

TRIENNIAL REVIEW RESPONSE REPORT

THE OPPORTUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:  
BRITISH COUNCIL RESPONSE  
TO THE TRIENNIAL REVIEW  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
RELATING TO THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF  
EDUCATION AND ENGLISH  
CONTRACT OPPORTUNITIES  
OVERSEAS

FIRST YEAR PROGRESS AND IMPACT REPORT – AUGUST 2016

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the recommendations of the Triennial review in 2014, the British Council launched its Opportunity Development Process (ODP) in June 2015, a procedure and internal campaign with the aim of ensuring fairness, transparency, consistency and partnership in developing its contract work overseas, in relation to contracts with a value greater than £100k.

This report reviews the first year of operation. It finds that the process has been rolled out successfully and has had a significant positive impact on the attitude and behaviours of British Council managers. The process of recording the rationale for project pursuit is being followed. However the process has not led to the expected increase in sharing of information about business opportunities for UK organisations. There is little evidence that the process has made a large impact on UK sector perceptions of the British Council's approach in this area, and the report calls for a more proactive engagement with the UK sector which will change perceptions, amongst other recommendations aimed at continuing and strengthening the process.

## Overall conclusions

- The Opportunity Development Process (ODP) has been rolled out efficiently to British Council offices overseas using a variety of methods and targeting relevant members of staff
- The policy that underpins the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) and the procedures involved are generally understood and being implemented although there are still inconsistencies in both understanding and implementation
- The use of the Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM) website for sharing large-scale opportunities has so far been very limited
- Oversight and reporting systems within English for Education Systems (EES) are insufficiently robust to verify if all opportunities identified are being recorded and shared
- There is evidence that organisational cultural change is taking place in relation to alignment, consistency, transparency, fairness and working in partnership
- The Opportunity Development Process (ODP) has had only a minimal impact as yet on sector perceptions

# Research methodology

Data was gathered through:

- An analysis of reporting systems:
  - Financial records via SAP
  - Global EES and Education & Society pipeline documents
  - Monthly consolidated Opportunity Development Process (ODP) reports
  - Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) log
  - Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM) log
  - Selected completed Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs)
- An online survey of British Council staff involved in the development of overseas contract opportunities
- Two focus groups with representatives of the UK sector
- Research highlights
- Organisational cultural change

Staff involved in the development of large scale overseas English and educational contracts report that the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) has clearly made a positive impact on their behaviour and/or the behaviour of their teams in relation to recording and sharing information with the UK sector. 83% of those surveyed report that the ODP is being implemented at least mostly consistently.

From a review of recently submitted Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs) there are isolated examples of staff not stating British Council preference for working on an open tender basis in response to specific requests from Ministries of Education to deliver services without passing through a tendering process. The relative infrequency of these examples and evidence of discussion with local UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) representatives around examples of this type confirm the general but not complete success of the process in bringing about organisational cultural change.

These behavioural and attitudinal changes within British Council are an important long term benefit that the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) is delivering.

## Recording information

The impact of this expressed change in attitude and behaviour is apparent in a consideration of the figures relating to Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) completion. Since June 2015, the British Council's Education and Society department have completed Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs) for 100 opportunities with an estimated contract value of £295m. For the same period the English for Education Systems function have completed OACs for 49 opportunities with an estimated total contract value of £75m.

## Sharing information

The number of competitive tender opportunities recorded through an Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) and posted on the Service for International Education Marketing (SIEM) website for the same period is four. This relatively low number could be the result of various factors:

- an MoE had decided categorically that it does not wish to pass through an open tendering process;
- a strategic decision has been taken to involve partners further down the line;
- as is the case with the majority of opportunities, the opportunity in question is already in the public domain;
- other channels are being used to share partnership opportunities;
- there is a reluctance to share.

It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions, but it is clear the stated channel for sharing opportunities from this process (the SIEM website) is not being utilised. It is worth noting however that during this period 100 lower value (less than £100k) Education and English contract opportunities were posted on the SIEM site.

## Preference for partnerships

Each Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) requires the manager to indicate 'pursue alone' or 'pursue in partnership' or 'do not pursue'. The majority of OACs (83%) were tagged as 'pursue in partnership' – equivalent to £432m. (See table 1). However, we noted that these figures relate to opportunities many of which do not result in business. (Table 2 gives the breakdown of revenue to British Council from overseas contracts.)

**Table 1: 'Pursue in partnership' June 2015 to July 2016**

	<b>ESTIMATED CONTRACT VALUE</b>	<b>% OF TOTAL ASSESSED</b>
Pursue in partnership	£432.41m	83%
Pursue alone	£66.57m	13%
Do not pursue	£17.55m	3%

**Table 2: Overall value of educational and English contracts (FY 2015 – 16)**

	<b>EDUCATION AND SOCIETY (E&amp;S)</b>	<b>ENGLISH FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS (EES)</b>
FCR (client income from non-grant funded projects)	£180.2m	£14.9m
External funding to British Council grant-funded projects	£53.4m	£6.33m
Grant	£104m	£21.5m
<b>Total</b>	<b>£337.6m</b>	<b>£42.72m</b>

## Transparency and reporting

The British Council's current reporting mechanisms are not configured to reveal what percentage of the *totality* of opportunities identified by British Council is being recorded. This is a particular problem with opportunities from the British Council's English for Education Systems (EES) function and is a cause for concern.

