

# SOULFUL

ARTS AND THE UK



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## THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

### Foreword

Using the cultural resources of the UK, the British Council creates friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries.

Our work in the arts has been central to this mission for more than 80 years, seeking new ways to connect with and understand each other through creativity.

Our programme uses the world-leading innovation and creativity of the UK to make a positive contribution to the people, institutions and governments of the countries we work in. We create opportunities, build connections and engender trust. Cultural exchange supports economic, social and cultural development, and strengthens connections. This is increasingly important in challenging times.

Our work in the arts has grown substantially over the last five years. We now operate in over 110 countries around the world, across six art forms and three multidisciplinary programmes covering the full breadth of UK creative industries. In 2015–16 our work in the arts reached 10.9 million people on the ground and a further 186 million online and through the media.

Above: Turquoise Mountain jewellery making workshop. Photograph by Wakil Kohsar

### SOUTH ASIA REGION

We operate in seven countries across South Asia, a region with a combined population of more than 1.7 billion (25 per cent of the world's population), half of which is below the age of 30. The region is characterised by its fast-growing economies, averaging an annual growth of 5–7 per cent (India is now the fastest-growing economy in the world) and major gaps between rich and poor, as well as urban and rural populations. The security situation in many countries also remains fragile.

Home to five of the world's major religions and six of the world's most spoken languages, South Asia has a rich religious, ethnic and linguistic history that transcends today's borders. With nearly 90 per cent mobile penetration, up to 20 per cent of which are smartphones, there is a unique opportunity to use digital technology to build links between the people of South Asia and the UK.

### SOUTH ASIA'S CREATIVE SECTOR

Our regional programme aims to support the development of strong creative sectors in the countries of South Asia, contributing to building creative, open and inclusive societies, economic development and enriching lives through mutually beneficial collaboration with the UK.

The South Asia region faces inclusion and equality challenges in social, economic and political spheres. Based on gender, faith, caste, age, race, sexuality and ethnicity, large groups are excluded from decision-making processes, and societal and cultural norms prevent diverse civic participation. This backdrop creates both significant challenges and opportunities for the creative sectors of South Asia.

Countries are characterised by a relatively vibrant cultural life, but this is hampered by poor infrastructure and limited government support. In some countries this is coupled with an increasingly conservative attitude among audiences towards some forms of cultural expression. However, the potential of the creative sector to contribute towards economic and social development is increasingly recognised by governments.

## OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

Afghanistan  
Bangladesh  
India  
Iran  
Nepal  
Pakistan  
Sri Lanka

In addition to responding to specific demands in the seven countries of the region, we have identified five priorities that are relevant across all.

- Empowering women and girls to challenge and shift attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality, through highlighting success stories, supporting economic empowerment and skills development, and expanding links and networks with the UK. For example, our partnership with the Southbank Centre on the Women of the World Festival (WOW) celebrates women and girls and their achievements, while asking what more we need to do to achieve equality.
- Using the arts to foster community cohesion by bringing diverse audiences into museums and major cultural venues. For example, 'Our Shared Cultural Heritage' combines the expertise of the UK and South Asia's museums and education sectors to connect young people from different groups to the stories of a shared heritage within museum collections.
- Showcasing the best of UK arts and culture to South Asian audiences. For example, in 2017 we celebrate a major bilateral year of cultural exchange between India and the UK, known as UK/India 2017. The cultural year will enrich institutional and individual relationships at all levels of society, helping to build a shared future for generations to come.
- Engaging young people in the UK with contemporary South Asian culture and creativity. For example, the New North and South partnership between the Whitworth, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester Museum, Liverpool Biennial and the Tetley in Leeds, together with the biennials in Colombo, Karachi, Kochi, Lahore and the Dhaka Art Summit, is a three-year programme that will help participating organisations reach new audiences, through the commissioning and exchange of work, and skills development opportunities.
- Supporting the development of South Asia's arts managers and leaders through supporting their skills development. For example, ARThinkSouthAsia is a training fellowship in the UK and Germany delivered in partnership with the Goethe-Institut and Khoj International Artists' Association in Delhi to empower arts professionals in the planning and development of sustainable cultural organisations.



