

**House of Commons**

**Foreign Affairs Select Committee**

# **The future of Britain's diplomatic relationship with Europe**

**Written evidence from the British Council**

**16 November 2017**

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## 1. SUMMARY

1.1 The UK is at its best when it is an open, positive, and internationalist country that looks outwards and engages widely. The priority in the lead up to the UK's exit from the European Union and beyond, must be to urgently step up the UK's efforts to build strong and sustainable bi-lateral relationships with the countries Europe and the wider world, and create a stronger more globally-oriented Britain at home. This will be fundamental to reaching the trade agreements and other partnerships we will need for the future and to secure our future influence, as well as creating a helpful backdrop to the discussions on leaving the EU.

1.2 The British Council stands ready to support the UK's ambitions for a stronger role on the world stage, including through using the UK's cultural resources to help achieve enhanced bilateral relationships in Europe. Cultural relations can play a huge part in strengthening the UK's role and connections post-Brexit, ensuring that current and future leaders and influencers in the EU and globally know, understand and experience the UK as an outward looking, engaged nation.

1.3 In 2016-17 the British Council worked with 1.7m people face-to-face in Europe. Over 2.5 million people attended our exhibitions, festivals and fairs, and our digital content attracted more than 24 million people. We also reached 36 million people through publications and broadcasts. However, in recent years the British Council's work in Europe, outside of English teaching and exams, has reduced considerably due to reductions in grant funding. The British Council in the European Union has already had a reduction from around £20 million a year in 2010-11 to £9.25 million this year in our grant funded cultural and educational programmes in European countries. This has already led to the closing of the British Council's offices in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway as well as the loss of staff capacity and reductions in programme spend. Further reductions are likely as the British Council's non-ODA grant through the Foreign Office declines further to £0 over the next two years. This will have major consequences for our ability to continue meaningful ongoing cultural relations activities in most EU countries and will cause reduction in impact in our priority operations.

1.4 Our longer term vision for the UK's future relationship with Europe is to use the cultural resources of the UK to establish Britain as the most globally connected country of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We aim to play a key role in:

- Expanding education, science and research collaboration with the EU member states.
- Enhancing the profile and reputation of the UK through a high-visibility Arts programme
- Scaling up UK engagement with the next generation of young leaders in Europe.

1.5 Enhanced cultural and educational relationships in Europe would be a key indicator of Britain's continued commitment to its bilateral relationships outside of the EU. However, to achieve this ambition will urgently require at least the maintenance of current funding levels and ideally some additional funding. We are working hard to grow our commercial income and attract private sector partnership funding, but this cannot increase at the pace required to offset the fall in our non-ODA grant. So to deliver this vision would require enhanced public investment.

1.6 Our work in the EU seeks to secure the role of the UK as a partner for European countries by focusing on the sustainability, relevance and value of relations with the UK through the Arts, Education, Society and the English language. We are guided by the principles of collaboration and reciprocity.

1.7 Given the significant changes that Brexit will bring, in order to maintain current bilateral relationships within the cultural and educational sectors, the UK must seek to secure agreement in the withdrawal negotiations that safeguards key means of cooperation with our European partners. This should include:

- continued ease of movement for students, academics, researchers, arts and creative professionals, and young people engaged in cultural or educational exchanges;
- increased cultural, educational and scientific partnership with the countries of Europe, including the UK maintaining its role in key EU funded programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and Horizon 2020, or if this proves to be impossible in the negotiations then their replacement with equivalent or enhanced alternatives; and
- increased investment into the UK's cultural and educational connections with countries globally
- post-Brexit residency for EU nationals
- continued cooperation on UK-EU intellectual property issues and regulation

We also urge negotiators to involve young people and representatives from the education, culture and science sectors in the UK and in EU Europe in consultation throughout Brexit negotiations.

## **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.

2.2 In 2016-17 we worked with 1.7 million people face-to-face in Europe. Over 2.5 million people attended our exhibitions, festivals and fairs, and our digital content attracted more than 24 million people. We also reached 36 million people through publications and broadcasts.