## UK sector perceptions

The focus groups held with the UK sector revealed two main points in relation to the effectiveness of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP).

First, the sector is aware that British Council is responding to the recommendations of the Triennial Review, but is not clear what this response consists of.

Second, the response has, on the whole, yet to make an impact on the existing perceptions of the British Council in relation to the transparency, alignment, consistency and fairness of its behaviour. Given its stated aim and the investment British Council has made in the development of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) and its roll-out, results could have been better, especially if communication with the sector had been part of the design of the ODP project.

These comments need to be seen in relation to the relatively short time the ODP has been in operation, British Council priorities and resources in relation to external communication, and the capacity of the sector to absorb and disseminate information provided by British Council.

One further point arising from discussions with the UK sector revolves around excluding opportunities with an estimated contract value of less than £100k – the kind of opportunity that ELT providers within the UK sector stated they are most interested in. The British Council will find it more difficult to put forward the ODP in its current form as a mechanism that fully allays the concerns of the sector.

## Recommendations

- Use the research questions in this report to set measures against which the impact of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) can be evaluated, along with its continued applicability, on a yearly basis
- Ensure that the information about how British Council is responding to the Triennial Review recommendations is externally disseminated in a more systematic way through the development and implementation of an effective UK sector engagement strategy
- Review the process and channels through which information about opportunities is shared, especially in relation to the Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM)
- Ensure that improvements being made to the systems for capturing and reporting on pipeline opportunities identified by English for Education Systems (EES) allow accurate and consistent reporting
- Consider lowering the current threshold of £100k for mandatory recording and sharing of opportunities
- Introduce a Contracts Approval Process (CAP) for English for Education Systems (EES) project pursuit to ensure better oversight of recording and sharing opportunities
- Continue with the programme of training for senior staff. Hold Regional Leads and country-based managers accountable for instances of non-compliance with British Council stated policy on recording and sharing opportunities
- Continue with the programme of training of and information dissemination to relevant staff. Hold regional and country directors accountable for performance of their teams in respect of Opportunity Development Process (ODP) policy and practice
- Include in the training of relevant staff an understanding of what UK sector expertise consists in and how this might be engaged with in the pursuit and delivery of (especially English for Education Systems) overseas projects
- Ensure 'targets' for overseas contracts work are expressed in ways that foreground benefit to the UK as well as financial targets and educational impact
- Review the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) documentation on an on-going basis to ensure that it is as easy to understand and implement as possible

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# CONTEXT

## 1.1 Overall recommendations of the Triennial Review of the British Council

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Triennial Review of the British Council was published 22 July 2014. The Review recognises many examples of excellence and innovation in the work of the British Council. However, overall the Review finds:

- *'[There is] scope for more consistent delivery of a high quality product across the board'*
- *'... activity [is] not always well aligned with other bodies representing British interests overseas including educational and cultural bodies, and UK diplomatic missions' (p3)*
- *'The Review also concludes that the following areas where UK stakeholders expressed concerns should be improved:*
  - *transparency*
  - *accountability*
  - *clarity of purpose' (p3)*
- *'The Review concludes that the next phase of change should do this in a way that:*
  - *brings greatest benefit to wider UK interests*
  - *frees up greater surplus for redeployment on non-commercial activities*
  - *mitigates damaging stakeholder perceptions that the British Council is primarily motivated by income generation to the detriment of its broader cultural diplomacy role' (p4)*

## 1.2 Specific Triennial Review recommendations relating to the British Council's development of education and English contract opportunities overseas

Along with these overall recommendations, the TR contained recommendations specific to British Council's development of education and English contract opportunities overseas. These recommendations were as follows:

- *'... the [British] Council work closely with UKTI, BIS, DoE and UK Embassies to achieve greater transparency and willingness to share information about English language opportunities overseas' (p50)*
- *'... the British Council operate transparently, inclusively and effectively to promote the wider UK sector, and that it put in place measures to demonstrate to UK stakeholders that it is acting fairly and consistently on behalf of broader UK interests' (p52)*
- *'the British Council work with UKTI, BIS and DfE to develop a system to promote UK education and English language teaching providers in-country on a fair competitive basis with their own products.'* (p52)
- *'... all UK Heads of diplomatic missions and UKTI staff be briefed on the British Council Fair Trading policy, with guidance of what this means in practice, and that this be re-circulated to all posts annually' (p55)*
- *'... the Council should also agree with UKTI a system, possibly including some transfer of responsibilities, to promote ELT, exam and other educational providers on a fair and competitive basis, and provide fair access to commercial opportunities' (p55)*

## 1.3 The British Council's response to the recommendations

In response to the Triennial Review's recommendations, specific to developing education and English contract opportunities overseas, the British Council developed the Opportunity Development Process (ODP). The ODP is designed to achieve greater alignment, transparency, consistency, fairness and partnership and was rolled out in June 2015.