Above: A Different Romeo and Juliet, Bangladesh.  
Photograph by Tanvir Murad Topu

Left: Afghanistan National Institute of Music.  
Photograph by Wakil Kohsar



## Afghanistan

Right: Globe Production of Shakespeare's Hamlet in Kabul. Photograph by Emal Maqsood

Below: Women Spread the Word creative writing workshop. © Queen's University Belfast Pacemaker Press



### COUNTRY CONTEXT

Afghanistan is a landlocked country dominated by mountains and deserts. It shares borders with China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The population of Afghanistan is estimated at over 32 million with a GDP of approximately US\$600 per capita. The country has two official languages, Dari and Pashto.

Afghanistan has suffered from such chronic instability and conflict during its modern history that its economy and infrastructure are in ruins and many of its people are refugees. The Taliban, who imposed strict Islamic rule following a devastating civil war, were ousted by a US-led invasion in 2001 but have recently been making a comeback. The internationally recognised government was set up following the adoption of a new constitution in 2004, and has struggled to extend its authority beyond the capital and to forge national unity.

Insurgency and security remain the country's main challenges. It is one of the world's poorest countries and suffers from a lack of development due to the decades of war and scarcity of foreign investment. However, the Afghan economy has been growing by roughly ten per cent year on year for the last decade due to the infusion of over US\$50 billion in international aid and remittances from Afghan expats. Other contributing factors include improvements to transportation systems and agriculture production – the backbone of the nation's economy.

Since 2002, the UK has been a major strategic partner and donor for the Afghan government, helping the country to build its governance, economic, social, cultural, educational and military infrastructures.

### CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

Although international headlines are consistently filled with negative stories about Afghanistan's security and politics, the country's cultural institutions and private sector have grown significantly. From Afghan archaeological sites to television channels, the country has experienced a steady, albeit fragile cultural renaissance.

Afghanistan has a rich cultural heritage due to its unique position at the crossroads of numerous major trade routes, the most famous being the Silk Road and the Khyber Pass. This blend of cultures flourished at many points in the country's history, notably under the reign of the Mughal emperors when Kabul and Herat emerged as important centres for arts and learning.

The Afghan government's main priorities are security and the economy, meaning less attention is placed on cultural development and the creative industries. International agencies therefore provide the main driving force and funding behind cultural development.

Afghanistan is in need of capacity building and training in all areas of the cultural sector, from individual artistic expertise to the establishment of new cultural institutions and infrastructure. Using culture as a tool to encourage social cohesion is fundamental to the country's future. It will help to change perceptions and reduce misunderstanding – essential ingredients to help eliminate conflict and assist the nation in creating a better and more peaceful society.

### OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Supporting development of the creative economy:* building skills and capacity to develop the sector in Afghanistan.

*Arts for social change:* supporting the development of a creative, open and inclusive society by fostering social cohesion, the empowerment of women and girls and the protection of Afghanistan's tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

*Supporting emerging leaders in the arts:* identifying and supporting the next generation of cultural leaders through collaborations with the region and the UK.

### WOMEN SPREAD THE WORD

Delivered in partnership with Queen's University Belfast, Women Spread the Word is an oral history project encouraging women in Afghanistan to tell their stories. The programme gives women the chance to 'be heard' individually, and enables them to process their often traumatic stories into tangible material, including a digital archive at the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University, which will be of use to future generations as well as historians.

An initial two-day workshop to collect stories from women from four Afghan provinces (Bamyan, Kandahar, Kabul and Helmand) was led by Julia Paul, university lecturer and former BBC journalist, giving the participants memoir writing, interviewing, documentary filmmaking and creative writing skills. At the end of the workshop 30 of the participants were identified to continue the story collection process, and to work with authors, poets and filmmakers to reinterpret and disseminate those stories across the country.

## Bangladesh



### COUNTRY CONTEXT

Bangladesh is a majority Muslim country with a population of 162 million living in an area the size of England and Wales. Over 55 million people are between the age of 15 and 30, of whom 28 per cent have no formal education and only four per cent have a degree or specialised training. Population projections suggest that in every decade until 2050, a further 30 million young people will reach adulthood and enter the job market. With economic growth of 6–7 per cent year on year, it is predicted that Bangladesh will be one of the next 11 emerging economies.

Historical and cultural ties with the UK are strong – 500,000 UK residents have Bangladeshi heritage and many of the country's public and private leaders have been educated in the UK. The UK is also Bangladesh's largest bilateral aid donor, with the Department for International Development (DFID) maintaining a substantial presence in the country and aiming to reduce poverty and assist Bangladesh to achieve middle-income country status by 2021. As one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the effects of climate change, Bangladesh also receives significant support from DFID for adaptation strategies.