## **3. THE UK'S CURRENT BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS**

3.1 The British Council supports the Foreign Office priorities in building and maintaining strong bilateral relationships in the EU through building educational and cultural relationships in each of the countries in which we work. We have been supporting these relationships for over 80 years.

3.2 We work in all EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Our work in Europe also includes a presence in: Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. We have a physical presence in 24 countries. Following reductions in the British Council's non-ODA funding, in 2015 we closed our physical offices in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden where we now employ a strategy of amplification (primarily through digital channels), with staff based remotely.

3.3 Our activity underpins the diplomatic and trading relationships the UK has with European countries. Research<sup>1</sup> for the British Council by IpsosMori and YouGov shows that participation in one or more cultural relations activities - arts, education and English language activities - with the UK is associated with an increase in the average level of trust in people in the UK. Where people trust the people of the UK they are also more likely to trust the government of the UK. Increased levels of trust in people in the UK are also associated with a significantly increased level of interest in opportunities for business and trade with the UK. New research by the University of Edinburgh has highlighted the significant diplomatic, trade and investment benefits that countries gain from investing in cultural and educational ties globally<sup>2</sup>.

3.4 We continue to ensure that our current strategy is relevant to Europe, articulating and enhancing the value of UK strengths in Europe and European strengths in the UK. Some examples of our work with EU countries include:

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<sup>1</sup> British Council, Trust Pays <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/trust-pays-report-v2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> University of Edinburgh, Soft Power Today: Measuring the influence and effects <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/soft-power-research>

3.4.1 English – In 2016-17 we taught English to 94,000 people face-to-face at the British Council's 63 teaching centres and partner centres in 11 countries and 25 cities. Many of these are aspirational young people who will go on to be future leaders and influencers across the continent. With their enhanced English skills they will be able to more easily access UK culture, study in UK higher education and visit the UK as tourists.

3.4.2 Examinations – The British Council's activity in examinations in the EU has extensive reach. In 2016-17 we delivered English exams in 239 towns and cities across 21 countries to 384,000 candidates. We work closely with over 4,000 schools to deliver these examinations on behalf of UK awarding bodies, generating around £12.5 million annually in export earnings for these bodies. We also have over 140 organisational clients (in government and private sectors) for our own suite of English language tests. The UK qualifications and assessments we provide create study and employment opportunities and can change the course of people's lives, but also having a UK qualification has an important impact on trust with the UK and also opens up possibilities for more people across Europe to study in UK universities.

3.4.3 Arts – Over 2.2 million people attended our exhibitions, fairs and festivals in 2016-17. Highlights included:

- *Venice Biennale, Italy* - The British Council organises the British Pavilion exhibitions at the Venice Biennale the world's leading showcase of contemporary art. For 80 years we have overseen the selection process of artists and architects, and preserved the historic building itself. In 2017, Phyllida Barlow represented the UK at the Pavilion. The exhibition opened to 5 star reviews and has been visited by nearly 250,000 visitors since it opened in May, with millions of people global also engaging online. The British Council also supports the Scottish and Welsh Pavilions, which were represented by Rachel Maclean (Scotland) and James Richards (Wales).
- *British Literature Seminar, #BritLitBerlin, Germany* - Thousands of viewers in Germany and worldwide tune in to the live stream to discover contemporary writers from the UK. The hashtag made 4.1 million impressions worldwide in the latest session in January 2017. The list of speakers over more than 30 years of the seminar includes Ian McEwan, Jeanette Winterson and this year's Nobel Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro.
- *Year of British Music, Portugal* - More than 30 concerts and 1,200 educational activities are taking place throughout 2017 as the British Council and Porto's premier music venue, Casa da Música, bring Portuguese audiences the Year of British Music. British musicians including George Benjamin, Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Dame Felicity Lott are performing alongside rising stars in all genres. The British Council is supporting emerging composers from the UK, as well as taking part in public discussions on the future of UK-EU musical collaboration with partners such as the BBC and Philharmonie de Paris.

