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Global Britain and South America

Written evidence from the British Council

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1. Summary

1.1 There are huge opportunities for the UK to engage with South America. The UK is seen as a credible partner, especially in the areas of education and culture, and is able to support the region with a range of political and economic challenges working in partnership. The British Council is ready and able to support further development in this area. It has the networks and reputation in region, having been established for almost 80 years in some countries, currently being the only foreign organisation to work with the Ministry of Education in Venezuela.

1.2 Other major economies are investing in soft power activities in the region. China is increasing the number of Confucius institutes and its international media arm, (China Global Television Network (CGTN)) as well as investing heavily in infrastructure projects across the region. The UK is currently influential, especially amongst young people, but given the increase in activities by other players, it must increase its activity and visibility to keep pace with others. It is imperative that future leaders experience and understand the UK as a modern, dynamic, global power.

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.

3. The work of British Council in the region

3.1 The British Council has been present in South America since 1939, our office in Rio, Brazil being open continuously for almost 80 years, and our office in Bogotá, Colombia celebrating its 80th anniversary a year later in 2020. Today, we work alongside HMG on the ground in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Trinidad, Uruguay and Venezuela. In terms of reach, the British Council reached half a million people face to face in the year 2017/18, with nine million engaging with our work online.

3.2 British Council priority countries in the region are Brazil and Colombia. As the region's largest economy, there are opportunities for the UK to build its economic relationship with Brazil and given the British Council's long-term presence in the country, it can support the UK in this aim by creating favourable conditions for trade. After a difficult recent history, Colombia is facing a period of growth and stability and this represents a significant opportunity for the UK. Developing the creative economy is emerging as a central pillar of Colombia's growth strategy and the British Council is working with Colombian partners to harness expertise in the UK and support this agenda.

3.3 The focus of the British Council's work in South America is supporting education system reform. There is growing recognition by regional policy makers of the need for reform in education systems, particularly in core skills, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and the internationalisation of Higher Education. The FCO has increased its financial commitment to education in Brazil, Colombia and Peru through FCO Prosperity Fund allocations and Newton Fund activities. Because of its reputation for integrity and quality market insight, access to decision makers and institutions, the British Council can support greater collaboration and exchange between South America and the UK for mutual benefit.

3.4 In terms of education, the focus of UK interest is often Brazil, but demand exists for strengthening connections with the other Pacific Alliance countries (Colombia, Chile and Peru), The Commonwealth (Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago) and the Caribbean more generally, as well as Argentina under its new Government.

3.5 Facilitating Internationalisation of Higher Education in Colombia

The British Council plays a crucial role across South America in establishing Mutual Recognition Qualification Frameworks between South American countries and the UK to facilitate higher degree recognition. In 2016, the British Council facilitated an agreement between the UK and Colombia on mutual recognition of degrees, recognising the higher education quality assurance systems in both countries. This has released potential for increased academic and research cooperation between institutions, facilitating and encouraging the creation of academic partnerships, which will foster the internationalisation agenda of universities.

The UK is one of the leading study destinations for Colombian post-graduates and the mutual recognition of degrees is designed to strengthen these existing links, enabling greater academic exchange and benefiting thousands of students from Colombia and the UK. As Colombia becomes an increasingly significant voice in the region, strengthening links between future leaders in the UK and Colombia through higher education will be a crucial source of UK soft power.

4. Political and economic developments in the region and the impact of these on UK engagement

4.1 There have been a few significant political developments in the region in recent years and instability can make it more difficult for the UK to maintain strong engagement with the region. 2018 has been a year of significant change for South America with the election of new leaders in eleven countries, including the emergent economies of Brazil and Colombia.

4.2 The British Council Brand Perception Study, carried out by Ipsos Mori (June 2018) can support continued engagement for the UK in these countries. It is a trusted brand; of those that were familiar with the British Council, 70% of Brazilians and 63% of Colombians were favourable towards the organisation. We have been able to continue working across South America where others have been unable to do so, and we are able to support the UK Government's long-term priorities for engagement as a result.