A Different Romeo and Juliet, Bangladesh.  
Photography by Tanvir Murad Topu



### OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Arts for social change:* positioning the arts and cultural sector to play a major role in the building of a more creative, open and inclusive society. This includes a focus on arts and disability, the empowerment of women and girls, and the creation of safe spaces for dialogue, critical thinking and freedom of speech.

*Supporting emerging leaders in the arts:* providing platforms for emerging arts professionals to showcase their work and develop their skills at an international level, and working with existing arts leaders and government to help create sustainable growth within the creative industries.

*Building understanding between the young people of the UK and Bangladesh:* supporting co-productions between Bangladeshi and UK creative networks with an emphasis on building links between the UK Bangladeshi diaspora and Bangladesh.

### CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

Bangladesh has diverse cultural traditions in music, poetry, dance, theatre and craft as well as informal arts such as rickshaw painting and riverboat singing. A tradition for festivals sees arts and culture presented to wide public audiences during major public and religious holidays throughout the year. However, with a lack of government-funded arts initiatives or public arts spaces, privately funded arts organisations and foreign cultural institutions based in Dhaka play an important role in providing access to contemporary arts and supporting emerging artists.

While Bangladesh has a vibrant cultural history, the lack of infrastructure and recent security threats have made it increasingly difficult for foreign collaboration with the country's creative sector. There are few opportunities for young people to develop their creative skills or to showcase their work, especially outside Dhaka. As a result, the development of many creative industries has been stalled by a lack of funding, education and the required skillset. However, this creates opportunities for UK cultural organisations to work in partnership with government and existing festivals and arts organisations to develop the capacity of young people in the creative industries and provide platforms to showcase their work. By extending the use of digital initiatives, communities in semi-urban and rural areas outside of Dhaka can have better access to the arts.

### A DIFFERENT ROMEO AND JULIET

From 2013 to 2016 the UK theatre company Graeae worked with Dhaka Theatre to create a long-term training programme for disabled adults in Bangladesh. This collaboration culminated in a new production at Bangladesh's Shilpakala Academy (National Theatre) titled *A Different Romeo and Juliet*, which marked the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

In a country where 12 per cent of the population is living with disabilities, the aim of the programme was to empower disabled communities through the arts, while promoting a more inclusive and open society and targeting policymakers to encourage long-term change. Results so far include a commitment by the Culture Minister to supporting the future of this work, and permanent changes made to the National Theatre's accessibility infrastructure.



## India

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

With a population of 1.3 billion people, India is the second most populated country in the world and home to nearly a fifth of the world's people. Although the majority of its citizens still live in rural communities – 73 per cent live in approximately 638,000 villages – the country is witnessing the fastest urbanisation rate in the world, with 70 of the world's most populous 100 cities predicted to be in India by 2030. The country has a young population with more than 50 per cent below the age of 25 and more than 65 per cent below 35.

India has the sixth largest economy in the world and is predicted to become one of the two largest by 2050. While it has a rapidly growing service sector, and is a major exporter of IT, outsourcing and software services, the agricultural sector continues to be the country's largest employer. India is also home to one of the world's fastest growing e-commerce markets.

India's main challenges include improving governance and delivery systems, providing quality education to its large population, building its infrastructure, increasing agricultural productivity and

ensuring that the fruits of economic growth are well distributed. Campaigns such as Digital India, Skills India and Smart Cities – which aims to make 109 cities citizen-friendly and sustainable – demonstrate the government's rapid development agenda.

India is set to grow and develop, becoming more influential on the global stage in the coming decades. In 2017, India will mark 70 years of independence, during which the UK and India will celebrate a major bilateral year of cultural, educational and scientific exchange, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then Prime Minister David Cameron during the former's UK visit in November 2015.