3.4.4 Education and Science – In 2016-17 we delivered education events in nine countries, representing 130 UK institutions. We worked with 34,000 teachers in our schools work, and reached 1.1 million participants face-to-face.

- *Erasmus+* - The British Council manages the Erasmus+ programme for the UK in partnership with Ecorys UK. This is worth over €1 billion in EU funding over 7 years, to enable over 250,000 people across the UK to participate in work and study opportunities in other European countries. 61,293 Erasmus+ participants came to the UK in 2014-15 (the most recent publicly available data).
- *British Council School in Madrid, Spain* - Famous throughout Spain for its high quality education, it celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2015. The school accepts pupils between two and 18 years old, follows the English curriculum and promotes the values of both Spanish and British cultures. The school is the first in Spain to receive the highest rating from the British Schools Overseas inspection, and over 90% of pupils achieve grade A\*-C in their IGCSE examinations. More than 2,000 students from Spain and other countries are currently taught at the school, giving them a lifelong affinity with the UK and its values.
- *UK Germany Connections* - British Council is part of the UK German Connections partnership, which reaches over 2,000 young people and 300 teachers annually through collaborative projects, exchanges and language programmes.
- *Study UK Campaign Event, Spain* – The British Council's Study UK campaign, brought together universities from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales at the largest multinational higher education conference in Europe. More than 6,500 representatives from higher education institutions joined this year's European Association for International Education (EAIE) conference in Seville, including 450 from the UK. The event allows universities to forge new and cementing existing partnerships with international counterparts. As well as joining panels and hosting a reception for delegates with the British Embassy, we presented our research into the benefits of university-city 'internationalisation' strategies – where both sides find mutual strength by reaching out to international students and visitors together.
- *Higher Education Delegation, Malta* - The British Council Chief Executive led a Higher Education delegation from the UK to Malta in May 2017, comprising UK Vice Chancellors and the head of Universities UK International. The delegation gained the highest access, meeting the President of Malta, the Minister for Education and Employment, and senior officials and leaders in Maltese education. The visit aimed to position the UK as Malta's leading partner in Higher Education and has led to an increase in partnerships between the two nations.

3.4.6 Society and Science – In 2016-17 we worked with 12,000 people face to face, helping to stabilise and strengthen relationships during the UK's EU exit. We also reached 133,000 visitors to science festivals.

- *Pontignano Conference, Italy* – Running since 1993, this prestigious and unique bi-lateral forum with the UK brings together current and future leaders

from the UK and Italy to address common challenges and develop networks and close relationships.

- *GAZE International Festival, Ireland* - In August 2017, British Council Ireland partnered with Dublin's GAZE International LGBTQI+ film festival for a 'UK Focus'. As well as helping to organise the festival, we screened 20 UK films, held discussions with British experts and assisted the UK Queer Film Network in hosting its annual conference. Among the 12,000 people who attended across the five-day programme was Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar.
- *Sofia Science Festival, Bulgaria* - Now in its seventh year, it brings more than 17,000 people to the capital to meet Nobel prize winners and British and international scientists, and learn about science communication, an area where the UK is a recognised world leader. Our schools programme allows pupils from primary age to attend free workshops. January 2017's festival was covered in 150 local and international publications and broadcasts.

