

## **Cultural Skills Unit research summary**

Examining the cultural skills gaps and shortages in: Egypt, Morocco and Saudi Arabia

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## About this report

This research was undertaken by the Cultural Skills Unit at the British Council. It aims to contribute greater understanding of the skills gaps and shortages across the cultural sector in Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. The research included interviews with 102 experts, including policymakers, British Council colleagues, and professionals working in education institutes, cultural institutions and independent organisations. To increase the validity of the study and to gain insight from a broader sample, an additional six focus groups were conducted and an online survey was completed by 225 cultural sector professionals across the three focus countries.

Findings from this paper will be used to support the British Council's Cultural Skills Unit in developing new evidenced-based programmes and products that consolidate and complement existing skills activity. The research also provides insights into potential partners and co-investors for programme development.

It is important to note that the research was subject to limitations and uncertainties that are beyond our ability to control or estimate precisely. Subsequently, the research was purposed with providing

illustrative and informative insights into emerging skills gaps and shortages, but is not meant to be a fully comprehensive mapping of the cultural sector in each focus country. Neither the author nor the British Council assumes any warranty for the accuracy, completeness or use of the findings. Readers are responsible for assessing the relevance and accuracy of the content of this research.

## Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are owed to all British Council staff who contributed their insights and expertise to this research. Without your support and dedication, gaining access to such an expansive and high-profile network of contacts would have been impossible in such a short space of time. The British Council Cultural Skills Unit is also tremendously grateful to all external partners and professionals who generously contributed their time to be consulted, including over 200 individuals who kindly completed an online survey. Your contributions were invaluable in the writing of this report.

## Foreword

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It gives me great pleasure to write the foreword to this important new report undertaken by the Cultural Skills Unit of

the British Council. The region that is the subject of this research has given the world some of its most iconic cultural gifts: dazzling architecture, intricate geometric and calligraphic decoration, magnificent manuscripts, and music and poetry that speak to us from the distant past, linking us to our forefathers.

Culture is a form of expression and a type of communication, and cultural dialogue is vitally important in today's world. When we see something made by someone from or in another part of the world, it gives us an insight into their culture and their lives.

That insight is the bridge between us, enabling a vastly better understanding to develop. Moreover, the arts and creative sectors provide inspiration that enriches the lives of all. When we marvel at the Palais de la Bahia in Marrakesh, admire the traditional architecture of the old city of Sana'a, gaze upon the iconic spiral minaret of

Samarra or wonder at the antiquities of Ancient Egypt we are engaging in a dialogue with the skilled artists who created them hundreds, and even thousands, of years ago.

Sharing our cultures is a foundation for peaceful co-existence. Training and skills development for young people has been at the heart of the work of my own Foundation, and we have always valued the arts and creative sectors as much as any other when considering the skills needed across the region.

I want to pay tribute to the British Council for this important piece of research and of course for the work they do generally building cultural bridges between Britain and the world. I hope that those who are in a position to shape the education of the young will take its conclusions seriously.

**HE Sheikh Mohamed  
Bin Issa Al Jaber**

Founder and Patron of the  
MBI Al Jaber Foundation

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Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber is a self-made entrepreneur and philanthropist who has successfully built an international business empire spanning Europe and the Middle East. He is founder, Chairman and CEO of MBI Group, and founder and sole patron of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation, a UK registered charity focused on building bridges between the Middle East and the wider world, working in three key areas: education, cultural dialogue and good governance.

## Foreword

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From museums to music, fashion to film, the skills that support the artistic process are vital to the development of a thriving

cultural sector around the globe. Skills range from technical specialism, to leadership and management; policy and qualification development, to youth engagement and English language.

The Cultural Skills Unit strengthens cultural relations between the UK and the rest of the world through sharing knowledge and developing mutual benefit. With UK and international partners we build sustainable cultural

skills programmes that develop the skills of those practitioners and institutions across the whole of the UK and internationally, supporting the artistic, social and economic benefits of a thriving and dynamic cultural sector.

The Middle East and North Africa is a unique and exciting region, with many challenges and opportunities and this research is the beginning of the process that aims to share and develop the cultural sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon T Dancey'.