4.3 Continued engagement with Venezuela

The British Council has been in Venezuela since 1941, throughout a military dictatorship, urban guerrilla confrontation and rapid economic growth due to fluctuating oil prices, recession, coup d'états and natural disasters (e.g. The Vargas mudslide tragedy in 1999 which killed over 10,000 people). Currently, the country is going through a severe political, economic and social crisis that has seen over 10% of the population emigrate. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the UK and Venezuelan governments to maintain strong relations; however the British Council is currently the only foreign organisation to work directly with the Ministry of Education in Venezuela, underpinning the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Through long term engagement the levels of trust have increased between both sides, enabling the British Council to be instrumental in persuading the Venezuelan Government to introduce English learning into public sector primary schools (training 8,000 teachers and reaching 1.5 million children in all state schools), building employability skills and enabling the next generation in Venezuela to access UK culture. In addition, whilst the Government's social programmes are in a state of abandonment and collapse, the British Council continues to run arts projects and workshops led by UK artists who provide training and opportunities for the future generations of Venezuelans offering them an alternative pathway to drugs and violence, supporting stability in the country. Through this work, we provide Venezuelans with a positive view of the UK and greater favourability to the UK and its values.

4.4 South America is one of the world's most dangerous regions, seeing high levels of crime and violence, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF)¹, with El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, St Kitts and Venezuela reporting the highest homicide rates in 2017. The peace accord in Colombia in November 2016 ended five decades of civil war, though violence associated with the conflict has not ceased. The region is turning a corner, but continued instability prevents the UK from engaging, whether it be through trade or diplomacy.

4.5 The British Council aims to contribute to the UK Government's aim of strengthening resilience and response to crisis, through building young people's resilience to conflict and crisis in the region. With one quarter of the population aged between 15 and 29, this is crucial in increasing long-term safety and security in the region. 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 Building Sustainable Peace in Colombia

Contextually, one of the biggest threats to the Colombian peace process is the violence and insecurity generated by organised crime and illegal armed groups. Support services to help young offenders desist from criminal activity are scarce, though the issue is receiving growing attention from the Colombian Government.

There are major concerns over the quality of education and skills development provided for young people and the UK is well placed to provide support in this area. The British Council developed the Supporting Young Offenders in Colombia programme. This project was funded through the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and aligns with UK Government priorities to support and build the capacity of the Colombian justice sector to address post-peace agreement challenges. By contributing to the building of stable conditions in Colombia, the UK will be able to engage more widely in future and will be seen as a trusted partner for trade and diplomacy.

The programme includes providing training to improve the quality of support by staff in Specialised Care Centres (CAEs), the institutions where young people are detained and working in partnership with local agencies to assess and improve rehabilitation and supervision services in the community. In total the British Council Colombia worked with CAEs housing and approximately 1,000 young offenders, around 25% of young offenders currently under detention in the country.

4.7 High levels of corruption have led to a lack of trust in governments. The percentage of people with little or no trust in government reached 75%, twenty percentage points higher than in 2001². Furthermore, the proliferation of fake news in region undermines trust in institutions and politicians. The recent election in Brazil was a clear example of this, where it was found that more than half of the 100,000 WhatsApp images shared during the election campaign contained disinformation and were misleading³.

4.8 Building critical thinking skills enables young people to critique the news they are receiving, and English language skills gives access to a wider range of viewpoints. The British Council also works with civil society to increase opportunities for young people to play a leadership role in their

¹ Robert Muggah, Llona Szabo de Carvalho and Katherine Aguirre (March 2018), 'Latin America is the world's most dangerous region. But there are signs it is turning a corner', Available online at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/latin-america-is-the-worlds-most-dangerous-region-but-there-are-signs-its-turning-a-corner/>

² OECD Development Centre (2018), *Latin American Economic Outlook, Rethinking Intuitions for Development*, Available online at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/latin-american-economic-outlook_20725140

³ Mike Isaac and Kevin Roose (Oct 2018), 'Disinformation and fake news spread over WhatsApp ahead of Brazil's presidential election', Available online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/brazil-election-2018-whatsapp-fake-news-presidential-disinformation-a8593741.html>

community. Our Active Citizens programme, for example, running in Brazil and Colombia strengthens communities by empowering and providing the skills for leaders to participate and take forward social action projects especially in disadvantage and marginalised areas.

4.9 Economically, the region has seen significant growth in recent years and many people have been lifted out of poverty. In 2015 around 34.5% of the population could be classified as consolidated middle class up from 21% in 2001. However, around 40% of the population are vulnerable to falling back into a poverty, a figure that has grown from 34%. This middle-income trap can be overcome through a strong rule of law and democracy, sufficient tax revenues, high quality education and skills, strong investment levels and developed capital markets⁴. Supporting prosperity in the region enables the UK to engage through trade, mutual investment and tourism.