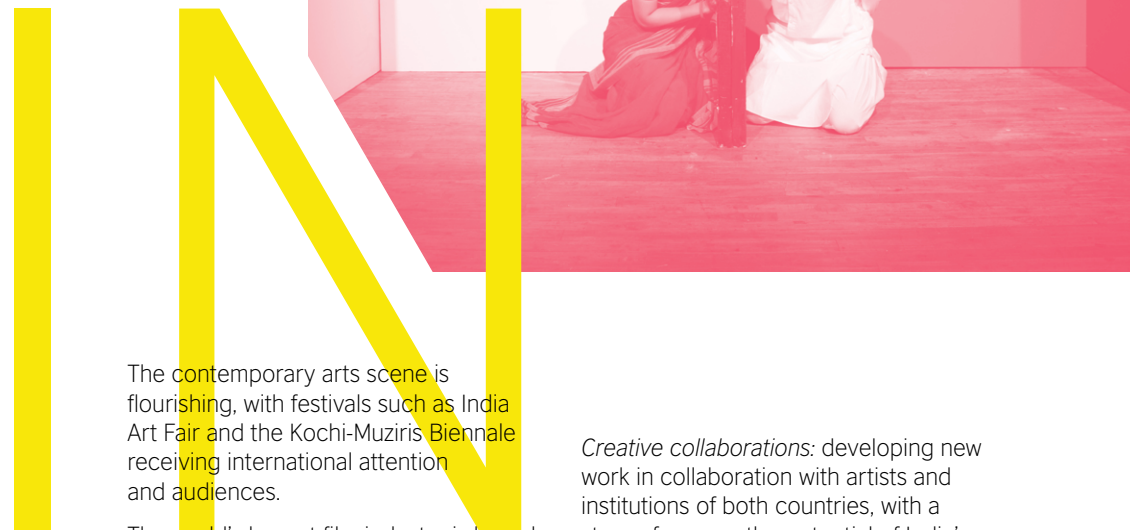
### CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

With government support dwindling and the private sector reluctant to loosen its purse strings, funding for cultural projects and events has become a major challenge. International foundations and large corporates generally look at culture through a developmental or a marketing lens, leaving little support for creative, experimental and risk-taking arts practices. Crowdfunding has emerged as a potential resource for smaller-scale projects.

India's creative industries are fast emerging as potent contributors to business growth, although this is still at an early stage. The creative economy is witnessing huge growth in specific sectors such as media and entertainment, as well as the textile and clothing industries.

Top right: Actors Tushar Pandey and Kriti Pant in a scene from *Mix the Play*.  
© British Council

Left: Candoco performs *Studies by C*, at British Council, New Delhi.  
© British Council



The contemporary arts scene is flourishing, with festivals such as India Art Fair and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale receiving international attention and audiences.

The world's largest film industry is based in India, and cinema continues to be the dominant art form that most people engage with. Live arts and cultural events such as theatre, music and dance are generally perceived to be too expensive or elitist for most to attend. Museums, libraries and visual arts are better developed than the performing arts markets but with further room for growth.

The UK remains an important destination for overseas study, with more than 3,600 Indian students studying art and design courses in the UK in the last five years.

There are very few skills development initiatives to help support India's thriving creative talent, and this provides huge opportunities for growth. The UK can be an important partner in capacity-building and professional skills to support a stronger, more prosperous cultural sector in India.

### OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Showcasing:* bringing the best of the UK's live and digital arts to new audiences in India, combining the large-scale and high-profile along with the more experimental and artistically ambitious, with the aim of inspiring millions of people through the arts.

*Creative collaborations:* developing new work in collaboration with artists and institutions of both countries, with a strong focus on the potential of India's creative industries.

*Skills and leadership:* developing cultural skills initiatives that provide opportunities to cultural professionals and creative entrepreneurs in both countries to work and learn for mutual economic and cultural benefit.

*Arts for social change:* using the potential for the arts to address social issues, in particular the empowerment of women and girls.

### MIX THE CITY INDIA

Mix the City India is a digital app that allows users to explore the music of a particular region and create their own unique compositions to share online. Mix the City India has four versions showcasing the diversity of sound, music and cultural influences from Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. Each version features 12 Indian artists whose original music samples have been compiled by UK artist-producers (Boxed In, Django Django and Anne Meredith, along with Israeli producer Kutiman) into shareable YouTube tracks available on the main Mix the City website. Targeted at 18 to 40 year olds, we hope to reach at least four million people in India alone.



While there is no shortage of new work being produced, there are opportunities for developing skills associated with its presentation, including leadership and management, and art writing and criticism. There is also a great need for developing arts education, including access to up-to-date literature and academic resources.

### OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Developing management, leadership and skills:* developing new models for sharing skills and knowledge, including workshops, residencies, research projects and accessible online materials.

