colonialism, in others our work is associated with the growth of democracy in the wake of collapsing authoritarianism. For some people we provided a library or exchange trip that changed their life, others meet us only once in an exam hall or theatre. Yet for all our different faces across an intricate global network, the British Council does one thing: we use culture – our shared set of values, goals, attitudes and practices – to help build a safer, more prosperous and trusted Britain and a more tolerant, stable and prosperous world.

BRITISH COUNCIL: INCOME AND VALUE



1. Income, delivering efficiently and direct value to the UK figures from our Annual Report and Accounts 2016–17 and internal management reports 2016–17.  
 2. Based on figures for transactions during the year with UK based suppliers.  
 3. Gross value added is a measure of the value of goods and services to the economy – the figures presented are an estimate of gross impact and exclude assessment of additionality: source Amion Consulting 2015.  
 4. Source: London Economics 2015.

## WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

What we must not do however is to underestimate the scale of the challenge we face as our mission is challenged for a short term tactical impact.

We must remember we were first conceived of as a response to the rise of intolerance, of extremism and of fascism. In today's world we see many of the same characteristics and must never imagine that civilisation can only progress and will never retreat.

Just over a year ago, one of our then Trustees and former Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the late Martin Roth, spoke eloquently of the rise of intolerance we see around the world. Martin decried the rise of extremism saying that while we were in all likelihood not reliving the 1930's, in the 1930's people did not imagine they were living in what we now know the 1930's to have been. With all that is happening across the West we must not be the generation who felt something may be happening but stood back and did nothing. Those values and norms which underpin liberal market democracies are under threat.

Equally David Petraeus, former Director of the CIA and US four star general, says that the greatest strategic challenge we have as the West is holding our values together. If we do that we can manage the global challenges we face – conflict in the Middle East, tension in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, climate change, the rise of new and large economies, an industrial revolution driven by artificial intelligence, further digital and social media disruption, challenges to the rules based international system – naming only some. If we do not hold our values together however, we will have a turbulent time with the peace of the world under greater threat.

As the British Council, forged in a time of great danger, we cannot be complacent. We must see what we do in creating opportunities, building relationships and engendering trust as being part of the UK's contribution to sustaining those values which the UK shares and which underpin the progress the world has made in reducing conflict, bringing people out of poverty and, extending life.

The insight of our founders in fostering the interchange of knowledge, ideas and discoveries was profound. It is indeed the basis of friendly knowledge and understanding between peoples which makes the world a better, safer and more prosperous place. We must redouble our efforts as we recognise that at least some of that basis is eroding and play our part in ensuring that what led to the loss of so many lives at the time of our founding has no prospect of recurring and that the next generations see as many gains in the stability of their world, the development of their societies and the attractiveness of their lives as we have seen in ours.