

Cultural Relations Collection

Edited by J.P. Singh



British Council's Going Global Conferences: Their Impact on International Higher Education

Murray Saunders and John McGovern



Education

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The British Council

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.

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Foreword

I am delighted at the release and publication of the first contributions to what I hope will be an important collection on cultural relations and the mission of the British Council. Not always easy to describe and at times even more difficult to measure, when you see cultural relations in action you know what it is about: working over the long term with individuals, communities and institutions in a spirit of mutuality.

Our mission is not only about what we do but also how we engage. This is what distinguishes a cultural relations approach from other forms of public or cultural diplomacy. It is about activities and opportunities, but it is also about how relationships are formed and nourished. And in our case as the British Council it happens in over one hundred countries, working with the English language and through cultural engagement in the arts, education and skills.

This collection provides an overview and analysis of diverse examples of this distinctive cultural relations approach and how it is used to further the British Council's charitable objects, and how the approach benefits both the UK and the people with whom we work. The ways of working apply whether convening the global leaders of international higher education, or building partnerships with civil society organisations or artists within a single country. The cultural relations thread also applies across the British Council's largest programmes, including those such as English Language teaching which deliver income.

Over the past decade the British Council has been consolidating its activities in order to increase the commonality across different countries and regions. Yet a cultural relations approach will always necessitate some variety, because mutuality involves degrees of exchange, co-production and adaptation to local needs. An example in this collection shows how in 2016 within Shakespeare Lives, a global programme celebrating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and operating to consistent global production values, a small, country-based arts investment in Nigeria saw the production and touring of a locally relevant Shakespeare play performed in Nigerian Pidgin.

The collection also reflects on the long view and includes two contributions which draw on historical investigation to understand the British Council's role over many decades in Burma/Myanmar and the Soviet Union/Russia, drawing on deep scholarship of post-colonialism and the Cold War respectively. It is to be applauded that the editors and authors allow such critical reflection, avoiding the risk of self-congratulation and enabling organisational learning and growth.

Reading these contributions together as a collection reminds me that while all these different areas constitute cultural relations in their own right, together they add up to more than the sum of their parts. Hard work in one area leads to networks and builds the trust that enables the British Council to undertake activities in different areas and with diverse kinds of partners.

It is not always easy to quantify cultural relations or the impact of an individual institution like the British Council over the arc of time and geography. Today, great effort is put into evaluating both the programmatic and organisational impact of our work. Yet the methodologies to assess the effects of multiple decades of engagement are still developing. Friends made, understanding gained and trust increased are things we know to be important. Proving their worth is harder.

Historical investigation helps, but in the end, as Martin Rose says of cultural relations in his essay in this collection: "It has been said of diplomacy that its success can be measured by wars not fought.... The same might be said of the British Council, though it operates at a more human level with individuals and communities rather than nations." Seen in this way, cultural relations is as much about the absence of negatives as the presence of positives. Cultural relations delivers the calm, reflective response as well as the bustling, creative one. This collection, authored by both well-known scholars and authoritative practitioners shows both. And it does so in a way that I hope you find to be accessible, enlightening and compelling. I commend it to you with enthusiasm.

Sir Ciarán Devane,
Chief Executive, *British Council*

Preface to the Cultural Relations Collection

The British Council is often viewed as an organisation that 'does', and it does a great deal, but it is also a 'thinking' and learning organisation and in recent years has begun to increase its investment in commissioning, using and sometimes undertaking research. It does so for three key reasons.

As an organisation that provides thought leadership in cultural relations it is important that the British Council contributes to, demonstrates and shares a thorough understanding of cultural relations, and of how this approach contributes to the United Kingdom's attraction and trusted connections in international relations. It does this, for example, through regular studies on the influence and measurement of soft power that track perceptions of the UK, particularly among young people across the world.

Second, we commission and undertake research as trusted expert practitioners in the thematic areas in which we work: in the arts, international education, English language teaching and assessment, and activities undertaken largely with young people in communities and civil society organisations, such as through the Active Citizens Programme. In each of these areas we convene informed debates based on the provision, sharing or curating of new knowledge, in many cases disseminated in well regarded publications and series.

A third reason is to increase the evidence and understanding for ourselves and others of what works to generate cultural relations impact and why. We seek to demonstrate engagement of the highest standard to supporters and partners, while also building our capacity as an organisation to benefit from using research and evidence, both our own and work by others', in order to make strategic decisions, engage global stakeholders, and exchange knowledge. Together, each of these research areas contributes useful new knowledge to further our charitable purpose through generating new insights and understanding in areas relevant to our work, in turn enhancing our ability to influence policy or to impact debates.

This cultural relations collection arose out of an early initiative when the British Council first established the small research team that would become part of the new global function led from the Research and Policy Insight Directorate. In commissioning a series of in-house and external studies it had three key aims. The first was to clarify our understanding of cultural relations as an encompassing venture that permeated all our work, whether specific to a sector or not and whether income generating or not. Here the contributions on English language and on assessment are particularly illustrative. The second aim was to provide an opportunity to country offices and regional teams, through a competitive bidding process, to commission research on initiatives that were able to illustrate a cultural relations approach in action at a local level. The fascinating contribution on Shakespeare in Nigerian Pidgin stems from this call. A third aim was to grapple with the challenges of understanding and demonstrating impact when reviewing the British Council's work in an area of activity or in a country over a long period of time. The contributions on science diplomacy and on Myanmar fit here and demonstrate the richness of reviewing cultural relations over time, alongside the challenges of making assessments across the long arc of history.

