

**Research fellowship outline**

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# **Decolonising Digital**

November 2020

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# Decolonising Digital

## A fellowship for early-career researchers from Africa

### Background

The British Council, in partnership with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Edinburgh, has developed a bespoke fellowship opportunity for early-career researchers from Africa, who are living and working on the continent.

The successful candidate will undertake a fellowship as follows:

- a 7-month research fellowship based with IASH at the University of Edinburgh, during which period they will work closely with British Council experts in the UK and Africa to refine and shape the direction of their research and its outputs
- further engagement with relevant British Council teams and colleagues to share, disseminate and apply the findings of the research in collaboration with the British Council in Africa once the fellowship is completed

### Research context

The changing digital landscape for creative and cultural expressions is creating new opportunities for the production and sharing of content. At the same time, it is arguably widening the gap of cultural and creative participation along the same lines as the digital divide. This is due to issues such as lack of access to digital platforms, lack of net neutrality and inequalities of discoverability (in terms of how content from various places are made visible across digital platforms). For example, in 2018, around 98% of African broadband connections were made through mobile networks, and so decisions by telcos or their regulators on what platforms to prioritise will have significant implications for content viewed. Some telcos offer a cheaper bundle though which users can only access content on a small number of social networks like Facebook. Ownership of digital media and platforms also bestows curatorial powers on a small number of companies from a handful of nations, primarily from the Global North (with the notable exception of China).

These challenges form part of wider debates, movements and initiatives addressing the legacies of colonialism and structural inequalities and power imbalances in relationships between the Global North and Global South. They are particularly urgent given the intensive transition from physical to online delivery that is underway across the arts, culture and education sectors globally, accelerated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. How might we decolonise digital?

The fellowship will focus on decolonising digital in the context of cultural and creative production and consumption in Africa and consumption of content originating from Africa in the UK and elsewhere in the world. These parameters may be interpreted quite broadly as long as the

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research relates in some way to the core areas of British Council programming and strategic engagement: Culture and Creative Industries, Education, Inclusive Communities, and International Cultural Relations more broadly. More specifically, there is an opportunity for the fellowship to engage closely with the British Council's **New Narratives** programme. This is a major five-year initiative (launching in April 2021) that aims to help contribute to changing reciprocal perceptions between Africa and the UK through stronger connections between its young people, more plural narratives between the two places and better insight for stakeholder decision-making.

As part of the application process (see below) candidates will be expected to propose how they would develop the research theme in line both the British Council strategic interests and their own academic expertise. The final focus of the research will be further refined once the successful candidate has been selected and as the fellowship gets underway.

## Fellowship duration and funding

The fellowship is for 7 months from April to October 2021. The fellow will receive the [standard IASH postdoctoral fellowship offer](#), including a bursary of £1,300 per month, plus a travel bursary of £1,000 and assistance with the UK visa application process and costs.

Please note that the fellow will be responsible for finding their own accommodation in Edinburgh for the period of the fellowship. The fellow's accommodation and other living expenses will need to be covered through their monthly bursary. The fellow may be able to supplement the bursary by individually arranging their own concurrent teaching, though IASH and the British Council expect that a maximum commitment of 0.4 of a full-time position will be dedicated to work other than the fellow's individual research project. IASH can provide the fellow with guidance on local accommodation options prior to the start of the fellowship, if required.

Should restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic mean travel to Edinburgh is not feasible, we will explore how most effectively to enable the fellowship to be undertaken remotely (in part or in full, as the circumstances require).

## Outputs and deliverables

The fellow will be expected and encouraged to work on academic research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers) drawing on the supportive research environment and networking opportunities of IASH. British Council experts will provide feedback and advice in support of these outputs as appropriate.

In addition, a range of deliverables will be agreed with the British Council that will be targeted at British Council audiences and stakeholders (both internal and external). These will include staff talks and workshops and a short and accessible paper for an informed but non-expert audience. The fellow may also have opportunities to contribute short policy-focused articles for the British Council's [Insights series](#). Additional research engagement and dissemination opportunities with external stakeholders may be available through the British Council's membership of the [International Cultural Relations Research Alliance](#) (ICRRA).

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We are particularly interested in working with the fellow to develop ideas for creative outputs relating to the fellowship (e.g. films, video-games, artistic performance, apps, interactive web-based outputs) and welcome innovative approaches to engage broad public audiences in their research, in the UK and across the African continent and beyond. Participatory approaches and the co-creation (and/or co-curation) of research outputs is also welcomed.

A detailed plan for the production and dissemination of research outputs will be agreed between the British Council, IASH and the research fellow once the fellowship is underway.