3.5 Following the EU referendum result, the British Council launched the EU-UK Culture and Education Series of events, bringing together over 450 institutional and policy leaders from the education, culture, arts and science sectors in Europe. The objective of this series was to help sustain the vibrancy and vitality that now characterises European collaboration in these sectors, which will continue to underpin the UK's bilateral relationships. The recommendations<sup>3</sup> were endorsed by 450 senior leaders in these fields from across the UK and the EU. They were:

- *Residency rights*: EU and UK leaders are urged to guarantee post-Brexit residency for EU nationals currently operating in the UK, and British nationals working in other EU countries.
- *Ease of movement*: The education, culture and science sectors are by nature international and mobile. Their success, and the success of many other sectors, depends significantly on the ease of movement of its people and assets. The economies of European countries and society as a whole currently benefits extensively from the sectors' flow of ideas, creativity and talent. For example, the UK's higher education sector relies heavily on 31,000 non-British EU workers that currently contribute to its success. We therefore advise EU and UK leaders to:
  - Negotiate a post-Brexit agreement for the education, culture, science and research sectors that does not inhibit their vital ease of movement, but rather, seeks to enhance and facilitate it.
  - If absolutely necessary, introduce measures, such as 'cultural and educational permits', that enable people and assets operating in the education, culture, science and research sectors to continue moving with ease between the UK and other EU countries. These measures should be low-cost, rapid-to-process and applied for adequate periods, to encourage continued collaboration and partnership.
- *Continued and enhanced participation in multilateral programmes*: The monetary and non-monetary benefits to European societies and economies emanating from EU-funded programmes, such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, Marie Skłodowska-Curie

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<sup>3</sup> Our Shared European Future <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education-culture-after-brexit/shared-european-future>

Actions and Creative Europe, are major. We urge EU and UK leaders to ensure UK institutions and individuals remain eligible to access these and future multilateral framework programmes. We equally recommend that the UK government makes appropriate financial contributions to ensure their continued effectiveness and impact.

- *Young Europeans and future generations:* We call on UK and other European leaders to give serious consideration to empowering and engaging young people as effective agents of positive change. If Europe is to prosper, young people must be able to play a meaningful part in shaping what will be their futures. We therefore urge EU and UK leaders to proactively engage youth in Brexit policy-making. Furthermore, we urge European leaders to ensure every young person in the UK and other European countries gains inter-cultural and international experience, either through study, work, performances, research, academia, training, language learning or other programmes or exchanges. Such experiences are proven to develop skills, create opportunities, broaden horizons, and build much-needed trust and understanding between nations.
- *Intellectual property, qualifications and regulatory framework:* EU and UK leaders should continue to cooperate over UK-EU intellectual property issues and regulation, which is particularly important in enabling cultural, scientific and educational bodies both in the UK and in EU countries to capitalise on creativity, ideas and talent. We also urge EU and UK leaders to maintain standards of recognition of professional qualifications between the UK and the remaining 27 EU member states in the fields of education, culture, science and research.
- *Informed decision-making:* We urge EU and UK leaders to work with representatives from the education, culture and science sectors in the UK and in EU Europe throughout Brexit negotiations in order to shape future pan-European cooperation, which will benefit us all.

3.7 The British Council works closely with Foreign Office colleagues on our work in the EU. We have been positively engaging with the FCO about how our work in the EU supports their emerging Europe bilateral strategies and areas where we could with additional funding do more in future. There are also many examples of effective collaboration on programmes that meet shared objectives, such as the current UK/Italy: Partners for Culture 2017 season, the joint funding of the UK Germany Connections programme for youth exchange and the British Council's management of a major component of the FCO's Baltics People to People initiative. The British Council feels there is scope for even closer collaboration and a greater focus on culture and education as key areas to develop in the UK's refreshed bilateral relationship with the EU 27.

#### **4. PRIORITISATION OF THE UK'S BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS**

4.1 In our Corporate Plan, we have committed in the period up to 2020 to prioritise our work maintaining and strengthening cultural and educational relationships and connections with the people of the countries of the EU and other major developed economies as the UK leaves the EU. This is one of six core priorities for the organisation.

4.2 Of the EU countries in which we work, our priority countries continue to be the six largest countries in continental Europe; France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Spain.



Within the changing regional context, building ever stronger links with the European Cultural Institutes and other European networks also remains a high priority. Bilateral relationships between the UK and each country within Europe will rise in importance as the UK establishes its new relationship with countries across the continent.

