Position Specification

Chief Executive, British Council

About the British Council

The British Council is one of the world’s foremost cultural relations organisations building trust in the UK and long-term relationships of benefit to the UK globally, through the UK’s most attractive assets of the arts, the English language, its education system and how its society is organised.

It aspires to help UK institutions, organisations and companies in the cultural and education sectors, public and private, to respond to the global demand and need for UK backed English teaching, arts, culture, qualifications, learning opportunities, knowledge and ideas.

The British Council is on the ground in six continents and over 100 countries. It was created 80 years ago by Royal Charter and works by creating long-term and mutually beneficial exchanges between individuals and institutions; by activities which enable individuals around the world to meet their aspirations; by working with governments and civil society organisations to support their development; and by connecting 100s of millions of people round the globe with each other and with the UK.

Employing over 7,000 people, the British Council derives approximately 80% of its income from teaching English, administering exams overseas and from partnerships and contracts. The remainder currently comes from government as grant in aid. In 2013/14 the British Council’s income was £830 million of which circa £160 million was core publically funded grant-in-aid. It aims to bring high quality English materials to every learner or teacher who wants them around the world. It works with governments to transform whole education systems to meet the global demand for English, working with other UK partners to do so. It is one of the world’s largest English teaching organisations teaching 388,000 learners in teaching centres and supporting 73 million learners and teachers of English on line and 132 million through TV and radio. 2.6m people evidence their expertise or competence through high stakes examinations offered by British Council exams centres worldwide.

In the arts, the British Council works with the best of British and international artistic and creative talent to develop events and collaborations which link thousands of artists, organisations and audiences worldwide. In addition to staging shows and exhibitions, it partners with others on joint arts projects and helps develop creative leadership, professional networks and cultural educational programmes worldwide.

All over the world, people want greater educational opportunities to enhance their lives and employment prospects. The British Council’s focus in education is on bringing an international dimension to education in schools, technical colleges and universities, on raising educational standards by sharing the UK’s expertise, and on encouraging the best international students to study in the UK. It works closely with UK schools, colleges and universities and with UK representative bodies to support the international ambitions of institutions and to build closer education links between the UK and other countries. It also collaborates with universities to help attract more than
400,000 international students to the UK every year. This creates an estimated export income of £9.8 billion for the UK economy.

The demands of globalisation and the need to meet growing expectations for development and social change provide the British Council’s fourth area of priority. Working with development agencies and with overseas governments and NGOs it provides access to the UK’s expertise in social development, access to justice, the development of civil society institutions and the creation of prosperity for all through institution building.

Last year the British Council’s exhibitions, festivals, events and performances attracted 9.5 million people. It offered face-to-face opportunities for 1.7 million people in the UK to gain international skills and experience. It reached 9,200 UK organisations with initiatives involving a total of 167 different countries. Its UK website reaches 10.9 million people each year.

Whilst the British Council is very well known overseas and amongst the key sectors at home, there is still a job to be done more widely across the UK. This includes continuing the drive for more language learning and greater participation in international programmes for the UK’s young people, so that they can take advantage of international opportunities and improve their job prospects, and thus contribute to the success of the UK economy.

**Governance and Structure of the British Council**

The British Council is a UK charity registered in England and Scotland governed by Royal Charter. It is also an executive non-departmental public body and a public corporation. Although it receives a government grant in aid, the British Council operates at arm’s length from the UK government. It is an entrepreneurial public service with a strong public service ethos and a public service purpose in all it does, but with an emphasis on earning, partnering and bidding for contracts in order to make the most of the opportunities to extend its work to maximise benefit for the UK.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is the British Council’s sponsoring department and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is answerable to parliament for the policies, operations and performance of the British Council. As an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body, the British Council gives evidence of its activity before the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee as part of the Committee’s inquiry into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Performance and Finances and, upon request, called to the Public Accounts Committee. As a registered charity the British Council is subject to charities legislation and to scrutiny by the Charity Commission. An important part of the Chief Executive’s role is proactively managing this relationship to ensure The British Council is working to a common agenda.

The Executive Board is responsible for the overall strategy, direction and management of the organisation. The Board of Trustees is the guardian of the British Council’s purpose and is ultimately accountable for the organisation. Chaired by Sir Vernon Ellis, the Board of Trustees holds the Executive Board to account for the organisation’s performance, strategy and policy.
The Appointment

The British Council is seeking to appoint an exceptional individual to succeed Sir Martin Davidson, who has served as Chief Executive with success and distinction for seven years. Working with the Board of Trustees and Executive Board, the Chief Executive provides the British Council with the leadership, challenge and inspiration to meet its aspirations. S/he will gain international recognition as an expert in cultural relations and will be at the forefront of the global relationship-building which enhances the British Council’s authority and presence and, through that, the profile of the UK as a whole.