This cultural relations collection has provided an opportunity to show the work of the British Council in its rich diversity, linked by this common thread and demonstrating that as with the best partnerships, mutuality in approach often produces things that are not what were originally designed, which are often better as a result and that sometimes grow in ways over which no individual or organisation has control.

Dan Shah
Director Research and Policy Insight
British Council

Editor's Note

This contribution is drawn from an external evaluation of British Council's annual Going Global Conference, which has brought together leaders in international higher education since 2004. Singh and MacDonald (2016) provide a quantitative cross-national analysis of one of the benefits of soft power: the ability to act as a leader in higher education. This contribution offers the qualitative detail and analytical rigour to evidence higher education as a soft power asset through the case of Going Global. The contribution discusses how the conferences evolved from events that aimed initially at attracting international students to the UK, through to providing a platform that could showcase UK excellence in international higher education while at the same time affording the same opportunity to other countries. This created a space for mutual learning and exchange, exhibiting key qualities of cultural relations: reciprocity and exchange among a diversity of players leading to mutual benefit. In providing a detailed evaluation of impact the contribution demonstrates the cultural relations and soft power of the organisation working in tandem and at its best.

The contribution also reflects broad issues of global norm entrepreneurship in the globalisation of higher education. However, we know little about how such norms and societal understandings emerge at a micro to global level. This contribution provides a glimpse of how this happens. The contribution uses a conceptual lens of a Theory of Change that works from the individual to the institutional and global levels. Towards the end, the report also discusses the role of other global conferences making a similar impact in the world. One discussed in this collection is New Directions, a regional East Asian conference series on examinations and assessment (Saunders & McGovern, 2019). The UK is a huge beneficiary of the British Council's convening power in the realm of international higher education. It draws attention to the UK's leadership and top rankings in higher education, endowing the British Council with the moral authority required by any norm entrepreneur.

Introduction and Background

Going Global is the British Council's annual flagship conference for leaders of international education. The first Going Global conference took place in London in 2004, and until 2010 the event was held in the UK every other year. In 2011, Going Global underwent a transformation in several aspects: the focus shifted from recruitment of international students to the UK, to a focus on partnership and mutuality; the event became annual rather than biennial, and the location for the event moved, for the most part, to alternate years between London and venues in other countries. The international locations have been Hong Kong (2011), Dubai (2013), Miami (2014), South Africa (2016), Malaysia (2018) and Berlin (2019).

The British Council considers the conference to be an important part of its international mission within the global higher education sector, a space for debate on the future of further and higher education that:

- Provides a unique platform for knowledge sharing
- Connects local, national, regional and global agendas
- Provides a global network for policy makers and practitioners working in the field of international education
- Supports evidence-led policy decisions deriving from research and regional policy dialogues
- Supports global thought leadership

Going Global is aimed primarily at government ministers and representatives, vice-chancellors and leaders in the higher education sector, and is used as a mechanism to enable decision-making dialogue and to curate an event which leaders within the global HE sector will see as important, influential, useful and providing significant opportunities. The objective underscoring this is to contribute a positive impact to HE worldwide, and in so doing to create a positive predisposition to the UK sector and the UK as a potential partner and collaborator.

This contribution provides a brief background to the conference series so far before providing an assessment of its impact in two parts. Conceptually, the contribution places the impact within the framework of the organisation's work in cultural relations. Empirically, it provides themed vignettes from around the world to provide an assessment of the impact of Going Global. This contribution is drawn from an impact assessment covering the period from 2011 to 2017. Its aim is to provide both a summative review of the sustained impact of Going Global events in that period, and a formative review, identifying how Going Global might create greater impact in future.

Using innovative evaluation techniques, which can be found in the original report (Saunders & McGovern, 2019, pp. 1-120), the study gathered evidence from the UK and six other countries that had participated in the 2011–2017 events. The six countries selected in addition to the UK – Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa and Turkey – were chosen because of the size of the potential pool of key informants. Types of informant sought were: key government decision-makers with responsibility for higher education; leaders of higher education sector bodies; leaders of higher education institutions (at the level of vice-chancellors, deputy or pro-vice-chancellors), and leaders of other agencies with an interest in international higher education. Gender was also taken into consideration. Overall 88 informants were interviewed, of which 63 were key senior decision-makers in the countries concerned.

Each country case study includes a 'Themed Vignette', which offers a closer, more detailed view of an aspect of the Going Global experience both particularly pertinent to that country, and with relevance to the whole. A selection of these vignettes helps indicate what the benefits of attendance at Going Global might be, and how best to engage with the event. Finally, a Synthesis of Findings assesses the overall impact of Going Global and what it has contributed to the development of the HE sector as a whole, validating the Theory of Change (or more accurately in this case, Theory of Cultural Relations) approach outlined below.

A Theory of Change

Assessing impact involves understanding how an intervention (in this case Going Global) interacts with stakeholders. This paper adopts a Theory of Change approach that is interested in how strategy changes practice, in what people do as a response to participating in the event. The overall concern is with changes in sustainable practice, in recurrent behaviour and in longer-term attitudinal change. However, steps along the way – which may in themselves not be strong enough to constitute an ‘effect’, but which are part of the total dynamic responsible for creating sustained impact – are also an important part of the relationship between an event and subsequent action or outcomes.