The ODP is a process which determines how British Council reports on, shares and pursues education and English contract opportunities overseas that have a value greater than £100k.

The ODP process is operational within the two parts of the British Council involved in developing English and educational contracts overseas, namely the Education and Society (E&S) and English for Education Systems (EES) departments.

To ensure full visibility of how British Council records the pursuit of projects supported through public funds, the ODP applies equally to Full Cost Recovery contract opportunities and Grant Funded project concepts with partnership funding of above £100k.

**The ODP has four main elements:**

### **1. Recording opportunities through the Opportunities Assessment Checklist (OAC)**

The OAC is a proforma template used to record internal discussion of a contract opportunity and informs the decision on whether, and in what way, to pursue a contract opportunity. Completed OACs are forwarded for review to British Council centrally.

### **2. Sharing information about opportunities by completing and forwarding an opportunity sharing template**

Opportunities identified are shared with local UKTI representatives, and where it is appropriate and useful to do so, posted on the UKTI opportunities – Exporting is Great website by UKTI and posted on the Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM) website by British Council.

### **3. Ensuring consistency and oversight of the pursuit process through the Contracts Approval Process (CAP)**

The CAP is a four stage process that guides, records and ensures oversight of the steps taken from identification of an opportunity to signing a project delivery contract.

### **4. A new procedure for complaints**

Providing ultimate right of redress through an independent adjudicator, Verita.

British Council country directors are accountable for the completion of the OAC and the sharing information template, and for following the CAP, up to the limit of their delegated financial authorities. Beyond their delegated authorities, British Council regionally and then centrally is accountable.

British Council policy underpinning the development of education and English contract opportunities overseas is in the public domain and published on British Council's corporate website.

# REPORT PARAMETERS

## 2.1 Purpose and terms of reference

As part of its response to the Triennial Review, recommendations specific to developing education and English contract opportunities overseas, the British Council undertook to review the progress and impact of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) after its first year in operation.

The purpose of this progress report is therefore to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of British Council's response to the TR recommendations regarding its development of large education and English contract opportunities overseas in achieving greater:
  - **alignment** - in terms of aims, values, standards and procedures - with relevant UK public bodies in the UK and overseas
  - **transparency** in the way it identifies and pursues opportunities
  - **consistency** in sharing information about identified opportunities according to clearly defined processes and standards
  - **fairness** in the way it positions its own products and services. Including not taking advantage of its public sector status by using public funds in a competitive open market to pursue commercial business
  - **partnership** with a view to promoting, supporting and actively collaborating with the UK sector overseas, as its default position
- Suggest any further steps that could be taken with regard to the TR recommendations in the future

## 2.2 Reporting period

The reporting period for this progress report is June 2015 to June 2016.

## 2.3 Scope

This progress report reviews the implementation and the impact of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) in order to evaluate its overall effectiveness against the Triennial Review's recommendations.

This report does not evaluate progress against recommendations of the Triennial Review relating to areas outside of those pertaining to the development of education and English contract opportunities overseas.

## 2.4 Methodology

The findings of this report are based on the following research questions and instruments:

RESEARCH QUESTION	INSTRUMENT
<b>Implementation</b>	
<p>Has the ODP been rolled out efficiently?</p> <p>Is the purpose, functioning and importance of the ODP understood by relevant British Council staff overseas?</p> <p>Are the reporting and sharing requirements of the ODP being followed by overseas staff?</p>	<p>Interview with UK staff responsible for the roll-out of the ODP</p> <p>Online survey of British Council Country Directors, Regional Leads and business development staff</p> <p>Desk based review of relevant reporting documents and relevant opportunity sites</p>
<b>Impact</b>	
<p>Has the ODP brought about organisational cultural change within the British Council?</p> <p>Is the ODP perceived as effective by the UK sector in responding to the TR recommendations?</p>	<p>Online survey of British Council Country Directors, Regional Leads and business development staff</p> <p>Review of selected completed OACs by region</p> <p>Focus groups with representatives of the UK sector</p>

# RESULTS

## 3.1 Implementation: How efficiently has the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) been rolled out?

### Research questions

- Has the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) been rolled out efficiently?
- Is the importance, purpose and functioning of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) understood by relevant British Council staff overseas?
- Are the reporting and sharing requirements of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) being followed by overseas staff?