4.10 The British Council uses UK expertise and networks to develop education and skills in the region. Skills have become the global currency of 21st century economies, and even more so in South America, the region with the widest gap in the world between the pool of available skills and those skills that economies and businesses require, as highlighted by the OECD⁵. One-fifth of the youth living in Latin America work in informal jobs, and another fifth are neither working nor engaged in education or training (NEET). British Council programmes in this area include English teaching, vital for participation in the global economy, enhancing teachers' abilities and classroom practice of 21st century skills, and leadership training for headteachers.

4.11 Teaching English Across South America

Our work in English supports local governments through our Teaching for Success programme. Examples include:

- Working in public sector primary education in Venezuela, which will provide a UK-led educational reform with a topic-based syllabus, and training for 8,000 teachers, reaching 1.5 million children in all state primary schools in the country.
- Partnering with Plan Ceibal in Uruguay to provide an innovative online solution to transform lives in primary schools, teaching English via videoconferencing to 80,000 children who otherwise would not have the chance to learn English.
- Helping the government to prepare Brazil's basic education systems for compulsory English while championing improved quality and an evidence-based approach through policy dialogues.
- Transforming the professional lives of English teachers working in challenging contexts and enabling them to take evidence-based decisions in their classrooms, based on Exploratory Action Research (EAR), through the regional Champion Teachers programme, reaching hundreds of teachers in Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru.

Meanwhile, we reach 18-20,000 students per year in our Teaching Centres across the region. As well as improving language skills, learning English enables South Americans to understand the UK and access the wider cultural assets.

4.12 Developing entrepreneurial skills is also a vital step towards building prosperity in the region. Out of necessity the region is already entrepreneurial: 60% of working age people work in their own business or an SME and the prevalence of own-account workers among the youth (16%) is almost three times as high as the OECD average.

⁴ OECD Development Centre (2018), *Latin American Economic Outlook, Rethinking Intuitions for Development*, Available online at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/latin-american-economic-outlook_20725140

⁵ OECD Development Centre (2018), *Latin American Economic Outlook, Rethinking Intuitions for Development*, Available online at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/latin-american-economic-outlook_20725140

4.13 The creative economy has been highlighted as a vital sector by several governments in the region. Chile, for example, aims to grow their creative economy from 2.5% to 4% over the next five years. The UK excels in creative entrepreneurship and digital, and British Council programmes in the region harness this demand to build capacity for young people in these areas. In Brazil we are piloting a Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies⁶ programme. The Colombian government has asked the British Council and FCO to support them with growing their so-called Orange Economy⁷.

5. Interests and activities of other state actors in the region: vis a vis the UK

5.1 Major global powers, particularly China, are seeking to influence the region through soft power. Soft power, which is demonstrated by high levels of trust between people, underpins trading and diplomatic relationships between countries.

5.2 China has invested significantly in both infrastructure projects (around US\$27 billion)⁸ and its soft power globally over the past few years. The investment in the China Global Television Network (CGTN) is specifically aimed at competing with global services such as the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera. CGTN can be received by more than 85 million viewers in over 100 countries and regions. CGTN Spanish broadcasts in 28 countries and regions, including Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Chile⁹. There are currently over 500 Confucius Institutes in 140 countries; in South America there are 34. In Brazil the number of Confucius Institutes has grown from three in 2013 to ten in 2018. In contrast, the British Council has reduced presence in Brazil from four offices to two in the same period¹⁰ as a result of budget constraints.

5.3 The USA invests significantly in formal soft power activities in the region. The Department of State's in-house Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) operates out of the US diplomatic network's 300 plus embassies and consulates. It's International Visitor Leadership Program brings around 5,000 people to the USA each year, and this has included influential South American leaders including former presidents of Brazil (Dilma Rouseff) and Uruguay (Tabare Vazquez), and Nobel Laureate Oscar Arias from Costa Rica¹¹. The Department's US Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation is supporting various cultural sites in South America¹². The USA's influence in the region, as around the world, is generated from its significant popular culture presence, in film, music and brands¹³.

5.4 Russia also sees the value of soft power and has its news outlets are increasingly well funded and influential. Latin America has seen the greatest increase in viewers of Russia Today, nearly tripling in two years to 17 million weekly viewers in 2017¹⁴. Cultural engagement has also increased with Russia's Russkiy Mir Foundation opening an institution in Brazil, with nine overall in the region.