This is an exciting, stimulating and challenging post, requiring energy, stamina, imagination, exceptional vision and cultural sensitivity. As described above, the British Council is an entrepreneurial public service with a strong public services ethos in all it does, and is backed by Royal Charter. Whilst operationally independent, it works in close alignment with government and a range of other stakeholders, to ensure that by working with and enabling others it brings maximum value to the UK.

The Chief Executive will need to manage the complexities of aligning with government and growing its income to optimise what it can do for the UK, with managing its relationships with partners and competitors in a transparent way which ensures that other UK bodies are not unfairly disadvantaged. To continue to grow opportunities for the UK, the British Council will need to be fast-paced, more ambitious, leaner and responsive to the needs of stakeholders including parliaments across the UK, government departments, the UK’s cultural and educational institutions, businesses and the public sector.

The Chief Executive will need to understand the demands of each of these constituencies and be comfortable in weaving them together and helping the organisation as a whole to understand how to best address them. S/he will be able to further the current strategy by understanding and balancing global and local needs. S/he will be able to work with a geographical, sector and functional matrix, identify simple accountabilities within complex structures, and lead and support change and continuous improvement without losing sight of the organisation’s fundamental mission.

The Chief Executive is responsible for managing over 7,000 British Council staff around the world, and s/he must be a visible champion of their interests. It is an essential part of the role to exemplify through personal leadership the values of the organisation; valuing people, creativity, integrity, professionalism and mutuality. The Chief Executive will be passionate about his or her guardianship of those values and of the organisation’s role as an exemplar of best practice in equal opportunities and diversity. S/he will have the ability to lead the continuation of the current strategy.

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Accountabilities

Working closely with the Board and Executive Board, the Chief Executive will have the following specific responsibilities:

Vision and Strategy

- Lead the setting of strategies and policies which further the British Council’s aims, create a unique contribution to the UK’s wider international objectives, increase the standing of the organisation, bring maximum value to the UK, and reflect the organisation’s values.

- Realise the vision through leadership and the ability to hold accountable those responsible for implementing innovative strategies, plans, major initiatives and services.

- Work with the senior leadership of the organisation to inspire, develop and motivate staff, so they deliver high performance for the organisation, and internal and external indicators recognise the British Council as a top employer.

External Relationships

- Secure the reputation, effectiveness and resourcing of the organisation through leading on the strengthening of relationships with those who influence or are affected by the British Council, in particular with the FCO, which is accountable to Parliament for the performance of the organisation.

- Strengthen relationships and alignment with other relevant government departments and with other major UK players in the arts, English, education and society sectors.

Delivery

- Ensure that corporate performance is delivered to the satisfaction of stakeholders, is measured and meets the targets set internally, and own organisational performance in relationship to the Board, stakeholders and Parliament.

Governance

- Working with the Chair, harness the energy and experience of the Board, enabling it to fulfil effectively its role of non-executive direction, support and challenge.

Finance

- As accounting officer, ensure that the British Council manages its financial affairs efficiently and, in particular, to ensure regularity and propriety in the use of public funds; lead on good practice and transparency in the governance, processes and controls to meet legislative requirements to the UK and overseas, including charity law, NAO, Parliamentary, Treasury and FCO requirements; and deliver the agreed corporate, business and financial performance.
Candidate Profile

Candidates, who may come from a range of different backgrounds, will require the following skills and experience:

- A passion for international cultural relations and with the proven ability to work across cultures.
- An ability to identify global trends, adapt organisational approaches and to grasp opportunities.
- A track record in senior leadership and management at or very near the top of a substantial and complex organisation with a strong customer focus, and a proven capacity to inspire and innovate.
- The capability to manage large change programmes within the organisation.
- Direct experience of working internationally or in an international organisation or strong geopolitical awareness.
- Experience of working with government and to build effective relationships in Whitehall, Westminster and with opinion formers.
- An ability to build and lead an entrepreneurial public body.
- An ability to work effectively with the media.
- Ability to manage ambiguity and complexity.
- A high level of intellect, including emotional intelligence and the ability to master complex issues quickly and to relish the challenges thrown up by a fast moving and constantly shifting agenda.
- Entrepreneurial flair and a strong focus on income generation together with well-developed financial and business acumen.
- The personal presence and authority to build effective relationships with wide audiences.
- An ability to delegate effectively and encourage and develop teams.
- Exceptional communication skills, with a proven ability to influence and negotiate, and to be at ease with any audience and comfortable in addressing address major gatherings and more intimate events alike.
- Personal energy, dynamism and drive.

Candidate Qualities:

- Visionary leader, motivator and relationship builder;
- Innovative, dynamic, and value-led public service ethos;
- Sensitivity, subtlety, stamina and resilience.

Candidates will also ideally have some knowledge of one or more of the sectors in which the British Council operates, and be familiar with both the public and private sectors.

Location

The role is based in London and there will be a significant amount of travel involved.

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