### Research instrument 1

#### Interviews with UK staff responsible for the roll-out of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP):

- John Knagg, Senior Advisor, English for Education Systems
- Craig Farmer, Global Pipeline Manager, Education and Society

#### To support the embedding of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP), the British Council took the following steps:

- Published a policy and produced guidance notes for new procedures, which included Frequently Asked Questions
- Sent out communications across Strategic Business Units regarding the launch of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) to all English for Education Systems (EES) staff and Education and Society staff, via the Education and Society newsletter *Express* (1,100 staff globally)
- Provided a further explanation of this guidance through 8 webinars targeting UK and overseas staff with a range of different responsibilities in the pursuit and delivery management of educational contracts. Webinars were targeted in particular at all Education and Society Business Development staff (106) and sector teams. Content was additionally cascaded by regional Business Development Leads
- Provided awareness raising sessions and support in each regional business development network via Education and Society pipeline calls as well as face-to-face training sessions with the Sub-Saharan Africa Business Development Network and the schools sector team

- Information on the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) is included in the induction programmes of Country Directors
- Information about the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) is included in all Education and Society Business Development training sessions, as well as inductions for new English for Education Systems and Education and Society Business Development staff, as well as for staff within relevant teams. The Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) has been incorporated into Education and Society Centre of Excellence training sessions
- Information has been included about the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) in the agenda for meetings of the global English leaders
- Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs) are recorded and logged with monthly reports provided to the 7 geographical regions and global heads, which monitor compliance with Opportunity Development Process (ODP) procedures. As part of the Education and Society Contracts Approval Process (CAP) OACs are independently reviewed by a board of senior Education and Society staff at the weekly Contracts Approval Board meeting, when opportunities reach stage gate 1.
- Reminders from the Executive Board of importance of ODP sent out to all regional and country directors

#### Verbatim comments resulting from research instrument 1

*‘Significant progress has been made with completing OACs but more work needs to be done to ensure that all OACs contain all the required information. We need to provide more guidance on what an ‘opportunity’ is exactly. Although accountability for the information contained in the OAC at senior level may need to be strengthened in some countries – the culture change in relation to alignment, transparency, consistency and fairness is taking place’*

John Knagg, Senior Advisor, English for Education Systems

*‘Colleagues understand and have bought into the underlying principles of the ODP around fair competition, focus on BC mission, working in partnership, UK benefit (etc) and that’s reflected in the OAC numbers since the policy was introduced. Compliance has been excellent for new opportunities pursued over the past year. There is still some confusion around the need to share opportunities with the UK sector using SIEM - and understanding when it is relevant to do so - which we need to address. Nearly all the opportunities in the E&S pipeline are already in the public domain meaning there’s no role for the BC to “re-advertise”, and in other cases we need to be careful about client confidentiality. As well as that, there’s still some work to be done to communicate the need to record opportunities that are not pursued.’*

Craig Farmer, Global Pipeline Manager, Education and Society

## Research instrument 2

Results of the online survey of relevant overseas staff

### *Are the processes for assessing and sharing opportunities clear?*

<b>Very clear</b>	<b>33.33%</b>
<b>Reasonably clear</b>	<b>58.33%</b>
<b>Only moderately clear</b>	<b>8.33%</b>
<b>Not at all clear</b>	<b>0.00%</b>

### Verbatim comments

- *'getting better for sure'*
- *'Getting clearer. I attended a very good webinar recently that helped bring everything together.'*
- *'Assessing, yes. Share or not share much less clear?'*
- *'The question of recoding things we don't go for is a bit problematic – we may take such decisions very early on before we really even know much about the nature of the [opportunity]. This undoubtedly leads to under-reporting.'*
- *'Very clear. Assisted by solid working relationships with UKTI [UK Trade and Investment] locally and UKTI Education in London, amongst others.'*

### Are these processes being implemented by you and/or the teams you are accountable for?

<b>Yes, consistently</b>	<b>33.33%</b>
<b>Yes, mostly consistently</b>	<b>50.00%</b>
<b>Yes, but inconsistently</b>	<b>8.33%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>8.33%</b>

### Verbatim comments

- *'The OAC appears onerous [which] means it's often delayed in completion ... [the] process [is] usually followed verbally just not recorded'*
- *'Most [opportunities] so far fall below the threshold but I realise that has led us to forget about the requirement'*
- *'... not wholly appropriate at the moment – few opportunities are arising, but where there are we are using the ODP to inform discussion with colleagues at appropriate levels and to reach an agreed decision'*
- *'We could submit the form more promptly'*