## **5. FUNDING, STAFFING AND EFFECTIVENESS OF UK REPRESENTATIONS**

5.1 The British Council currently spends £9.25 million of its FCO grant for 2017/18 in the EU region. Due to reductions in the total grant, this has reduced from a level of £20 million in 2010-11.

5.2 The British Council was awarded an overall amount of €112,756,502 in contracts from the European Union in FY 2016-17 (including Erasmus+ and a number of contracts for work around the world for example in the Middle East and North Africa). We have increased partnership and contract income leverage from 24% in 2013 to 60% in 2016. For work in Europe itself, we will grow our external partnership income to £6 million by 2019/20.

5.3 The British Council Spending Review settlement means its non-ODA government grant will reduce to zero by 2019-20. Since 2009 the British Council has absorbed over £120 million reductions in non-ODA and faces a further £25 million reduction to 2019/20. This will leave the British Council with a significant funding shortfall over the next two years.

5.4 The reduction in non-ODA funding over the past decade means that we closed our four offices in the Nordics. A number of operations now run with skeletal funding and staffing. In Belgium, the Netherlands and Hungary we currently operate without a resident Director, for example, and with almost no programme in the Arts, Education and Civil Society. The reductions in funding have also led to deep cuts in programme activity in major countries such as France and Germany. From 2018/19 onwards the shortfall is likely to require cuts in our presence in Europe and the wider developed world. We do not believe this is consistent with the strategic requirements for Britain's place in the world.

5.6 There is an increasing need to build trust, engagement and attraction in an altered international environment. The latest research<sup>4</sup> for the British Council by IpsosMori shows that views of the UK (amongst educated millennials) from across the G20 have seen major changes as a result of the EU referendum result. The UK is now viewed much more negatively by young people in European countries. The research also suggests declines in perceptions of British openness and tolerance, and the likelihood of trade with the UK from young people in Europe. In this new landscape, the work of the British Council could help to provide an important means of building more positive relationships and influence for the UK in the future.

5.7 If the funding shortfall was bridged then we will continue to deliver against our key objectives:

- Long-term professional links with professionals, influencers and leaders in the areas of Science and Research, Education and Arts and Culture.

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<sup>4</sup> British Council, From the Outside In, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/research/fromtheoutsidein>

- Extending opportunities to young people through English teaching and English exams.
- Reaching a wider audience through the media, in print and online.

5.8 If in addition to this funding levels in the EU were returned to their earlier level, then we would like to invest significantly more in working with the UK arts and education sector to:

- Expand education, science and research collaboration with the EU member states.
- Enhance the profile and reputation of the UK through a high-visibility Arts programme
- Scale up our engagement with the next generation of young leaders in Europe.

## **6. METRICS FOR EVALUATION PERFORMANCE**

6.1 The British Council uses a number of measures to evaluate the impact of its work. Our new Results and Evidence Framework measures performance against a high level of indicators:

- Increased trust: increased trust and understanding between people in the UK and people worldwide
- Economic value for the UK
- Value for money
- Building connections: wider international reach and stronger cultural relations between people in the UK and people worldwide
- Creating opportunities: lives are transformed through English, education, skills, qualifications, arts and culture

Further information on the measures we collect against these indicators is available in our [Corporate Plan](#)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> British Council, Corporate Plan 2017-20, pg. 34

**Annex 1 – British Council proposals for expanding activity with UK partner organisations in the developed world**

Cultural and creative connections	Education, skills and science	Young people and future leaders
Cultural festivals and seasons	Science and research collaboration and partnership	Connecting the UK with future global leaders in politics, science, arts and media
Major global campaigns	English as the world's preferred language	Sport programmes and connections
Digital arts	UK professional standards and qualifications	International connections, opportunities and foreign languages for UK young people
Artistic and creative connections and collaborations	Education is GREAT	Digital connections with the UK
Creative economy	International mobility, collaboration and partnership for students, researchers and policymakers	Connecting social entrepreneurs and promoting the UK as a global Leader in social investment