⁶ See: <https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/en/programmes/dice>

⁷ ProColombia (2018), 'Orange Economy Already Accounts for Almost 3% of GDP in Colombia', Available online at: <https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/orange-economy-already-accounts-for-almost-3-of-gdp-in-colombia-697550341.html>

⁸ Ricardo Barrios (2018), 'China's Belt and Road lands in Latin America', Available online at: <https://dialogochino.net/chinas-belt-and-road-lands-in-latin-america/>

⁹ See: https://www.cgtn.com/home/info/about_us.do

¹⁰ Alistair MacDonaldd (2018), *Soft Power Superpowers*, Available online at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/j119_thought_leadership_global_trends_in_soft_power_web.pdf [Accessed 15 November 2018]

¹¹ Robert Zimmerman (2015), 'Soft Power, High Impact', Available online at: <http://www.afsa.org/soft-power-high-impact>

¹² See: <https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/afcp-whs-list.pdf>

¹³ Alistair MacDonaldd (2018), *Soft Power Superpowers*, Available online at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/j119_thought_leadership_global_trends_in_soft_power_web.pdf [Accessed 15 November 2018]

¹⁴ Ipsos Mori (2018), 'Weekly TV Audience Grows by More Than a Third Over 2 Years' Available online at: <https://www.rt.com/about-us/press-releases/ipsos-market-research-rt/>

Rossotrudnichestvo has also expanded its global networks. Rossotrudnichestvo's New Generation program, for example, takes Latin American leaders to Russia for one week and offers lectures in Spanish on Russian politics, economy and its approach to diplomacy¹⁵.

5.5 The impact of increased investment in soft power by major powers is yet to be determined. In a survey by Pew Research Centre during Spring 2017, South Americans from Mexico, Chile, Peru, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil were asked which nation they favoured between China, the USA and Russia. Overall, China was most popular with only Colombia favouring the USA¹⁶.

5.6 British Council research surveying young people in G20 countries aged 18-34¹⁷ has shown that the UK is not perceived as attractive as other G20 countries in South America. When asked to rank countries for attractiveness, the UK is ranked sixth (82%), ahead of the USA in ninth (76%) in Argentina. The results for Brazil also have the UK sixth for attractiveness (84%), this time just behind the USA (85%). The UK lags behind leading Western powers like Italy, France, Canada, Australia and Japan and it is notable that the UK performs less well in South America than it does in other parts of the world.

5.7 As is consistent with the global data, trust is lower than attractiveness, and trust in the UK Government is lower than trust in people or institutions. The UK Government is the fourth most trusted G20 government in Brazil after Canada, Japan and Germany, but in Argentina it ranks seventh behind Canada, Japan, Australia, France, Germany and Italy.

5.8 Only 6% of the respondents from Argentina and 8% of respondents from Brazil intend to do business/trade with the UK in future, putting it in sixth and fifth place respectively. Respondents rather intended to do business with other large economies such as the USA, China and Japan.

5.9 The data suggests overall that the UK is behind other key nations such as Canada, Japan and other European states in terms of perceptions in South America. Given intentions to do trade/business with the UK, we are potentially missing out on opportunities by not being seen as attractive or trustworthy as these other countries.

5.10 British Council research shows that this is important for trade and diplomacy. Trust manifests in a greater likelihood to visit the UK, study in UK universities and do business with UK companies^{18,19}. Research has found that for every 1% increase in the number of countries covered by a state's cultural relations institutions, there is an almost 0.66% increase in FDI for that country and 0.73 per cent increase in international students. This corresponds to a US study that has found that a 1 per cent increase in soft power of a state leads to a 0.8% increase in exports.

5.11 There is huge untapped potential for trade between the UK and South America. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), between 1999 and 2016 the UK's exports to South American

¹⁵ Julia Gurganus (2018), 'Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Available online at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>

¹⁶ Margaret Vice, (2017), 'In global popularity contest, U.S. and China – not Russia – vie for first', Pew Research Center, available online at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/23/in-global-popularity-contest-u-s-and-china-not-russia-vie-for-first/> [Accessed 15 November 2018]

¹⁷ Alistair MacDonald (2018), *Powers of Attraction*, British Council, [published on 30 November 2018] Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research>

¹⁸ British Council (2012), *Trust Pays*, Ipsos Mori, YouGov and British Council, available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/research/trust-pays>

¹⁹ British Council (2013), *Culture Means Business*, British Council, Ipsos Mori and YouGov, available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/research/culture-means-business>

countries was at around £5.5 billion, in comparison to Ireland who received £26.7 billion²⁰. As major economies, such as China, seek influence in the region, the UK must also lay the foundations for trade through investment in soft power.