**Do you have any further comments to make about the effectiveness of the implementation of the ODP?**

- *'I find it ok ... reasonably straight forward, but I don't think I know who owns it. Seem to be a few people in charge of it but I am still not clear who the go-to ODP team is ... otherwise, it's working for me'*
- *'I think a more formal introduction would have been better – compulsory webinar attendance maybe? The recent session I attended was great at setting out the 'why' as well as the 'how' whereas I feel we started with the 'how' and therefore maybe didn't pay it enough attention because we didn't know 'why'. Having a clear, documented process is very helpful.'*
- *'Can we simplify the OAC? Replace some sections with drop downs?'*
- *'The OAC process is still a bit haphazard. Technically this is the first thing that teams should do when they get their first sniff of a project / opportunity but it tends to happen concurrently with proposal writing. Also I think there needs to be more centralised guidance on advertising for institutions / consultants to be involved in our projects. We know about the consultancy database and how to advertise opportunities that way, but less sure about how we pass information to UKTI and other agencies which can also share more widely.'*
- *'Overall, a necessary introduction. If the process/processes could be digitised, it would be even better.'*
- *'Unless it is consistently used by everyone, it begins to break down, as others think it is not worth the extra paperwork.'*

## Research instrument 3

### Research questions

1. What was the estimated number and income value of all project opportunities identified?
2. What % of pipeline projects had completed OAC forms?
3. What % of pipeline project opportunities had been posted on the SIEM website?

### Desk-based review of relevant reporting logs and relevant opportunity sites

- Education and Society (E&S) pipeline document
- English for Education Systems (EES) pipeline document
- Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) log
- Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM) log
- A selection of completed Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs)

The research examined the following data set: opportunities with a contract value of over £100k for the period 1 June 2015 to 16 June 2016.

### Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs) completed

#### English for Education Systems (EES)

REGION	AME	EU	EA	MENA	SA	SSA	WE	TOTAL
Number of opportunities**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
OACs completed	9	2	7	9	9	6	7	49
Value (000,000)	8.2	0.6	12	9.4	15.7	26	2.7	74.6

\*Figures taken from the Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC) log

\*\*N/A for number of opportunities because English for Education Systems do not systematically record all speculative opportunities in their pipeline document

#### Education and Society (E&S)

REGION	AME	EU	EA	MENA	SA	SSA**	WE	GLOBAL	UK	TOTAL
Number of opportunities	12	17	6	35	19	N/A	20	8	7	124
OACs completed	10	14	1	29	18	N/A	16	6	6	100
Value (000,000)	23.6	14.9	13.8	82.3	58.5	N/A	34.1	56.5	11.3	295

\*Figures supplied by Education and Society (E&S)

\*\* SSA figures have not been incorporated as yet due to different reporting mechanisms

## Information shared about opportunities above £100k, for which OACs have been completed

Services for International Education Marketing log

REGION	AME	MENA	UK
Number of opportunities shared above £100K	1	2	1

## Total educational and English opportunities (all contract values) posted on SIEM

OPPORTUNITIES POSTED IN THE REPORTING PERIOD	386
Opportunities relating to consultancy/training	62
British Council administered opportunities	18

### Review of selected completed Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs)

#### Research question:

Are British Council managers following British Council's own policy in relation to issues of fair competition, in completing Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs)?

In Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs) staff are asked to address the following issues:

- *If the British Council has been supporting the development of government policy and plans in this area, it is particularly important to demonstrate how we are operating on a fair basis.*
- *If a client has approached only the British Council, to document the rationale for proceeding. Is the client willing to consider a full tendering process? The British Council should highlight broad range of UK capability*

These selected answers, taken from OACs completed during the reporting period, indicate to what extent Country Directors are following British Council policy in relation to fair competition:

#### 1. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

*'At this stage, to our knowledge the client has approached the British Council only. The client is particularly interested in maintaining education links between the UK and [client] and sees the British Council as its partner of choice in achieving this.'*

*'The British Council is the only ELT provider with presence on the ground and established infrastructure in country with a substantial online English product, robust English language testing products and the required expertise to conduct a consultancy review of the university's foundation year.'*

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The response here does not indicate that British Council has stated its preference to the client of working on an open tender basis.

## 2. AMERICAS

*'The materials developed with [name of UK sector provider] are ready. Given that the Ministry has lost so much delivery time and only has until December to deploy materials, the British Council is both a trusted partner and the unique route for UK contracting. We have discussed locally with UKTI [UK Trade and Investment] and it is apparent that no other British institution could respond to the tight timeline and with commercial viability.'*

*'The British Council has emphasised that it would sub-contract a large aspect of the project to the UK publishing sector.'*

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The response indicates that British Council has discussed the issue of single sourcing with UKTI and is committed to working in partnership as its default position.

## 3. WIDER EUROPE

*'As is an FCR project opportunity, no British Council grant funds will be used in this project. The opportunity complies with the 7 high-level principles of fair competition policy.'*

*'At the very first meeting with the client, we clearly expressed our preference to respond to an open tender. The TSU will make their decision about how they will procure services, after the university management decides on the final format and content of the services that they would like the project to include.'*

*'Procurement may be in the form of an open tender, or they may opt for direct procurement with a trusted supplier (subject to local public procurement standards).'*

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The response indicates that British Council has stated its preference to the client of working on an open tender basis.

