



House of Commons

International Development Committee

UK Progress on Sustainable Development Goals inquiry

Written evidence from The British Council

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Contents

1. Summary
2. British Council
3. Our approach to the Sustainable Development Goals
4. Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals overseas
5. Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Summary

1.1 The British Council is committed to the UK's international development efforts and supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through making a positive contribution to the countries in which we work in the education and cultural sectors. Our work additionally creates opportunities and builds connections and trust with the UK.

1.2 We believe in working in partnership, including with governments, donors, businesses and social enterprises, to develop sustainable solutions to development challenges. Our experience of working in more than 100 countries around the world is that the networks and contextual understanding that can be developed over many years of working in country leads to much more sustainable outcomes for our development programmes. We believe that our approach – with trusted relationships developed over years, and centred around long-term co-operation, and the sharing of knowledge and experience for the mutual benefit of the UK and the rest of the world – is hugely beneficial in delivering on the SDGs.

1.3 This submission shows how the British Council, as a Non-Departmental Public Body, contributes to the SDGs listed in the terms of reference. However, we believe that the SDGs are closely linked and some are mutually reinforcing, and therefore make a contribution to a number of them through our programmes across arts and culture, education, English language, sport, science and civil society.

2. The British Council

2.1 The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. This enhances the security, prosperity and influence of the UK and, in so doing, helps make the world a better, safer place.

2.2 The British Council's contribution to UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) is long-standing and has been formally recognised since the 1970s. As a Non-Departmental-Public-Body, the British Council contributes holistically to the SDGs by working with HMG, overseas governments, organisations and directly with the people who benefit from our programmes. We manage our ODA through our core grant-in-aid (via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and through contracts and partnerships with government, including with DFID, DCMS and BEIS.

3. Our approach to the Sustainable Development Goals

3.1 The British Council is committed to the UK's international development efforts, supporting positive change in education and English, the arts, skills, civil society, justice, social enterprise and the creative economy. We focus on long-term impact and measurable large-scale change. We work in partnership with governments, organisations and businesses, enabling us to support the UK's contribution to Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

3.2 DFID conducts annual reviews of our contracts though not all contracts are reviewed annually. During an annual review, a team employed by DFID checks the project is on track to meet the impact objectives. Of the six reviews that have been recorded for 2017/18, all were A rated.

3.3 The British Council has always worked according to the principle of mutuality so that our ODA interventions benefit ODA countries as a primary benefit and the UK as a secondary benefit.

4. Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals overseas

SDG 4 (Quality Education)

4.1 In relation to SDG 4, the British Council is committed to more inclusive education systems based on the principles of access, engagement, empowerment and enablement, aimed at ensuring the highest quality of education for everyone. We do this through collaboration and project partnerships with educational partners, school leaders, teacher educators and teachers.

4.2 Connecting Classrooms

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning, run in partnership with DFID, creates partnerships between schools across the UK and in developing countries, encouraging them to work on the Sustainable Development Goals together. It builds the capacity of teachers and school leaders in a range of core skills to help young people develop knowledge, skills and values to live and work in a globalised economy. These core skills are: critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration and communication, creativity and imagination, digital literacy, global citizenship, student leadership, and personal development. There are six main elements to the programme:

- Grants to support networks of schools and partnership projects involving 4,500 schools in the UK and in developing countries;
- Professional development training for 60,000 teachers and school leaders in the UK and developing countries;
- Online partnerships for over 5,000 schools plus access to teaching and learning resources;
- School and teacher level accreditation and awards;
- Advocacy and awareness raising at policy level; and
- Monitoring and evaluation

4.3 Educations for Refugees

Our Language for Resilience programmes respond to refugee crises in different parts of the world including in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Syria, Iraq and Ethiopia. The programmes have created opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives through language learning, providing safe spaces for them, while still supporting home languages. Our work gives a voice to those who have been displaced, builds social cohesion and provides individuals with skills to access work, services and education. Through the HOPES project (EU-funded, €12 million 2016–19), we have been working with a range of partners to address the shortage of higher education opportunities for displaced Syrians as well as

young people in the host communities affected by the high influx of refugees. Through this project we have delivered English access programmes for students through partner universities and provided training for university teaching staff.

4.4 Education System Reform in Algeria

The British Council is working in partnership with the Algerian Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to support their overarching school education systems reform agenda. The programme supports the capacity-building of Algeria's school inspectors and leaders and the professional development of teachers, to support better learner outcomes. Over 200 inspectors and school leaders have been trained and have used the new framework and associated pedagogies to train over 40,000 new teachers.

SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

4.5 In relation to SDG 16, our programmes support the development of robust, accountable institutions and strengthen civil society and governance. Our programmes seek to foster a culture of open and inclusive dialogue, in place of violence, and give young people the skills to influence decision-makers.

4.6 Through supporting countries with education system reform, we are also helping to equip young people with the skills they need for a prosperous future. More effective and legitimate education institutions providing quality public education can also reduce violence, overcome social divisions and improve relations between citizens and the state.

4.7 By contributing to the UK's soft power, we provide a means to support the rules-based international order. In this context, our work helps to generate and align shared values, norms, objectives and ultimately behaviours in a peaceful world. By working on cultural, education and civil society soft power programmes, we play a role in creating the long-term conditions for mutual respect and understanding to be achieved.

4.8 Young Mediterranean Voices

Young Mediterranean Voices (formerly Young Arab Voices) is a debating network that has reached over 100,000 young people since 2012. A report by the think tank Chatham House viewed the programme as one of the region's most successful skills transfer and training initiatives, fostering critical thinking skills not supplied by the formal education system, and as creating a culture of more inclusive debate and dialogue.

4.9 Active Citizens

Active Citizens is a non-profit programme that promotes community cohesion and improvement through civic engagement or volunteering and which to date has been delivered in 68 countries globally to almost 250,000 participants. The programme is an example of how British Council works with partner organisations overseas to increase the contribution of community leaders towards achieving sustainable development both locally and globally. It encourages peer-to-peer relations across cultural, geographic and political boundaries and aims to share best practice and equip communities with the knowledge and tools required to continue the work independently.

4.10 Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme

Through DFID, the British Council, Social Development Direct and International Alert worked together to administer the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme. It aimed to help Nigerians manage and ensure the reduction in cases of violent conflict. The programme produced independent research to influence policymakers to build sustainable peace. The programme contributed to the inclusion of a wider range of actors from across government and civil society in the process to formulate a new National Security Strategy, which shifted policy away from a military-only approach to a more comprehensive one.

SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities)

4.11 The British Council's work in education and the creative economy also provides opportunities to local communities for training and education, building individual skills for employability and community skills needed for sustainable development, supporting SDG 8 and SDG 10. Respublica concluded in its report 'Britain's Global Future: Harnessing the soft power capital of UK institutions'¹, "opening access to higher education is... a crucial driver of economic growth and the fight against poverty".

4.12 Social Enterprise

The British Council administers social enterprise work in policy development, skills transfer and sharing of experience. During the 2014 Triennial Review it was noted that the British Council is a driving force in this area. Feedback from overseas partners showed that the UK, through the British Council is unique in supporting the development of social enterprise.

4.13 Newton Fund

The British Council is one of the 15 UK delivery partners with Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for the Newton Fund. The programme enriches the quality and strength of UK and overseas science and research through international co-operation. It builds research and innovation partnerships with 16 ODA-eligible partner countries to support their economic development and social welfare, and to develop their research and innovation capacity for long-term sustainable growth. It has a total UK Government investment of £735 million up until 2021, with matched resources from the partner countries.

¹ Respublica, *Britain's Global Future: Harnessing the soft power capital of UK institutions*
<http://www.respublica.org.uk/our-work/publications/britains-global-future-harnessing-soft-power-capital-uk-institutions/>

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 As a Non-Departmental-Public-Body, the British Council contributes holistically to the SDGs by working with HMG, overseas governments, organisations and directly with the people who benefit from our programmes. We believe that it is this approach along with long-term standing in country allows for sustainable benefits both globally and for the UK through our development programmes.

5.2 We believe that the SDGs are closely linked and are mutually reinforcing – for example, there is a connection between the role of education in social justice, peace building and social cohesion, particularly in countries affected by conflict, where a functioning and fairer civil society is highly dependent on an effective and inclusive education system. This links goals 16, 4 and 5 (among others).

5.3 As the UK's international engagement becomes further focused on the developing world, all organisations and departments must look at how they can contribute more effectively to the Sustainable Development Goals, drawing on their areas of expertise to gain impact across all areas.

5.4 We are looking forward to working with DFID and support them in the lead up to the Voluntary National Review, in particular in relation to gathering evidence for the UK's contribution to the SDGs internationally.