The paper sets out evidence on both the intermediate and longer-term effects of attendance at Going Global, and holds that integration of the experience of Going Global constitutes a resource for participants, and that this leads in many cases to onward action. Impact is examined on three different levels:

- Personal (knowledge, networks, ideas)
- Institutional (strategy, policy)
- Sector and government (systems, agreements)

Though there were variations in the responses from country to country, and between segments and individuals within each country, the evidence is markedly positive. This is true at individual, institutional and sector levels. Impact is threefold. First, the reputation of the UK higher education sector is reinforced and enhanced. Second, UK organisations and institutions, along with delegates from other countries, can benefit from the opportunities Going Global has provided to develop relationships, introduce new systems, practices and courses, and to access markets. Third, and perhaps most important in a post-Brexit world, Going Global creates a positive predisposition towards the UK in general, with benefits to both the UK and international HE sectors.

Impact at individual, institutional and sector levels is examined below, with subsequent closer focus on the creation of positive predispositions to the UK.

Individual Level

For the individual, Going Global has effects that are perceived as valuable and, in some cases, transformative. Given the seniority of the informants, this is an important result. Of the 63 interviews undertaken in the six non-UK countries, there were only five dissenting voices when it came to understanding and experience of the purpose of Going Global. Areas of positive experience highlighted statements that Going Global extended thinking, enabled networking, and gave opportunities for personal development.

New approaches, new partnerships

Perhaps the most significant benefit of Going Global at this level is the access Going Global provides to new ideas and new approaches as input for policy, strategy and practice. This enables participating decision-makers to benchmark their own systems and institutions and to plan. Government respondents in South Africa, for example, found the event a useful and inspiring resource. In Nigeria, respondents identified how attendance at Going Global extended their understanding of contemporary issues within HE. In some cases, this individual enrichment was cascaded, supporting institutional and sector development, and providing planning and policy resources. Linked to this effect, are the relational benefits the key informants describe, especially with UK counterparts. Going Global enabled bilateral discussions that led to institutional, sector and government-level collaborations. The vice-chancellor of Kano University noted: “as a direct result of Going Global we created a Directorate of Research Collaboration and Innovation.”

In Malaysia, all of the informants acknowledged that Going Global had an impact on their thinking about higher education in general and international higher education in particular. No one suggested, as in some of the other countries surveyed, that it had a transformative effect on how they subsequently thought or acted, probably because the internationalisation of Malaysia’s higher education is more advanced, but the greatest impact was perhaps seen as being on helping individuals to be confident that they were well sighted in the leadership of the sector or their institutions.

Changing mind-sets

Judging from the respondents' remarks, Going Global had perhaps more of an impact on individual participants from Egypt than from any other country in the survey. Prior to Going Global, they had felt isolated internationally and had very little knowledge or experience of the UK. Prior to 2012, UK activity in higher education in Egypt was very limited, as was Egyptian participation in Going Global, but 2013 was a breakthrough year with a delegation of 22 people attending from Egypt. It was from this delegation that at the subsequent sector reform group emerged: Going Global had a major effect at a personal level on this group of very senior stakeholders. Going Global changed mind-sets and changed attitudes towards the UK and to the UK HE sector – as one respondent put it, it helped propel UK HE from “zero to hero”. Most importantly, it made possible the involvement of UK partners in the reform process in Egypt and helped shape the direction the reform might take.

The two female participants from Egypt commented that Going Global was ‘female friendly’ and they also felt comfortable as veiled Muslim women. They saw the event as important for the breaking of stereotypes in this regard. One of them noted: “Going Global lit a fire for a campaign, which is ongoing, about the role of women in HE in general in Egypt and in STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] in particular.”

New ideas and practises

Individual experience of Going Global, in non-UK countries at least, highlighted the impact that new ideas encountered at the event had on confidence, and how that fed into instigating and sustaining new policies and practice. In Pakistan, all but one of the informants commented upon how much they had learnt and on the value of the experience of attending Going Global. Half of the informants had been more than once, and all but one would choose to return if offered the opportunity. (Pakistan always has a sizeable presence at Going Global, with more than 140 participants since 2011.) At an individual level, several of the interviewees commented on how Going Global not only provided them with new ideas about policy, strategy and practice but also, and perhaps even more importantly, it validated their own ideas and gave them the confidence to progress them.

Institutional Level

At the institutional level, most participants reported a positive experience, but there was more variation in response than on an individual level. Much depended on the extent to which participants attended with realistic expectations and a clear strategic aim identifying useful sessions, meetings and collaborations see Themed Vignette: Pakistan). Reported impact at an institutional level in some countries, such as Turkey, was perhaps less strong than elsewhere, but the key informants in most countries provided a range of evidence on how they had used Going Global to change their policies, systems, practices and partnerships. There were examples in each of the country reviews of this reform work being carried out with UK organisations and institutions, partly or wholly, as a result of attending Going Global.

Creating partnerships, changing practice

While it is not always possible to isolate immediate effects, it is clear that relationships begun and fostered at Going Global have an impact in the long term. Of the Pakistan institutions represented by the informants, for example, 70 percent were able to point to changes that had taken place in some measure because of Going Global – most of these at the level of practice, but some at a system level. Partnerships with UK institutions featured strongly. Several key informants explained the catalytic effect of Going Global. Even though it might not be possible to draw a direct cause-and-effect correlation between a Going Global event and a subsequent change in policy, strategy or practice, informants were convinced that Going Global was a major influence on new policies on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), transnational education (TNE), radicalisation on campuses, and on the choice of priorities in the new National Action Plan.