## 4. EAST ASIA

*'The opportunity is an open tender in line with domestic law on procurement, with details available publically on the Ministry of Education website to all interested parties.'*

*'The opportunity is only open to organisations with a physical presence in [client country], including offices and support staff. Briefing sessions are open to all eligible, interested parties, including international organisations with offices in [client country]. In the past two years, these sessions have been attended by high-profile domestic providers.'*

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The response here indicates that British Council is responding to the in-country public tendering procedures.

## 5. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

*'We were approached directly by the ministry about this, but would work to share it as an opportunity for the wider education providers in the UK. Once the opportunities have been published publicly, we would approach suitable UK partners and consultants to help deliver the project. An initial UK partner is [name of partner] who has already approached us about forming a consortium to bid for this work'*

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The response here indicates that British Council is committed to developing this opportunity on an open tender basis.

## 5. SOUTH ASIA

*'The client has approached the British Council because of our strong local track record in [area of work] and our excellent reputation across the country. The client has also approached [UK sector provider] and there is potential for partnership. We have raised the question of tendering and that the project may be through BC Examinations and English Services India Private Limited (BCEESIPL) – the client mentioned the Swiss Test which has been used on other contracts in the state.*

*'A Needs analysis is required to understand the levels of learners, teachers, infrastructure capability etc. and we have given [name of UK sector provider] the opportunity to partner on this. There is an opportunity to address a clear need, develop a project that can have high impact and sustainability, and an urgency to respond to the State request immediately. That urgency means it will be difficult and sensitive to influence the procurement process at this stage, although post the needs analysis, we will discuss the opportunity further and raise the possibility that the client considers a full tendering process. This would allow other UK organisations to access the opportunity. Additionally we will, in our on-going discussions, explore the possibility to highlight wider UK capability and expertise in the focus areas, with a view to being aware of possible partnerships with UK. We have initiated discussions with both the Secretary of the HE Department and [name of UK sector provider] UK on these lines.'*

*'If a single source contract goes ahead, we will look at how to sub-contract elements of the project to other UK organisations whose participation will give the highest added value to the objectives of the project. This would be in collaboration with UKTI.'*

*'We would support the transparency of procurement creating opportunities for local and international companies to participate.'*

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The response indicates that the British Council intends to work in partnership with the UK sector (in both pursuit and delivery stages) and to state its preference for working on an open tender basis and to discuss any issues relating to the client's insistence on working on a single-source basis with UK Trade and Investment (UKTI).

## Conclusion

This sampling of completed Opportunity Assessment Checklists (OACs) by region indicates high levels of compliance with the ODP and appropriate attitudes/behaviour with only:

- a) Isolated inconsistencies in the understanding of British Council policy of working in partnership as its default position and of fair competition
- b) Isolated inconsistencies in the understanding of British Council's role in delivering benefit for the UK

## 3. Results

### 3.2 Impact: How effective has the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) been in achieving its aims?

#### Research questions:

- Has the ODP brought about organisational cultural change within the British Council?
- Is the ODP perceived as effective by the sector in responding to the TR recommendations?

#### Research instrument 2

An online survey of British Council Country Directors, Regional Leads and business development staff

**SURVEY QUESTION: Compared to the period before the introduction of the ODP, how would you describe you and/or your team's overall attitude towards reporting on opportunities and sharing information? Do you have any specific examples?**

- *'Very different. I don't think we would have considered sharing opportunities with the UK, other than where we needed to make a proposal for which BC needed external skills.'*
- *'From total ignorance to basic understanding. Definite improvement – much greater clarity on why/what/when than before. No longer guilty as charged!'*
- *'We didn't share consistently and there was no mechanism (e.g. OAC) in place to ensure that we were considering whether or not UK sector should/could be involved in our project work.'*
- *'We are much more aware of the risks of competition, and scrupulous about the process of documenting and assessing opportunities. However, I am not sure that we feel that the process would necessarily protect us from damage in a case like that which occasioned the first, and ongoing, [organisation] complaint. There is always a risk that at low level, a process like this will be seen as a means for devolving liability; to avoid this, I would like to see some top-down engagement.'*
- *'I suspect not changed enough, to be honest. More work needed.'*
- *'I and the team completely understand the need for the ODP and the core concerns arising from the Triennial Review and elsewhere. We have worked hard to build up an internal culture of integration which, by virtue of being market-led, leads to more effective cross-geography opportunity tracking. At the same time, we have worked hard at building a more open and confident relationship with partners and stakeholders. This means that teams (co-ordinated by our central Business Impact Assessment Team, which had set up a pan-UK flow chart some 12 months before ODP) are happy and consistent in sharing information for the benefit of the whole UK.'*

**SURVEY QUESTION: Compared to the period before the introduction of the ODP, how would you describe you and/or your team's overall attitude towards reporting on opportunities and sharing information? Do you have any specific examples?**