*Building mutual understanding between Iran and the UK:* sharing the best of UK and Iranian contemporary arts through supporting and building networks between major festivals and art organisations.

*Supporting emerging leaders in the arts:* identifying emerging leaders in Iran and building connections with the UK and the wider South Asia region to support their future success.

### CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

Iran benefits from a strong cultural infrastructure. The arts and culture sector is largely subsidised by the government, but the country also houses an active and influential private sector, which has provided an injection of contemporary practice in an otherwise conservative offer.

While traditional practices across art forms are still very much alive, there is a strong contemporary arts scene, particularly in theatre, visual arts, cinema and architecture. Literature remains a vital source of inspiration, influence and creativity and, despite restrictions, dance and music have thrived, inspired mainly by Iranian folk and world music. Graphic art, fashion and other fields have recently benefited from a more contemporary and international critical reception.

There is considerable public appetite for contemporary work, with increasing audiences for festivals, gallery openings, book fairs, performances and concerts. Among young people in Iran there is an increasing online engagement with the arts, ranging from social networks, local radio shows, electronic music, online exhibitions and literature forums.

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

In cultural, economic and political terms Iran straddles both the Middle East and South Asia. Its population of approximately 80 million – spread over 31 provinces – is ethnically diverse, with over 50 per cent of the population below the age of 35.

Iran is re-emerging from years of isolationism. As a result, the country is becoming an ever more important international player with significant influence. It is one of the most stable countries in the region and economic growth projections are strong, subject to resolving sanctions restrictions.

Iran and the UK have a long history of cultural and economic exchange, which has been subject to political tension and mistrust since the 19th century and gained momentum following Iran's 1979 revolution. Since 2013, there has been mutual interest to improve relations and connections.

The British Council has had no official presence in Iran since 2009. There are no current plans to reopen an office in Iran but we are carefully monitoring developments.

Above: Longplayer Exhibition, September 2014, Azad Art Gallery, Tehran. Photograph by Sadaf Azadehfar

Left: Longplayer Poster. Designed by Omid Nemalhabib, Studio Kargah







## COUNTRY CONTEXT

Nepal is struggling to overcome the legacy of a decade-long civil war that ended in 2006, and the current post-conflict phase can be seen as a historic moment of transition and change. The main challenges for Nepal are to sustain peace while building the legitimacy of the state, deepening democracy and ensuring fundamental rights of marginalised groups, particularly based on gender and ethnicity.

In the 2012 UN Human Development Index, Nepal ranks 157th out of the 186 countries included on the list, making it one of the least developed and poorest countries in the world. Approximately 25 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and around 45 per cent of the population is unemployed. The devastating April 2015 earthquake is estimated to have pushed an additional 700,000 Nepalese into poverty, and dampened growth (from 4.6 per cent to three per cent) and investor confidence. Two-thirds of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and foreign direct investment in the country is on average only 0.5 per cent of GDP.

High unemployment, especially among the youth who constitute more than 40 per cent of the total population, is another key challenge. Though contributing substantially to the Nepalese economy, youth migration is also draining the country of its future generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and workers.

The UK has an important military relationship with Nepal through the Brigade of Gurkhas, stretching back 200 years. This relationship gives the UK considerable prestige in the country and provides significant income for the Nepalese economy through salaries, pensions and disadvantaged community service support.

Female entrepreneurs from the Janakpur Women's Development Centre in the Terai, at Women of the World Kathmandu. Photography by Claire Burkert



## CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

The development sector in Nepal is already fairly crowded following the civil war, recent natural disaster and an increasingly fragmented society due to political instability. However, using arts and culture to achieve development aims still presents an array of opportunities for the international arts community.

The commercial arts scene is still developing in Nepal, which presents opportunities for international cultural organisations to play a key role in sharing best practice. Similarly, preservation and protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is crucial to preserving a sense of shared identity.

Access to funding for the arts sector in Nepal is very limited. Arts and culture is seen as a recreational pastime rather than something that has the potential to contribute towards economic development. Many gaps exist in the sector, with little political support to strengthen and expand cultural and creative professions. Access to existing opportunities is limited to the few rather than the majority, and there is an exclusion of rural audiences in an arts scene that is predominantly centred on Kathmandu.

## OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Empowering women and girls:* supporting the economic empowerment and the profile of women and girls in society through creative and cultural experiences, skills development and expanding links and networks with the UK.