Most Pakistani interviewees were able to point to the creation and maintenance of new strategic partnerships that were either initiated or nurtured through Going Global, including strategic alliances as well as the purchase of services and products from, for example, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and Cambridge Assessment. Going Global was also cited several times as a major influence on new research practices at the institutional level with respect to research, strategic planning, curriculum and internationalisation.

Malaysian respondents, as well as pointing to the general influence on policy and strategy, also provided specific examples of partnerships with UK institutions that were initiated at Going Global, for example with Dundee, Kent, Birmingham and Manchester Metropolitan universities.

Internationalisation and UK partnerships

When it came to Going Global's impact at an institutional level, Nigerian respondents identified a similar increase in sophistication and horizon scanning as they had at an individual level, but in some instances also pointed to specific arrangements for curriculum development and links with UK providers of courses. This was dependent on the extent to which a Going Global theme was accessible, relevant and applicable to the Nigerian context.

Some Nigerian vice-chancellors identified links to the Institute for Development Studies in which a review of key practices was prompted by the experience of Going Global. For other respondents, participation in Going Global supported the internationalisation of practice. One Nigerian participant noted: "We came back and formed a group looking at the development of pedagogic practices. We coined the term, 'The 21st Century University', to capture this focus on new methods; it [Going Global] helped with this innovation in teaching and changing attitudes, we are well ahead in the digital world, it helped to catch up with things like mobile technologies."

One highly influential Malaysian respondent was of the view that Going Global helps to set the agenda on all aspects of the internationalisation of HE. Going Global's role in internationalisation was also noted in Egypt, where five of the respondents were key members of the Supreme Council of Universities group tasked with the reform of HE, as well as being presidents of some of the country's largest and most prestigious universities. The impact on their institutions seems to have been twofold. First, internationalisation became a priority. Second, the institutions previously orientated primarily towards the USA and Germany now shifted their focus far more to the UK. Respondents considered Going Global to have had a profound impact on this, the change coming about to a large measure because attendees felt valued and respected, particularly appreciating the chance to showcase their own issues and challenges. One of the outcomes of this reorientation has been the blossoming of institution-to-institution TNE partnerships with the UK. Another has been the adoption of British HE practices such as quality assurance across several universities, as well as the purchasing of UK services, for example for the reform of university entrance exams. It also led to major curriculum changes and to the launch of projects, such as Smart Cities.

Sector Level

Going Global's impact at the sector level is emphatic, with evidence of change at policy and system level, and of partnerships with UK counterpart organisations. Evidence from a number of countries suggested that Going Global functioned to create positive predispositions to the UK, and that the UK was perceived as a key provider of strategic resources for national planning, in a context of trust and equal partnership. The most unequivocal and widespread view of informants at this level highlighted the usefulness of Going Global in 'oiling the wheels' of global connections. Memorandum of Understanding development between delegations led to later collaborative development at ministerial level, and several countries described how they have reoriented their higher education system away from other countries and towards the UK. This reorientation began after their experience of attending Going Global.

Influencing policy changes and partnerships

Going Global has had a demonstrable impact on policies at the sector level in such countries as Malaysia. In recent years, the Malaysian government has embraced internationalisation, and Malaysia is now one of only a few places in the world that can properly claim to be a hub for international education. Several UK institutions, as well as institutions from other countries, have established a physical presence there, and others have entered into collaborative agreements for the delivery of TNE programmes. Respondents indicated that as a country that prioritises the internationalisation of HE, Malaysia needs to use Going Global both to benchmark and to showcase its own practices, systems and policies, and is now actively doing so. There was general agreement that the major changes that Going Global had effected were at a policy level, including influence on policies on community engagement, vocational education at the tertiary level, and the relationship between universities and industry. Perhaps most significant was the crystallising influence that the minister and his colleagues attributed to ideas garnered at Going Global on the education ministry's 2015 blueprint document for HE in Malaysia.

In Pakistan, where in the early days Going Global had been seen primarily as a space for new ideas and networking, it is now perceived as providing the country, and especially the Higher Education Council, with the opportunity they value to showcase the achievements and the challenges of HE in Pakistan. It enables them to break down stereotypes of Pakistan and to form strategic alliances at both sectoral and institutional levels in order to assist them in their quest to reform their HE system. Informants pointed to major changes that had taken place in such areas as quality assurance, which they attributed largely to Going Global, as this was where they met, and continue to meet, their UK partners.

Oiling the wheels of global relations

The evidence suggests that the process of enabling and brokering is a key characteristic of the contributory impact that Going Global can make to national and institutional development. In Egypt, Going Global helped to set the reform as well as the internationalisation agenda, bonded the leadership team and established direct connections with UK counterpart organisations and individuals at the highest level. In an indirect but nevertheless significant way, the ideas heard, the contacts made, and the meetings held in and around Going Global led to major new partnerships at sector level. The government-to-government 15-year Memorandum of Understanding on collaboration in HE signed by the leaders of both countries, and the new policies, strategies and legislation at sector level on quality assurance, is evidence of what was achieved.

The enabling and brokering process of Going Global – the side-meetings, the networking – featured in many interviewees' responses, including those from Nigeria, who pointed to Going Global providing an opportunity to forge specific links with UK-based organisations, as in the Nigerian University Commission's drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding with (QAA) to develop quality assurance practices. Respondents from Turkey, too, pointed to the input that Going Global had made to subsequent major policy decisions and to providing them with a better understanding of their position internationally. Meetings during Going Global led to the invitation to the UK Minister to visit Turkey and to the subsequent signing of a government-to-government collaboration agreement, and also influenced a number of policies and strategies, such as a complete rethink of the government's plans for techno-parks. Going Global's convening power, and the way in which it brokered opportunities to meet and further important contacts was seen by respondents in a number of countries as the most important dimension of the event.