- *'... raised awareness of the need to be open about opportunities.'*
  - *'It is clearly understood that opportunities need to be shared with the UK sector through ODP. How and when we do this is perhaps a little fuzzy.'*
  - *'Probably fair to say that we didn't report opportunities before unless we wanted/needed to partner'*
  - *'... we know the needs to report on opportunities and follow guidelines (OAC)'*
  - *'More disciplined'*
-

## Research instrument 5

### Focus groups with representatives of the UK sector

Two focus groups were hosted by UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and facilitated by the British Council on 12 and 14 July 2016. The following institutions were represented:

- BESA (British Educational Suppliers Association)
- Cambridge
- English UK
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)
- GL Education
- GVS Ltd
- Levant Education
- Macmillan Education
- Pearson
- Twig World
- UK Trade and Investment (UKTI)

Both focus groups were asked the following four questions. A summary of answers is provided.

1. What is your understanding of the Triennial Review recommendations relating to overseas education and English contract opportunities identified by British Council?
2. What is your understanding of how British Council responded to the recommendations?
3. Compared to a year ago, have you noticed any difference in the way that British Council shares information about overseas education and English contract opportunities?
4. Overall do you believe that British Council is responding effectively to concerns raised in the Triennial Review over alignment, transparency, consistency and fairness?

#### **1. What is your understanding of the Triennial Review recommendations relating to overseas education and English contract opportunities identified by British Council?**

On the whole, there was a general understanding of the background to the recommendations of the Triennial Review:

That the British Council was putting commercial imperatives ahead of its cultural relations role, not sharing opportunities with the UK sector and using its in-country presence, reputation and government grant to unfairly position itself to generate revenue in a competitive market; a lack of clarity and consistency.

In relation to recommendations, mention was made of:

- greater transparency and openness,
- better understanding of the UK sector and its offer,
- training for British Council staff in transparency,
- transferring responsibility for sharing opportunities to UKTI,
- the independent complaints process,
- the 100k reporting and information sharing threshold,
- the internal focus of the recommendations,
- and a new legal entity for the British Council's commercial activity.

## 2. What is your understanding of how British Council responded to the recommendations?

Mention was made of the Opportunity Assessment Checklist (OAC), policy documents, opportunities posted on the Services for International Education website, information sharing at the UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) working group meetings.

Little was known about how the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) was actually working in practice, if the process was mandatory, how British Council decided it had the expertise to pursue opportunities, how the preferred suppliers list worked, or how information sharing about the process is taking place.

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### Questions 3 and 4:

**3. Compared to a year ago, have you noticed any difference in the way that British Council shares information about overseas education and English contract opportunities?**

**4. Overall do you believe that British Council is responding effectively to concerns raised in the Triennial Review over alignment, transparency, consistency and fairness?**

*There is a sense that the British Council is doing something to address the recommendations, but no clear understanding of what this is exactly and no consensus around changing perceptions. There were individual references to continued nervousness, increased clarity, more engagement with the British Council through UK Trade and Investment's ELT working group, opacity and defensiveness in relation to the independent complaints process, responding to concerns raised by UK sector on an ad-hoc basis from the centre, not necessarily replicated overseas. No major changes perceived and no sense that the British Council's default position is to work in partnership.*

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# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Caveat: An analysis of progress depends on an understanding of the starting point and performance indicators against which progress is to be measured. As the British Council did not undertake a systematic baseline study at the inception and roll-out stage of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) nor specify any performance indicators (see recommendations below) this report can only provide a snapshot of current attitudes towards its policy and practice. This is clearly not the same as measuring impact and British Council should be cautious in attributing any reported cultural change within the organisation or in the perceptions of the UK sector directly to the implementation of the Opportunity Development Process (ODP). However in terms of assessing progress as it relates to implementation, rather than impact, we are to some extent on safer ground, in that before the Opportunity Development Process (ODP) there were no formal requirements for the British Council to report on or share any information with the UK sector about its development of overseas English and Educational contracts overseas.

This report reviews the first year of operation of the ODP. It finds that the process has been rolled out successfully and has had a significant positive impact on the attitude and behaviours of British Council managers. The process of recording the rationale for project pursuit is being followed. However the process has not led to the expected increase in sharing of information about business opportunities for UK organisations. There is little evidence that the process has made a large impact on UK sector perceptions of the British Council's approach in this area, and the report calls for a more proactive engagement with the UK sector which will change perceptions, amongst other recommendations aimed at continuing and strengthening the process.