5.12 The impact on soft power on diplomacy is shown through voting patterns at the United Nations, highlighted by the University of Edinburgh. Countries with higher numbers of cultural institutes have a stronger chance of pulling other states towards their own position in terms of international voting²¹. The impact of a high culture rank is higher than any of the factors in the models presented for voting in the UN General Assembly, including the hard power of a state's economic strength as measured in GDP.

5.13 Furthermore, cultural and educational activities help to build trust and keep dialogue open, even amid international tensions. It can lay the foundations for better diplomatic relations in the future. The low level of trust in the UK Government in Argentina, for example, could have been influenced by a history of conflict between the two countries.

5.14 Building Trust through Arts in Argentina

Operating in a country that was engaged in a direct armed conflict with the UK around 35 years ago, the British Council has played an important role in building trust through cultural and education activities and has reached 25,000 people across the world with the show. Towards the end of 2014, at a challenging moment for UK-Argentine relations, it took the decision to support the Minefield project, directed by Argentine director Lola Arias. The project brought together Argentine and British veterans to explore their memories of the war. The British Council supported Lola in by facilitating a professional development opportunity in collaboration with the Royal Court Theatre, London. This commitment and support was instrumental, helping the production to obtain financial support. The show has already toured 25 cities in 12 countries, with the US and Japan confirmed for 2019. Through work in the arts, the British Council has helped to diffuse a difficult and delicate political relationship and connected veterans from both sides of the conflict. At the final performance recently in Buenos Aires, Jorge Faurie (Argentine Minister for Foreign Affairs) and HM Ambassador to Argentina Mark Kent joined veteran performers on stage, gave messages of reconciliation and jointly commended the work of the show.

5.15 Given the high levels of attraction to the UK, it will be important to build on this and forge links with future South American leaders in the decades to come. As there is more competition for global influence, the UK can build on shared values to build mutual trust. The G20 survey data²² showed that Argentina, Brazil and the UK hold poverty, inequality, climate change and the environment, and extremism as high priorities in terms of global issues. With the G20 countries playing such an important global role, and influential role in the region, their norms and values will be influential in determining the UK's engagement and influence in the region. Brazil, in particular, will face a determined shift in approach with the new Government and so building connections between future leaders in the UK and Brazil will be crucial.

²⁰ See:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/internationaltrade/articles/whodoestheuktradewith/2017-02-21>

²¹ JP Sing and Stuart MacDonald (2017), *Soft power Today: Measuring the Influences and Effects*, British Council and University of Edinburgh, available online at:

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/3418_bc_edinburgh_university_soft_power_report_03b.pdf

²² Alistair MacDonald (2018), *Powers of Attraction*, British Council, [published on 30 November 2018] Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research>

5.16 Building Academic Connections Between the UK and Brazil Whilst Tackling Climate Change

The Newton Fund is a partnership with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The programme enriches the quality and strength of UK and overseas science and research through international co-operation. The British Council is one of the delivery partners of the Newton Fund in Brazil.

The Newton Fund agenda has grown out of a common understanding between the relevant agencies of the UK and Brazil on issues which are in our common interest to tackle, including deforestation and environmental depredation. The British Council's Newton programmes are designed to help local communities develop resilience and adapt their economic lifestyles to cope with these changes.

Through the Newton Fund's wider work, we are reaching an overall audience of more than 100 leaders, and almost 7,000 researcher and academics; and are supporting 48 collaborations between 50 UK and 78 Brazilian institutions in the higher education and research sectors.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 The British Council continues to support the UK Government's priorities for engagement in the region. Working at arms-length, it develops and maintains relations with governments and people in South American countries. The British Council continues to work with UK institutions and people to create the conditions favourable to do trade and diplomacy.

6.2 Countries across South America are facing significant political and economic challenges. The UK can offer solutions to help tackle these challenges across a wide range of areas, including the education and culture sectors, in which the UK has significant expertise.

6.3 Major economies, particularly China, are investing huge amounts to increase their influence in the region. The UK is seen as an attractive country to young South Americans, but second to the USA. If the UK wants to maintain or even increase this position, it will need to recognise the competition from others and increase investment in soft power activities accordingly.

6.4 The UK must continue to harness its most attractive assets and increase links between people and institutions in the UK and South American countries, enabling future leaders to experience and understand the UK as a modern, dynamic, global power.