Of the 25 UK respondents, five reported no direct outcomes of Going Global, though this is possibly a product of the elusiveness of “nailing down” (as one respondent put it) outcomes that can be gradual, accumulative or more nuanced. For other respondents, outcomes were tangible, identifiable and specific: Going Global offered clear opportunities for presenting and exporting expertise, making significant bilateral agreements at national level and supporting the development of national systems through identifying useful resources and contacts. Going Global acts as a broker and enabler. It is an effective and convenient location for cementing or furthering existing connections and initiating new ones.

Direct impact such as this is easily identifiable, yet those more gradual, nuanced, accumulative outcomes are also crucial. Making HE partnerships or purchasing higher education services are complex transactions that require time and often involve many stakeholders. While agreements may not be started or finished at Going Global, many informants believed that the event played an important contributory role.

Positive predispositions to the UK

The less tangible forms of impact of Going Global can form the backbone of sustainable changes in policy and practice and ultimately in attitude. Going Global nourishes existing positive relationships and provides a positive experience for the majority of respondents. This can lead to agreements and reforms in the longer term that in turn create positive predispositions to the UK.

In non-UK countries

The enhancement of the UK's reputation was seen both in very general terms (as a country doing something for the ‘good of mankind’) and more specifically in terms of its position in international HE.

Respondents in South Africa and in Pakistan detected a shift at Going Global away from direct marketing, a move that was associated with a more potent approach to the creation of positive predispositions towards the UK, with the convening capacity of Going Global playing an important role in diplomatic terms. A Pakistani participant noted: “UK HE has had a reputation in the past for pursuing primarily its commercial interests. Going Global softens this image and generates a sustainable effect. It seems to be part of, and to define, UK HE's international strategy.”

Although aware of the benefits to the UK of Going Global as a marketing opportunity, eight out of ten Egyptian respondents felt it enhanced the UK's reputation and influenced its standing in relation to other countries. An Egyptian participant noted: “Going Global has helped affect a cultural shift in the global leadership of HE from the USA to the UK as seen by key Egyptians. This is the main reason why the Egyptian government still continues to fund significant numbers of its best and brightest to go to the UK for their PhDs, despite the high fees.”

Respondents from Commonwealth countries such as Malaysia and Pakistan saw an affirmation of common historical ties, and of strong links between their and the UK's HE systems. “It's in our DNA,” as a Pakistani interviewee put it. In Nigeria, the “close tie” that existed with the UK was frequently cited, with the observation that the positivity of historical links should be nurtured and built upon rather than being taken for granted – a point also made in South Africa.

Alongside this positive predisposition to the UK in Nigeria was a sense of trust and equal partnership, an appreciation of openness and the lack of a covert ulterior motive or colonial agenda. South African respondents also identified Going Global's openness and lack of manipulation or covert agenda. Openness yields trust that prompts positivity: a clearly effective form of soft diplomacy.

A Nigerian participant's observations cut to the heart of mutual exchange inherent in cultural relations:

“We don't feel suspicious, there is no sinister motive. Going Global is innovative, something to transform societies, it has openness, a way of thinking, just offering something that will help us ...I don't see UK now as an agent of colonialism, more partners in affecting change, there are no secrets, it is more like an equal partnership, there can never be a relationship like the one between Nigeria and the UK.”

Three Themed Vignettes

Each country case study in the report included an illustrative account of an issue associated with that particular country's experience of Going Global, but which also had more general relevance. A summarised selection of these 'Themed Vignettes' highlighting particular aspects of Going Global's impact follows.

Malaysia

Key informants in all the countries expressed a view that they would like to see Going Global extend its reach and its impact. In Malaysia this went beyond simply wanting to see more countries attending. They felt there should be more continuity between the annual three-day stand-alone events.

With this in view, suggestions aimed at creating a Going Global Community were made. Ideas included putting all material online immediately after the conference, so that attendees had a soft version that they could share with each other and easily disseminate to colleagues, and the setting up of a space on the Going Global website for attendees to communicate with each other between events and in the run-up to the next event. The space could be organised around recurrent themes (such as TNE and quality assurance), or by type of attendee (academics, VCs, policy-makers). Future Going Global programmes could include a place for these groups to meet face-to-face and to present and share their work.

The hope is that the creation of a permanent Going Global Community of Practitioners, or a nest of such communities, might provide Going Global with, in the words of one respondent in Malaysia, "a life of its own". This would extend the reach, deepen the impact and enhance the sustainability of the Going Global project.

Nigeria

Interviews with the VC of the Nile University of Nigeria (NUON, a Turkish university with strong links to 18 other Turkish universities) and members of his senior management team provided insight into the convergence of an institution's interests, attendance at Going Global, and non-prescriptive yet responsive practices by the British Council in Nigeria and by UK institutions. This transformed the NUON VC's views from a position of relative suspicion and mild hostility to a far more positive predisposition towards the UK, and to UK HE.

In 2014/15 the Turkish government closed down large numbers of universities in Turkey, including all those with which NUON had robust links. It was decided that NUON would revert to a wholly Nigerian entity, but as all existing partnerships had been with the dismantled block of Turkish universities, the VC had to rebuild partnerships worldwide and to forge new links with the global HE community. This challenge coincided with the VC's first encounter with Going Global in London in 2015.