*Fostering community cohesion:* bringing interactive content and untold stories about cultural heritage to communities and young people whose engagement with museums and heritage sites is limited.

*Skills and leadership:* supporting the development of a professional arts sector in Nepal.

## WOMEN OF THE WORLD KATHMANDU

As part of a regional partnership between the British Council and London's Southbank Centre, Women of the World (WOW) Kathmandu is a festival celebrating the stories and achievements of women across Nepal and South Asia. Through talks, performances and workshops, alongside opportunities to eat and to shop, the festival attracted women, men, boys and girls to come together, celebrate and question what still needs to be done to support greater equality. As one of a series of similar WOW events planned across South Asia, the programme is also building a powerful network of female achievers able to collaborate effectively across national boundaries.

## Pakistan

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

Pakistan is the sixth most populated country in the world, with an estimated population of over 195 million increasing at a rate of 1.45 per cent per year. Geographically situated between India, Afghanistan, Iran and China, Pakistan is home to a unique blend of landscapes varying from plains to deserts, forests, hills and plateaus ranging from the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea in the south to the mountains of the Karakoram range in the north. The GDP per capita of Pakistan exceeded US\$1,100 in 2015, which ranks the country 140th in the world. Current projections are for around six per cent growth year-on-year especially with the implementation of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, which should benefit the whole country.

The social and economic challenges faced by Pakistan are based around lack of education – with over 12.3 million primary school age children out of school – as well as violence and extremism. Peace and security in the country have been tested time and again due to unrest and political instability. These issues have had a domino effect on the overall economic health of the country.

Pakistan and the UK enjoy good bilateral relationships on business and trade, with a desire to greatly increase the level of trade during the coming years. The UK is the third largest importer of Pakistani goods, after the United States and China. There are over 1.2 million UK citizens of Pakistani origin living and working in the UK, which provide a potentially important source of new connections and partnerships.

### CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

The cultural sector in Pakistan has been a lower priority for federal and provincial government in recent years, with minimal public sector funding being invested in the creative industries. Funding for the sector is mostly rooted in private sponsorship or external donor agencies.

However, the sector has a proven ability to bring together communities and contribute to peaceful and constructive relationships. In the past decade, there has been a wave of new cultural trends in Pakistan including literature festivals, film festivals and the nascent revival of the Pakistani film and media industries.

Pakistan's creative industries are still developing and the current engagement level with the general public is low. The general population rarely attends art exhibitions, libraries or other artistic offerings. Despite large-scale events, audiences for the arts have been stagnant and have not expanded in the way many had hoped.



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Much work needs to be done to extend access and engagement more widely, especially with the growing younger generation. However, the emerging creative talent in the Pakistani film, crafts, literature, design and fashion industries gives optimism for future growth.

With over 50 per cent of the population under the age of 25, there is huge potential for the UK to help develop the creative sectors. There are also opportunities to share UK expertise to support the growing IT and digital sector in Pakistan which complements a number of start-up incubators being set up around the country.

Above: International Heritage and Museums Conference, Lahore.  
Photograph by Umar Farooq

Below: WOW Karachi.  
Photograph by Production 021



### OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Arts for social change:* using the power of arts and culture to support positive social change within Pakistan and to provide opportunities for marginalised groups.

*Creative economy development:* supporting the development of Pakistan's creative industries through programmes such as Fashion DNA, which mentors and tutors fashion designers in Pakistan and showcases their work in the UK.

*Connecting people in the UK and Pakistan:* using the arts to build networks and create opportunities for the people of the UK and Pakistan to connect and engage.

### INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE AND MUSEUMS CONFERENCE 2016

The International Heritage and Museums Conference was hosted in Lahore in partnership with Walled City of Lahore Authority and the Government of Punjab. This was a collaborative project between museums in Pakistan and the UK, including a research and capacity-building partnership between the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Lahore Museum in 2015.

The conference explored the museums and heritage sector in Pakistan, looking at issues such as creating pride of place and identity, enhancing public and community participation, audience development and integrating intangible heritage.

The success of this event was the genesis of *Our Shared Cultural Heritage* – a region-wide project to connect young people better to the collections of museums, and plans for a second conference in Lahore will include a public festival.



## Sri Lanka

### COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sri Lanka occupies a strategic position in the South Asia region as a regional export hub between China, Africa, the Arab states, India and Iran. It is seen as a neutral player able to work easily with countries such as China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Home to 20 million people, with Sri Lanka's GDP per capita surpassing US\$11,000, the country is undergoing rapid infrastructure development.

