FREEDOM WITHIN A FRAMEWORK

How Global Information Services will smooth the path to British Council success in generating friendly knowledge and understanding across the world
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Document history

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Introduction

The British Council’s strategic priorities for 2015 and beyond include growing impact and ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. They are underpinned by a commitment to continue to transform our technology and business processes to release the full potential of all our staff, unlock the value in our information assets and develop our capability for the future.

Global Information Services (GIS) has a vital role to play in smoothing the path to British Council success, working with our partners in the business to maximise the value of the investment the British Council is making in information and technology. This strategy recognises the need to deliver a professional service that scales with changing business requirements and unleashes the potential talent within our regions whomever and wherever they are; the key thrust of our strategy is:

‘Freedom within a framework’

Our investment in information and technology must be based on sound business decisions that result in cost-effective IS services being delivered. We act as trusted advisors to the business; ensuring we have a solid understanding of the context and ambitions of the British Council, and Global Information Services is charged with managing demand and prioritisation of information and technology services in a consistent, inclusive and transparent way.

Our stakeholders and customers across the world have multiple needs and are increasingly technologically savvy; this presents GIS with a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is satisfying expectations and demand with a limited budget and in the face of competing priorities. We will work with the business to understand the investment choices the organisation faces, the pros and cons of purchasing services globally vs. locally and benchmarking current spend and optimising third party spend to get more value from suppliers.

We will also address the underinvestment in core services (networks, email, office products etc.) and bringing these services and support up to scratch bringing both diversity and security standards up to the most appropriate levels using our policy of Security and Diversity “by design”.

We acknowledge the opportunity to recognise and harness innovation and talent at a global and local level, reducing the “time to market” of new technology and information services, bringing greater diversity into the GIS workforce and reducing reliance on high-end resources at the centre. A further opportunity is to lead organisational thought in information risk management, reducing bureaucracy where possible to improve organisational agility and to allow governance activities to be focussed on the areas of greatest risk.

The “freedom within a framework” concept balances innovation with the appropriate level of support and governance.

Our strategy is underpinned by four strategic pillars: Getting the basics right, Customer, Insight, and Collaboration, and sets out our approach to supporting the British Council’s strategic aims and objectives for 2015 and beyond.
THE PROMISE

Global Information Services (GIS) will lead the effort to drive value from our investment in information and technology.

Strategic principles

- If it doesn't benefit the customer, why are we doing it?
- We cannot grow without technology, our plans depend on it
- Information is the asset we are dealing with
- We will rapidly move local innovation to a global utility service
- All of us as leaders are responsible and accountable for the value our part of the business creates from the investment in technology

Supporting points

- One size does not fit all, but too much variety will break the bank
- Resources are finite so prioritisation and re-use is essential
- Working with the business to understand business priorities is key to realising opportunities
- Technology, itself, does not add value or deliver benefits
- Standardisation and optimisation are the key tools for cost reduction and efficiency along with Diversity by Design and Security by Design.
- A nimble and pragmatic approach is key to delivering against changing business requirements
- We will continue to measure our efforts in order to demonstrate the total lifetime value of our investment in information and technology.

RESOURCES

People

The leadership team will ensure we have the culture, people, and capabilities in the GIS team to maximise our effectiveness; working as ambassadors of our function, and for the British Council as a whole. With strong pressures on staff recruitment and retention, we will build a programme which allows us to bring colleagues into the team in entry level roles with a programme to train and develop, allowing them to secure roles at a higher level in the future.

By working across the global network, and moving to be closer to Local IT staff, we will ensure we utilise and nurture the vast range of talents in the British Council using the cultural diversity as an enabler in our global delivery.

Partners

In addition to the review of sourcing strategy as part of the GIST programme, we are also moving to refine the way we work with third party developers. We envisage moving more work to these partners. This will enable us to quickly flex to demand, increasing and decreasing our capacity as needed. We see a significant reduction in our reliance on non-permanent and fix term contracts staff. In order to be true partners our vendors will need to demonstrate they share our values as an organisation including the principles above.

Behaviours

Our promise will be carried out in a way that aligns with both the organisational behaviours and the three GIS cultural norms:

- Credible assertion
- Humility
- Critical loyalty
FOUR STRATEGIC PILLARS

Pillar 1 - Getting the basics right

Aim

Getting the basics right in the way we deliver IS services, both now and in the future.

We will invest in our core services, extract maximum value from our supplier contracts and continuously build the capabilities of our people to ensure that our services, platforms, and operations are fit for purpose, include diversity by design on accessibility, provide an inclusive experience at work for all and keep pace with the environment in which the British Council operates.

What does this mean?