Despite his initial reservations (based on a longstanding and deeply engrained suspicion of the UK), the VC decided during initial in-country discussions to try and link with UK universities. He retained a cautious attitude to the UK and its educational system, but found that Going Global acted as: "a fantastic opportunity for us to rebuild, but without strings. My perspective on the UK and its system completely changed because they seemed to me to be open and simply enabling; this was in stark contrast to my recent experiences in Turkey." As a result of the Going Global experience in London in 2015 and then South Africa in 2016, NUON was able to sign three MoUs with UK universities – a result that exemplifies the way positive predispositions can be sustained by Going Global through an open approach to enabling, a global perspective and having responsive potential partners to hand at the right time.

Pakistan

Pakistan has made extensive use of Going Global, with some 140 participants attending between 2011 and 2017, including senior members of government and the Higher Education Council (HEC), and VCs from both private and state universities.

The HEC views Going Global as a major contributor to its higher education strategy. In the early days, HEC delegates went to Going Global to learn and to network, and though they still value the experience from this point of view, in recent years their use of Going Global has become tactical as well as strategic, meeting with the British Council well in advance of the event to discuss the theme and how Pakistan might best respond to it. The purpose is to make sure that Pakistan is able to showcase achievements and challenges, to benchmark systems and standards, to scan the horizon for new developments and future problems, and to identify people and organisations that might assist them in the task of reforming and developing the country's higher education.

Once the potential attendees have been identified, the HEC works with the British Council prior to departure for the event to ensure that everything is in place to achieve their objectives: their inputs to the main event; their closed session; the bilateral sector meetings; the sector agency counterpart meetings; the contacts with target UK HE organisations and institutions. At Going Global, the team, assisted by the British Council staff from Pakistan, meet to review progress and alert each other to people and events within the programme that may be of interest. Upon their return they organise a dissemination event, followed later by a review meeting to evaluate follow-up actions.

Perhaps inspired by the example of the HEC, some private universities have also adopted a tactical approach to Going Global. They see Going Global as essential to their policy and strategy-making and ensure that all the key members of the senior management team attend, put in a great deal of preparatory work prior to the event, and ensure that what is learnt is disseminated and followed up at an institutional level.

Experience of Analogous Events (UK/All Countries)

Key informants in all the countries were asked about their experience of attending analogous events to Going Global set up by other UK or non-UK organisations¹. The level of experience of other events varied across individuals, segments and countries.

The most cited event was NAFSA, which clearly attracts people from all over the world. The European events (EAIE and EUA) seem to be of most interest to Egypt and Turkey. APAIE, AIEC and NZIEC attract participants from Malaysia. ACU was of interest mainly to Pakistan. WISE also attracted Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey.

The events of most interest to the UK informants, especially institutional leaders, were NAFSA and Santander. Interestingly, neither they, nor the informants from any other country, made mention of either the Times Higher Education regional or global summits or Universities UK International's Higher Education Forum. Except for the World Academic Summit, which is targeted at the top universities, the other Times events are regional and UUKi's International Higher Education Forum is targeted very much at the UK sector. (Participants from abroad are by invitation and the event lasts only for one day.)

Going Global is seen as distinct from these events. Indeed, the most frequent comment made by informants was that Going Global differed from all other analogous events. This was the main reason cited for their positivity towards it. The evidence points to a combination of factors earning Going Global its niche. The target group is seen as leaders at various levels of the HE sector, but the content and the format make it particularly relevant to the leaders at sector level responsible for policy and strategy. For this group, ACU is not seen as sufficiently global, EWF as for ministers only, APAIE and EAIE are seen as regionally focused, AIEC, CACIE, NZIEC and WISE as primarily promotional and NAFSA and Santander as focused on recruitment and exchange.

¹The events cited were: American Council for Education (ACE), Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), Australian International Education Conference (AIEC), Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE), Association of University Administrators (AUA), China Annual Conference for International Education (CACIE), European Association for International Education (EAIE), European Association of Universities (EUA), Education World Forum (EWF), International Association of Universities (IAU), National Association of Foreign Students Advisers (NAFSA), New Zealand International Education Conference (NZIEC), Santander Universities Events, World Conference on Higher Education (held by UNESCO), World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE).

Synthesis of Findings

As was mentioned in the introduction, assessing the impact of Going Global involves understanding how strategy changes practice: what people do as a response to participating in an event. The overall concern is with changes in sustainable practice, in recurrent behaviour. However, stages along the way – which may in themselves not be strong enough to constitute an 'effect', but which are part of a dynamic responsible for creating sustained impact – are also an important part of the relationship between an event and subsequent action.