Sri Lanka and the UK have strong historical ties, with many Sri Lankans having family ties with the UK and vice versa. The UK and Sri Lanka share similar legal systems, and an active dialogue exists between both countries' parliamentarians. The UK is one of the most important export markets for Sri Lankan merchandise and the second largest trading partner after India. Sri Lanka is also a key partner for the UK's education sector, with over 13,000 Sri Lankans studying for UK qualifications in the UK and Sri Lanka.

### CULTURAL SECTOR OVERVIEW

The effects of Sri Lanka's devastating and protracted civil war, which spanned over 30 years from 1983 to 2009, has meant that until recently, the Sri Lankan government and the international community have placed priority on the economic rebuilding of the country and development of its commercial sector. Very little focus had been given to arts and culture.



Top right: Aerial View of Slave Island  
by Ciriacidis Lehnerer.  
Photograph by My Favourite Photography

Right: Passport Blessing Ceremony  
by Venuri Perera.  
Photograph by My Favourite Photography



Over the last few years, however, with the help of the international community, Sri Lanka is beginning to look at ways to preserve and protect its vast and vibrant cultural legacy that dates back to the third century BC. There is an emerging understanding of the importance of showcasing and celebrating the multi-ethnic and multi-religious cultures that have inhabited the island as a way of bringing peace and reconciliation to the country.

There is a need to build capacity and training in all areas of the cultural sector, from the establishment of a cultural infrastructure, to the creation of new cultural venues and the training and development of arts professionals.

### OUR PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

*Arts for social change:* using the arts as an effective means to address difficult and relevant issues in Sri Lankan society.

*Supporting emerging leaders in the arts:* developing a new cadre of arts professionals able to make a significant contribution towards a more sustainable creative sector.

*Demonstrating the economic and social benefits of investing in the creative sector:* supporting government, industry and others able to contribute towards the development of the sector in Sri Lanka.

### COLOMBO ART BIENNALE

The Colombo Art Biennale (CAB) is the largest contemporary art event in Sri Lanka. Established in 2009, CAB showcases contemporary art from Sri Lanka, the South Asia region and beyond.

By identifying and supporting the development of the New North and South network, the British Council has helped to link CAB to the Whitworth in Manchester, the Liverpool Biennale, and other partners in the UK, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

For the 2016 Biennale, the British Council also supported CAB to add a new architectural element to the event, and commissioned the Turner Prize winning collective Assemble to conduct workshops for artists, architects, students and community artisans who resided in the Slave Island area of Colombo. At the end of the workshop series, the Slave Island residents and the arts and crafts community celebrated the work they had created and their newly made connections with each other by creating a street party and sharing a meal together (the Great Feast).



## Find out more

[Afghanistan](#)

[www.britishcouncil.af](http://www.britishcouncil.af)

[Bangladesh](#)

[www.britishcouncil.org.bd](http://www.britishcouncil.org.bd)

[India](#)

[www.britishcouncil.in](http://www.britishcouncil.in)

[Iran](#)

<https://iran.britishcouncil.org/en>

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[Pakistan](#)

[www.britishcouncil.pk](http://www.britishcouncil.pk)

[Sri Lanka](#)

[www.britishcouncil.lk](http://www.britishcouncil.lk)

## Our structure

The British Council's Arts department consists of two main parts: UK and international. In the UK, we have one executive, four cross-disciplinary, three national and six art form teams. These teams are responsible for developing an expert understanding of the UK and the potential partners the British Council might work with in their sector.

Arts staff in countries within each of the seven regions work with their colleagues in the UK to co-create our programmes based on their expert knowledge of the local context in which they operate.

Overall decision making across Arts is made by a senior leadership team, which consists of a director in each region and 11 directors in the UK.

## Our funding

Over 75 per cent of the British Council's turnover is earned through teaching and exams, tendered contracts and partnerships. The British Council also receives grant-in-aid funding from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This makes up less than 20 per cent of our total income, but enables us to represent the UK's long term interest in countries where we cannot rely on earned income alone.

Much of our work in Arts is supported by Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding. ODA is UK tax payers' money that supports aid and development in low- to middle-income countries. Using this, we deliver arts programmes that promote economic development and welfare in these countries, which contribute to building trust and opportunity with the UK.