**Simon T Dancey**  
Director, Cultural Skills Unit

## Introduction and overview

**This report was conducted by the British Council's Cultural Skills Unit which was established in 2014 with the aim to develop a strategic skills offer for the arts and creative industries. Research was undertaken with the British Council's local country teams in Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, as well as with the regional Middle East and North Africa (MENA) team. All collaborators provided strategic guidance, support, and investment into this report.**

The Cultural Skills Unit is responsible for leading the scoping and co-ordination of skills programmes across the globe. To that end, the unit works in two phases. With all programmes based on solid evidence, the research phase aims to identify skills gaps and shortages affecting the arts and creative industries. New programmes and partnerships are then developed in the programme development phase, drawing on the research findings and recommendations.

The main aim of this report is to gain deeper understanding of the skills gaps and shortages which affect professionals and young people in the arts and creative industries across the three focus countries. Additionally, the report aims to identify local challenges, current best practice in skills provision, and potential partners and co-investors.

The Cultural Skills Unit will develop new skills offers based on the outcome of this report, working collaboratively with the British Council staff in each focus country to ensure programmes complement current British Council activities and address unique cultural differences. All Cultural Skills Unit programmes developed globally aim to increase cultural relations between the UK and the focus country, by working together with UK-based expertise to support and enable the creative and cultural sectors. Programmes will cross four core areas: policy, professional development, youth engagement, and English language qualification for the sector.

Through the development of programmes in the MENA region, the Cultural Skills Unit aims to deliver international opportunity, strengthen the UK profile and participation, and move towards greater individual and wider societal benefits.

## **Aims and objectives**

This research provides evidence-based findings to inform the development of new products and programmes by highlighting the following:

- Skills gaps and shortages affecting the cultural sector in Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia.
- Current best practice of skills training provision in each country.
- Key players addressing the identified skills gaps and shortages.
- Potential partners and co-investors in future programmes.
- Challenges affecting the cultural sector in each country and the unique risks which could be faced during programme development.
- A preliminary list of recommendations to be explored by the Cultural Skills Unit.

## **Methodology**

After initial discussions with focus country teams, research tools were created and a preliminary desk-based review of the literature was conducted to identify emerging themes in relation to cultural skills in each country. Field research then commenced where a total of 102 experts participated in semi-structured interviews across the three countries, including cultural sector practitioners, managers and cultural operators, policymakers, educators, and British Council staff. A mixture of strategic, convenience, and snowball sampling methods were used to gain access to this pool of experts. Additionally, a total of six focus groups were conducted with cultural sector practitioners and young people post-16. Finally, to triangulate the data, a total of 225 surveys were completed across the three countries to gain insights from a broader sample.



## Key findings

**While the political and socio-economic situations differ between Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, there have been some common findings. Primarily, the ways in which the cultural sector has been a tool of resistance, providing youth with an alternative way of addressing life challenges, has been the main common finding.**

As such, this area needs to be supported by investment into youth-centered programmes and entry into the sector initiatives, as suggested by professionals consulted for this research. Additionally, as the arts and cultural sectors continue to grow, professionalisation through exposure to international best practice for practitioners was also suggested. Finally, the dynamic nature of the current political and socio-economic situation in the

region emphasises the need for engagement with cultural policymakers. The focus countries were able to provide a window of understanding into the MENA region, and have highlighted the opportunities available for increased cultural relations with the UK. The research has identified skills gaps and shortages separately in each of the focus countries summarised over the following pages.



## Egypt

**Survey respondents identified that there is a lack of suitably qualified and skilled professionals to fill certain roles in the cultural sector in Egypt. Interview and focus group participants identified six main shortages affecting the sector: curators; business development experts for the arts; fundraising professionals; audience development experts; cultural policy experts and advocators; and technicians in the music and theatre sectors.**

Additionally, survey respondents identified that there are important skills missing from the repertoire of professionals working in the sector. The most cited skill missing was exposure to international best practices, followed by soft skills, technical discipline-based skills, and management and leadership skills. Interview and focus group participants explored this further by stating that the most important skills missing for professionals in the sector are arts management,

including curatorial skills, exhibition design, business development, fundraising, and audience development. The second most explored skillset by participants in Egypt was technical discipline-based skills. Theatre skills, including sound engineering, lighting design, décor, scenography, make-up design, and costume design, as well as technical skills around the music sector, including mixing, mastering, production, and licensing, were all highlighted.