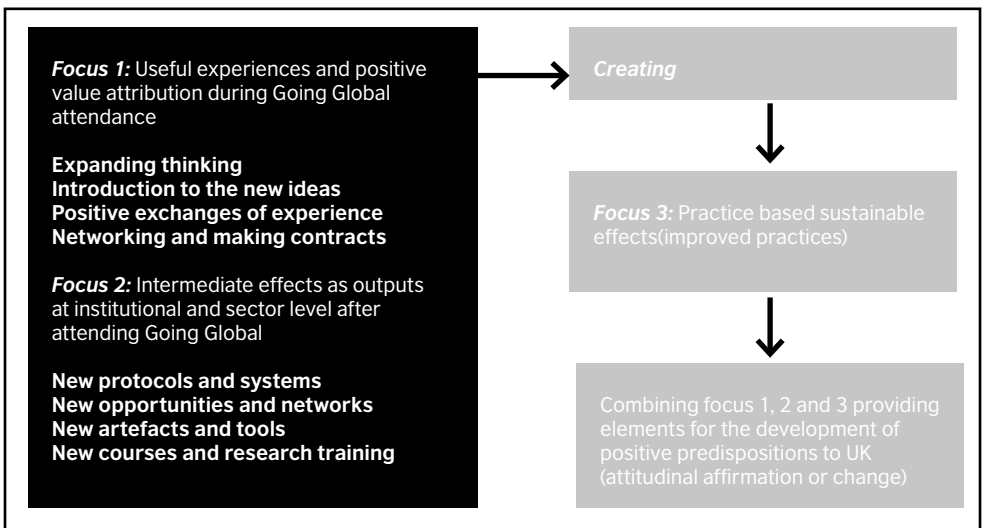
This Theory of Change – or, more accurately, Theory of Cultural Relations – argues that there is a strong determining link between the kind of experience attendance at Going Global offers and the subsequent actions and changes that attendance at the event might have prompted, and the creation of positive predispositions towards the UK (as the provider of Going Global). This argument forms the central focus of the findings that follow.

Finding 1: The Theory of Cultural Relations that lies behind Going Global is validated

The evidence collected suggests that the Theory of Cultural Relations embodied in Going Global is sound. The relationship between the experience of attending Going Global, its intermediate effects and practice-based effects are graphically illustrated by the interview data.

In assessing the impact of Going Global, it is sustainable changes in practice and longer-term attitudinal change that constitute real success. We can see from the data that the nature of the experience of Going Global, together with its intermediate effects (new systems, new infrastructure, new courses etc.) precede and help bring about new sustainable practice clusters (new teaching and research practices, assessment practices etc.). In turn, these combine in the creation of positive predispositions toward the UK. Table 1 illustrates this connection between experience of Going Global, its intermediate effects and sustainable longer-term attitudinal change.

Table 1: Connection between Experience of Going Global and Attitudinal Change



Finding 2: The experience and understanding of Going Global (individual effects)

An astonishingly positive experience reported by delegates at Going Global highlighted the following dimensions (with emphasis differing from country to country).

Going Global:

- Extended thinking and provided new ideas as input to policy, strategy and practice
- Enabled networking and making contacts
- Enabled targeted bilateral discussions and side-meetings which led to institutional, sector and government-level collaborations
- Provided opportunities to showcase individual country systems
- Focused on various expressions of internationalisation
- Gave opportunities for personal, institutional and national enrichment and development
- Was unique and different to analogous events
- Enabled horizon-scanning and forward scoping

There was considerable continuity in respondents' understanding of Going Global and its purpose. This was particularly the case for the interviews outside the UK. Out of the 63 interviews undertaken in six countries, there were only five dissenting voices which spoke about the hybrid nature of Going Global (with a tension between academic and other dimensions of experience) leading to superficiality of content, limited opportunities for networking, or rushed presentations, or which expressed concern about ulterior motives behind the strategy.

Finding 3: The institutional effects of participating in Going Global

While it is accurate to say most participants reported a positive experience, those especially from institutions in the UK, exhibited more variation. Much depended on the extent to which participants attended Going Global with realistic expectations and a clear strategic aim – identifying useful sessions, with meetings arranged and collaborations in view. When this was not the case, immediate institutional benefits were less likely (although not impossible). That said, individual enrichment that fed into institutional development in the longer term was nonetheless reported. Among the tangible benefits accruing to institutions across all the country interview reports were:

- The development of new policies and strategies (internationalisation)
- The development of new partnerships and collaborations for TNE
- Benchmarking, often against UK standards or practices
- The development of new courses
- The introduction of new systems within institutions (assessment)
- Widening pedagogic capacity to include issues of student engagement and active learning
- PhD research training and research collaborations involving national and international funding

Finding 4: Sector and national effects

The most unequivocal and widespread view of the sector/national key informants highlighted the usefulness of Going Global in 'oiling the wheels' of global connections and providing a convenient and enabling environment not only for UK-to-other-country partnerships, but other country-to-country linkages. In many cases, processes such as these – enabled by Going Global – were cited as the most valuable aspect of attending the event, above the content of the programme itself.

All the country interview reports contain details of effects and impact at national sector level derived from participation in a Going Global event, including:

- Memoranda of Understanding development with delegations leading to bilateral collaborative development at ministerial and system level
- Reviewing and developing national systems (e.g. quality assurance systems)
- Providing input into national strategy, policy and vision
- Leadership training at national level
- Benchmarking and helping with a reform agenda

Finding 5: Developing positive predispositions to the UK and its global positioning

A clear link between experiences of attending Going Global and an increase in more general positive predispositions towards the UK was apparent. The usefulness of attending Going Global is not sufficient in itself to explain this effect; a more 'tonal' feature of experiencing Going Global is involved. Over its lifetime, the event has evolved from being a one-dimensional strategy to showcase UK Higher Education and to market it globally, through one that reflected the interests of a more global constituency to now being experienced as an exchange and opportunity to debate and confront global issues in an open and inclusive forum.

This characteristic was identified by most informants, and formed the basis of a potent projection of the UK as an agent of good which has transcended a degree of suspicion. Perhaps the most telling evidence came from the head of a major comparator, a foreign cultural agency who expressed envy at the impact Going Global has on the reputation and profile of UK HE and the UK more generally.