## **Outcomes and benefits**

This is a unique professional development and research networking opportunity for an early-career researcher from the continent of Africa. The fellow will be part of the lively international and interdisciplinary scholarly community at IASH and benefit from the opportunities this affords for intellectual exchange and peer support. This relationship with IASH is ongoing following the completion of the fellowship, providing continued peer engagement as part of a global network of IASH alumni/ae.

The collaboration with the British Council extends these opportunities by enabling access to the professional expertise of the British Council staff and stakeholders involved, bringing valuable insight into the perspectives of cultural relations practitioners and policy makers in the UK and Africa and across the British Council's global network. The fellow will benefit from access to qualitative and quantitative data from British Council programmes and activities that are relevant to the fellowship topic and will be encouraged to build connections and networks with British Council colleagues over the course of their research through internal discussion and knowledge exchange.

Through this direct engagement with the British Council throughout the period of the fellowship, the research fellow will gain insight into and experience of developing and applying research findings beyond the academic community. This will include opportunities to contribute to UK, African and international policy debates around decolonisation and digital cultural relations, and to inform and enhance the British Council's strategic partnerships with civil society organisations, community groups, young people and influencers.

The fellowship provides a valuable opportunity to contribute to societal and economic research impact. The research fellow will be expected to work with British Council experts and external stakeholders to inform and shape best practice in digital cultural relations between the UK and Africa, and to promote through their research and engagement enhanced awareness and cultural fluency in relation to themes such as decolonisation, inclusivity and digital innovation.

The New Narratives programme provides an excellent pathway to help guide and shape the fellow's engagement with key audiences and stakeholders in the UK and Africa – from government, civil society, science and enterprise to artists, academics, English learners, school children, students and future leaders – and to relate the research to wider initiatives that aim to promote more forward-looking approaches in the UK's social, cultural and economic interactions with Africa.

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## Candidate eligibility and person specification

This fellowship is open to early-career researchers who are citizens of any African country AND resident on the continent.

In addition to the [standard eligibility criteria for IASH Postdoctoral Fellowship programmes](#), applicants must have:

- a research and/or professional background that relates to the core areas of British Council programming and strategic engagement: Culture and Creative Industries, Education, Inclusive Communities, and International Cultural Relations more broadly
- an interest in and understanding of digital technologies and platforms and in debates around digital access and inclusivity
- experience of engaging non-academic audiences and stakeholders in research (e.g. through engagement with policy makers, practitioners, artists or broad public audiences)
- commitment to professional development and a clear understanding of how the fellowship will support this
- clear commitment to knowledge sharing and the development of best practice beyond the timeframe of the fellowship itself, based on the networks, insights and learnings developed through their research

## Application process and timetable

The application process will be managed by the British Council in two stages:

*Stage 1:*

To initiate the application process, please submit the following documents to [James.Perkins@britishcouncil.org](mailto:James.Perkins@britishcouncil.org) by the deadline of 24:00 UK time on **Sunday 10 January 2021**:

- a **research proposal** (up to 3 pages max.)
- a **CV** (up to 3 pages max)
- the names, job titles and contact details of two **referees** who may be contacted by the British Council later in the application process

Your research proposal should:

- outline your motivation for applying and your interest in engaging with IASH and the British Council specifically
- detail how you intend to approach and develop the research theme for the fellowship and outline your initial ideas around potential research outputs
- explain how this complements your research interests, background and expertise and supports your professional development goals and future plans

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- indicate any existing connections or experience of collaborating with IASH and/or the British Council

Applications will be reviewed by the British Council. Applicants who demonstrate the strongest fit to the above Study objectives and Qualifications required (as judged by a review panel) will be invited to proceed to the next stage.

*Stage 2:*

At this stage, applicants will be given the opportunity to join a call with relevant British Council staff in order to get feedback on their research proposals and discuss any queries about the research context for the fellowship. They will then be asked to refine and develop their proposals and to submit revised versions by 24:00 UK time on **Sunday 14 February 2021**.

Following further review of these revised proposals by the British Council in consultation with IASH, applicants whose proposals are ranked highest will be invited to interview (via video-conferencing or in person at a British Council office in Africa if feasible). A final decision on the award of the fellowship will be made by the end of February 2021.

*Timetable:*

- initial application deadline: Sunday **10 January 2021** (24:00 UK time)
- review and feedback: From 11 January – 29 January 2021
- revised proposal deadline: Sunday **14 February 2021** (24:00 UK time)
- further review and interviews: From 15 February – 26 February 2021
- fellowship awarded: By end of February 2021
- fellowship start date: From 5 April 2021
- fellowship end date: 31 October 2021

For any questions about this fellowship opportunity, please contact

[James.Perkins@britishcouncil.org](mailto:James.Perkins@britishcouncil.org)