## Overall conclusions

- The Opportunity Development Process (ODP) has been rolled out efficiently to British Council offices overseas using a variety of methods and targeting relevant members of staff.
- The policy that underpins the ODP and the procedures involved are generally understood and being implemented although there are still inconsistencies in both understanding and implementation
- The use of the Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM) website for sharing large-scale opportunities has so far been very limited
- Oversight and reporting systems within English for Education Systems (EES) are insufficiently robust to verify if all opportunities identified are being recorded and shared
- There is evidence that organisational cultural change is taking place in relation to alignment, consistency, transparency, fairness and working in partnership
- The ODP has had only a minimal impact as yet on sector perceptions
- With this in mind, further development could usefully take into account the following recommendations

# Recommendations

- Use the research questions in this report to set measures against which the impact of the ODP can be evaluated, along with its continued applicability, on a yearly basis
- Ensure that the information about how British Council is responding to the TR recommendations is externally disseminated in a more systematic way through the development and implementation of an effective UK sector engagement strategy
- Review the process and channels through which information about opportunities is shared, especially in relation to the SIEM
- Ensure that improvements being made to the systems for capturing and reporting on pipeline opportunities identified by EES allow accurate and consistent reporting
- Consider lowering the current threshold of £100k for mandatory recording and sharing of opportunities
- Introduce a Contracts Approval Process for EES project pursuit to ensure better oversight of recording and sharing opportunities
- Continue with the programme of training for senior staff. Hold Regional Leads and country-based managers accountable for instances of non-compliance with British Council stated policy on recording and sharing opportunities
- Continue with the programme of training of and information dissemination to relevant staff. Hold regional and country directors accountable for performance of their teams in respect of ODP policy and practice
- Include in the training of relevant staff an understanding of what UK sector expertise consists in and how this might be engaged with in the pursuit and delivery of (especially EES) overseas projects
- Ensure 'targets' for overseas contracts work are expressed in ways that foreground benefit to the UK as well as financial targets and educational impact
- Review the ODP documentation on an on-going basis to ensure that it is as easy to understand and implement as possible

## 6. Annexes

6.1 Research instruments – staff online survey

6.2 Research instruments – UK sector focus group questions

## Online staff survey questions

### Your role

1. **Are you a Country Director / Regional Lead / Country Lead / Business Development Manager / Project Officer / Other (please specify)**

*Describe very briefly your role in relation to the Opportunities Development Process*

### The TR [Triennial Review] recommendations

2. **How would you rate your understanding of the TR recommendations as they relate to concerns raised by the UK sector over alignment, transparency, consistency and fairness?**

*Very good / Reasonable / Only moderate / Poor*

*Comments*

### Implementing the Opportunities Development Process

3. **Are the processes for assessing and sharing opportunities clear?**

*Very clear / Reasonably clear / only moderately clear / not at all clear*

*Comments*

4. **Are these processes being implemented by you and/or the teams you are accountable for?**

*Yes, consistently / Yes, mostly consistently / Yes, but inconsistently / No*

*Comments*

### Impact of the ODP on your behaviour

5. **Compared to the period before the introduction of the ODP, how would you describe you and/or your team's overall attitude towards reporting on opportunities and sharing information?**

*Comments and any specific examples*

6. **Do you have any comments to make about the effectiveness of the implementation of the ODP?**

*Comments*

### Call for UK sector focus group participants

I am sure that you will recall the Triennial Review of the British Council which reported in 2014. The Review, underlining the undoubted benefits of the Council as a force for good and as a positive influencer of international cultural relations, and recognising its need to generate income from overseas educational contracts, identified nonetheless some concerns. One concern for the education sector in the UK was the perception that the British Council is primarily motivated by income generation to the detriment of its broader cultural diplomacy role. The Review recommended that procedures be put in place to ensure transparency and fairness so that, where the Council becomes aware of a relevant business opportunity that is not already in the public domain, then that information is shared with the UK education sector more generally.

These procedures, the Opportunities Development Process, were developed and set out on the Council's website and have now been operating for just over a year. There is also a formal complaints procedure with independent moderation for organisations who feel that things are not working as they should.

A year into their implementation the British Council has undertaken to review these (still) new procedures and assess if they are doing what they should do, or if, either in the policy itself, or in the way that it's being carried out, there are things that need to be changed.

These new procedures were generated as a result of discussions between UKTI and British Council and we would now like to invite you to participate in a focus group to elicit feedback on how things are going. The focus groups will look specifically at the following questions in order to ascertain if the ODP (and the opportunities it brings into the public domain) is perceived as effective by the sector:

1. What is your understanding of the Triennial Review recommendations relating to overseas education and English contract opportunities identified by British Council?
2. What is your understanding of how British Council responded to the recommendations?
3. Compared to a year ago, have you noticed any difference in the way that British Council shares information about overseas education and English contract opportunities?
4. Overall do you believe that British Council is responding effectively to concerns raised in the Triennial Review over alignment, transparency, consistency and fairness?

We are very interested in gathering views from a cross section of the UK sector, especially amongst those who have had recent contact with the British Council and would like to invite you or one or two of your members to participate in a focus group to address these questions on either **12 July (2 – 3.30 p.m.)** or **14 July (10.30 a.m. – 12 p.m.)**. These will be held at **UKTI's offices in London**.