Investing in our core platform and services:

- Reshaping our network
  - Delivering faster and better internet links, able to handle increasing demand for data usage (the PlaNet programme), the result is much improved performance and experience for teachers, students, and staff alike, e.g. Computer Based Testing and On Screen Marking.
  - Shifting to cloud based services, helping us to flex services to meet changing demand, cost effective storage & better accessibility in devices.
- Improving our services
  - Reducing bureaucracy with lean processes.
  - Local tailoring within a global framework

Producing and maintaining a long term maintenance plan and roadmap for all our services which means we will avoid unplanned technical debt and give greater transparency on costs.

Supplier contracts:

- Reduce contract spend and manage the quality of the services we buy, through a strong vendor relationship management function.
- Working with partners and third party developers to enable us to quickly flex to demand, increasing and decreasing our capacity as needed, and reducing our reliance on NPW and contracted staff

Delivering a fit for purpose technology and information service by getting the people and capabilities right across the world:

- Building a network of trusted business partners to link in with the Regions and strategic business units
- Supporting the continued development of our own teams by nurturing the talents of people to add value to the way the British Council works. (Reducing the reliance on central resources).
Pillar 2 – The Customer at our heart

Aim

We will deliver, wherever possible and cost effective to do so, a smooth customer experience for people using the British Council’s technology and information services.

- Deliver a personalised and accessible customer experience through supported and secure technology solutions that allow local and individual customisation, encouraging more traffic and better quality engagement.
- Provide easy to use and scalable tools that will allow customer focused communication at local level (and potentially globally).

What does this mean?

- Optimising and scaling the existing payment and booking systems for global use.
- Creating compelling and affordable products (e.g. Customer Data Systems: CRM) and services that allow British Council stakeholders to engage with our customers at scale whilst remaining locally and personally relevant.
- Developing a global application to allow customers and stakeholders to manage their own profiles: to have one identity for all British Council Services, securely and with accessibility in mind.
- Business partnering with finance and others to secure a global view on payment collection and processing. Ensuring that security standards are met appropriately e.g. Payment Card Industry standards.
Pillar 3 – Giving you insight

Aim

Creating the tools and skills necessary to harness information from around the network, providing internal and external stakeholders with knowledge and insight on the British Council’s work and its impact.

This is about getting the right information, at the right time, in the right way, safely by:

- Setting and supporting a strong but pragmatic data governance framework to improve data quality across the British Council.
- Providing systems to manage, collate, and analyse structured and unstructured data across the global network and business functions to enable stakeholders to informed decisions.
- Providing systems to interpret and communicate data and knowledge in a meaningful, accessible, exciting and helpful way.

What does this mean?

Setting data governance
- Data standards
- Data stewardship
- Data ownership
- Compliance

Managing, collating and analysing data
- Articulate and provide evidence of the impact that the British Council has in the countries in which we work, and the value that brings to the UK and the countries themselves
- Report on a defined set of high-level corporate KPIs, drilling down as necessary into the detail
- Identify future business opportunities and threats
- Share knowledge internally and externally

Communicating data with tools including:
- Dashboards and balanced scorecards
- Info-graphics
- Presentations
- Geographical Information Systems (mapping data to geographies)
Pillar 4 – Creating space for your collaboration

Aim

Supporting cultural relations by providing stakeholders with the technology and information needed for knowledge sharing, brokering relationships, communicating and collaborating to create the space to gain friendly knowledge & understanding.

- Provide technology to make it easy to connect people, share ideas and collaborate and co-create.
- Provide tools that support communities of excellence or practice and intellectual engagement.
- Provide support and knowledge on using technology for virtual networking and relationships at scale using a variety of media and supporting inclusion and diversity e.g. internet video conferencing.
- Linking communities within the UK and overseas to develop friendly knowledge and understanding within British Council facilitated spaces (e.g. alumni and specialist communities).

What does this mean?

We will support the collaboration through the following types of engagement:

- Enabling internal, internal to external and external to external collaboration across geographies, strategic business units and partners.
- Ensure colleagues across the organisation have the right tools to enable secure and innovative collaboration.

Across this model we will:

- Create compelling and affordable collaborative products and services that allow British Council stakeholders to create and manage wide internal and external communities at scale.
- Provide expertise, guidance, and frameworks to use existing or emerging technology, allowing greater flexibility and innovation, safely.
- Provide search and publishing technology to deliver insight and thought pieces to the communities.
CONCLUSION

Technology is a powerful enabler. Without it, the British Council cannot realise its aspirations for impact and growth.

All of us as leaders are responsible and accountable for the value our part of the business creates from the investment in information and technology.

By delivering to these four strategic pillars, we believe we can achieve a true ‘Freedom within a Framework’ operating model, unleashing the existing talent within regions to make a stronger British Council and play our part in further creating lasting impact through friendly knowledge and understanding between nations and the UK.