The tonal qualities of Going Global are soft in nature, and act as an effective and persuasive international voice. They may be summarised as follows:

- An open and responsive agenda works to create trust and preferred-partner status
- The absence of an overt political and economic agenda creates positive predispositions to the UK (in comparison to the US)
- Female-friendly
- Strong quality branding for UK HE
- Creative and forward-thinking themes (Thought Leadership) position UK as world leader in HE
- Convening power of Going Global in global HE reflects well on the UK
- The incidental benefits of a global convention: "I'll see you at Going Global to further negotiation on our agreement"
- Economic benefits in linked studentships, TNE agreements, research training and sales of products and services
- Existing systemic links between UK and national systems are a positive factor

Finding 6: Benefits to the UK

Going Global's benefits to the UK come in different forms. First, and perhaps most importantly, Going Global creates positive predispositions to the UK. Going Global contributes to the creation and enhancement of the image of the UK as a country to trust and respect, and as an excellent country with which to partner. Second, Going Global reinforces and enhances the reputation of all aspects of the UK higher education sector. It acts as a showcase for British universities and for British science. Third, it provides the UK HE sector with the opportunity to learn about HE around the world and to meet the 'movers and shakers'. It provides access to markets.

The overall evidence suggests another important benefit. Going Global, as one UK sector informant stated, is "more than just a showcase, it is a good place to do business". Making higher education partnerships or purchasing higher education services are not simple transactions. They take time and often involve many stakeholders. Probably none of the agreements referred to by the key informants from the six non-UK countries was started and finished at Going Global.

However, in the informants' view, Going Global played an important contributory role, often being where the parties first established contact and/or were able to continue building the relationship.

These economic benefits to the UK and UK HE sector are diverse, and vary according to country. Table 2 below sets out the income-generating activity referenced by the key informants as having been stimulated or facilitated by Going Global.

TNE was the most cited activity, with PhD schemes partly brokered by Going Global perhaps being considered the most important. Education services included the provision of training for vice-chancellors and PhD supervisors. Educational products included UK examinations, and educational technology demonstrated at Going Global. Research collaborations were often linked with PhD schemes. Student Exchange was at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. MoUs often involved several stakeholders and several types of income-generating activity.

Table 2: Areas of commercial contribution of Going Global to the HE sector

Country	TNE Partnerships	PhD Scholarships	Sale of Educational Services	Sale of Educational Products	Research Collaborations	Student Exchange	MoU
Egypt	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Malaysia	X	X			X	X	
Nigeria	X	X	X	X	X		X
Pakistan	X	X	X	X	X		X
South Africa		X			X		
Turkey			X				X

Finding 7: Equity-focused and gender-responsive aspects of Going Global

This impact study endeavoured both to have an even spread of male and female interviewees, and to ensure there was no unconscious gender bias in the tone and content of the prompts in the interviews. Whilst every effort was made to select a gender-balanced sample from lists of delegates who fulfilled the study's criteria of seniority and decision-making capacity, it was evident that global higher education suffers from a gender gap (albeit one that varied between countries). Of the 75 external key informants interviewed across the seven countries, 49 were men and 26 women.

In terms of the data generated by the interviews, there was no observable difference in the way in which men and women responded to the prompts, with an even spread of views and perceptions of experience across the both genders. That said, it was possible to infer that women were more likely to identify the networking value of Going Global and to see the event as women-friendly in the way it was organised. This referred to the content of themes, the selection of presenters, and the way in which contributions were managed, as well as to the tone and nature of the organised social interactions, which were considered gender neutral.

Finding 8: Developing greater impact for Going Global

Almost without exception, the key informants in all of the countries surveyed expressed the view that Going Global should continue and made a considerable positive contribution to the reputation of UK HE. Going Global is perceived as distinctive and unique by comparison with other international higher education events, particularly in such areas as its target audience, content, style and delivery.

Conclusion: *Using Going Global*

The impact evaluation covering the period 2011-2017 suggests that the assumptions underlying Going Global's cultural relations strategy are validated. Positive experiences of attending Going Global and the intermediate effects of participation (new systems, infrastructure, courses) help bring about sustainable practice structures (new teaching, research and assessment practices), which in turn create a positive predisposition towards the UK.

Impact can be achieved on many different levels. Going Global is indeed 'a good place to do business', yet attending the event is not simply about cherry-picking the business, but about paving the way: presenting the whole UK system working in collaboration. A strategy that downplays the hard sell and emphasises the common good – the cultural relations that change perceptions and have benefits in the long term – is both diplomatically effective and produces tangible political and economic benefits, conveying a powerful message that the UK is a constructive ally and partner to be trusted.

Responses from country to country, and between individual and segment interviewees, varied, yet the degree of positivity expressed by more than 70 decision-makers worldwide was quite clear. The networking, enabling and brokering processes of Going Global, while not perhaps always seen in terms of immediate impact, benefit both UK and non-UK organisations and institutions, through the opportunities Going Global provides to cultivate and progress relationships, to access markets, and to introduce new systems, practices and courses. And perhaps most crucially, Going Global creates positive predispositions towards the UK, with benefits to both the UK and international HE sectors. As an Egyptian participant noted: "The world is a better place as a result of Going Global. If UK were to step away from it, then others would take its place which would not be good for either the UK or the rest of the world... There would be a global deficit."

Although Going Global began as a strategy first to attract international students to Britain and then to showcase UK higher education to the world, it has moved on to reflect the interests of a more global higher education constituency. As the only open forum that is not confined either to particular bodies or members, it is now experienced as an opportunity to debate global issues in an open and inclusive international higher education forum, which also forms the basis of a potent projection of the UK as an agent for 'good' in this arena.

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