## Morocco

**Survey respondents in Morocco strongly identified that there is a lack of suitably qualified and skilled professionals to fill certain roles in the cultural sector. Interview and focus group participants identified four main shortages affecting the sector, which centred around museums and art galleries: curators; museum management experts; arts managers and operators; and entrepreneurs in the arts.**

Additionally, survey respondents identified three main skills missing from the repertoire of professionals working in the sector: soft skills, including communication, collaboration, teamwork, and problem solving, was the most cited missing skill; followed by management and leadership skills; and business development and finance skills. Interview and focus group participants expanded on this idea by explaining what they found to be the most important skills missing for professionals today in Morocco. First, museum and cultural heritage skills were identified as being urgently needed to expand the growing museum sector in Morocco. Second, arts management skills, including

business development, audience engagement, project management, and English language for the sector, was also discussed. Finally, gallery and art space management, including curatorial and exhibition design skills, were highlighted as skills needed to support the growing number of dynamic arts spaces.

Finally, the growing connectivity between Morocco and English speaking countries is moving the country away from its exclusive relationship with French speaking countries. As such, English language qualification for the sector was identified as having potentially strong impact if included as part of a wider arts skills training offer.



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## Saudi Arabia

**Survey respondents in Saudi Arabia identified that the lack of suitably qualified and skilled professionals in certain areas are strongly affecting the cultural sector as a whole. Interview and focus group participants identified five main shortages in the country: professional marketers for the arts and creative industries; creative entrepreneurs; museum and cultural heritage experts; film and theatre producers; and gallery managers.**

Additionally, survey respondents highlighted four main skill gaps existing in the repertoire of professionals working in the sector: management and leadership skills; soft skills; marketing skills; and technical discipline-based skills. Interview and focus group participants expanded on this idea. First, gallery management skills, including space management, curatorial skills, business development, audience engagement, and marketing skills were highlighted as important skills missing for professionals today. Second, skills for the museum sector, including exhibition management, art handling, curatorial skills, audience engagement, preservation, and conservation were also skills that

were highlighted. Third, technical discipline-based skills in theatre, including sound engineering, lighting design, décor, backstage management, and scenography, as well as discipline-based skills in film production, were highlighted as strongly needed to expand these two growing sectors in Saudi Arabia.

Finally, English technical language skills for the sector were identified through all three research methodologies as having medium potential for impact in the country. General English language skills were identified as being of a greater importance for the time being.



## Conclusion

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**This evidence-based report underscores the need for greater human development through skills capacity building offers. A cross-cutting analysis of the needs and opportunities of the three focus countries reveals the following conclusions:**

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**Facilitation of 'entry into the sector initiatives':** As the largest demographic across the MENA region, creating employment opportunities for youth has become a top priority across all sectors and governments in the region. In order to encourage the interest of youth in cultural and creative sectors it is important to facilitate entry into the sector initiatives by supporting organisations in their ability to offer paid internships

and apprenticeships. This will enable youth input into the sector, as well as display the various professions available in the sector, thereby highlighting for youth the viability of the sector as a potentially successful career option.

**Mentorships and residencies:** Introduction of international best practices was identified as a potentially strong approach to



professionalising the sector in the MENA region. Programmes such as residencies for specific artforms, in a twinning exchange manner, as well as in-country mentorships by UK-based expertise, were highlighted. This was also viewed as an opportunity to increase cultural relations and dialogue with the UK.

**Engagement with cultural policies:** As the political and socio-economic situation across the region continues to change, engagement between the civil sector, the creative industry, and governmental bodies has become vital to shape more concrete and effective cultural policies. Regional players in this area do exist, but support through facilitation of policy dialogues and skills training in policy advocacy are currently needed.

**Specialised programmes:** There is a current need for specialised training offers in technical discipline-based skills around the theatre, music, and film production sectors; arts, gallery, and museum management; and curatorial skills. These programmes should address the concerns around the professionalisation of the sector.

**Transversal skills training:** General programmes in business development, marketing, and financial planning for the arts were identified as cross-cutting transversal needs for the sector. Additionally, professional writing skills as well as English language skills were highlighted.



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