CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM BRITISH COUNCIL SCOTLAND

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work with over 100 countries in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. We are an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and a charity registered in both Scotland and England.

Several areas of our work and our approach have relevance to the scope of the current inquiry, such as cultural relations, soft power, mutuality and additionality. We offer the following evidence in relation to the key areas being considered.

In summary, our position is that successful international cultural collaborations and/or efforts towards employing soft power rely fundamentally on investing in long-term relationships, built upon trust to secure mutually beneficial outcomes.

Our approach to international cultural relations

We define our approach to cultural relations as:

using the cultural resources of the UK to foster the sharing of knowledge and ideas between people working together for mutual benefit, leading to long-lasting relationships, trust, understanding and respect.

Our five current strategic priorities acknowledge a number of external factors, including Brexit and the ongoing refugee crisis, which impact the framework and delivery of our work across the world:

1. Building education and cultural partnerships with countries of the European Union and other developed countries.
2. Strengthening educational and cultural opportunities and connections with India, China and other emerging and high-growth developing economies.
3. Strengthening long-term connections and relationships with the next generation in Russia and neighbouring countries.
4. Contributing to stability and security in priority countries, including in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, and responding to the Syrian refugee crisis.
5. Creating international opportunities and connections for young people and for cultural and educational institutions in the UK.

Devolution features prominently amongst these considerations. Our UK Strategy directs our work toward making a significant contribution to the UK’s long-term international objectives by representing and serving all parts of the UK, as well as the particular interests of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Ultimately, we want our approach to cultural relations to reflect, draw on and serve the diversity of the UK.
In the UK we develop and deliver major programmes that connect individuals (including children, young people, artists, scientists and social entrepreneurs) and institutions (including schools, universities, arts organisations, museums and galleries) with the wider world. Programmes include Erasmus+ (together with Ecorys we are the National Agency in the UK), the Newton Fund for science innovation and partnerships, Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning, and the biannual Edinburgh Showcase which brings over 200 international delegates to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

The British Council in Scotland

British Council Scotland consists of a small team of staff based in Edinburgh who work to develop and grow Scotland’s international connections and contribution across the arts, education and society sectors. Our programmes are tailored for Scotland’s devolved frameworks, Scotland’s international agendas and Scotland’s distinct assets and priorities. Collaboration is key to how we operate and we have strategic relationships with Universities Scotland, Education Scotland and Creative Scotland. We map our work to key national strategies and frameworks including Scotland’s National Performance Framework.

In recent months we have delivered several projects as part of our work to connect Scotland’s arts and education sectors to international opportunities and vice versa. For example:

- In response to insight from Scotland’s culture sector and in partnership with Creative Scotland we recently delivered an open call to create opportunities for focused collaboration between Scottish artists and creative sector organisations and their partners in 15 European countries. This attracted a huge response and we are now supporting 16 individual partnerships.

- Going Global, the British Council’s high-profile conference for leaders in international further and higher education took place in Berlin in May 2019. We worked with the Connected Scotland group, of which we are a founding member, to develop a programme for a senior delegation from Scotland to attend the conference and engage in wraparound activities, these included a breakfast session on Scotland In Europe, a networking dinner for Connected Scotland delegation members, and a day of activities with the Scotland Hub in the British Embassy in Berlin.

- We recently hosting a networking event in Edinburgh to celebrate Indian scholarship students in Scotland. This gave visiting scholars the opportunity to meet with business and academic contacts, and an opportunity to celebrate links between Scotland and India.

In recent years we have worked on several initiatives, projects and missions to develop Scotland’s long-term cultural and educational relationships in India. These include contributing to two Ministerial visits by John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Both included high-level representation from Scotland’s higher education sector, and a related programme of events and seminars designed to connect them with their counterparts in India. The most recent of these visits took place in December 2018 and it included a Research and Innovation Seminar delivered by the British Council in Delhi. In addition, we were able to connect several Scottish artists and
organisations to showcase their work in India as part of the British Council’s UK/India 2018 cultural season.

Scotland’s schools, universities, colleges, youth and third sector organisations are active participants in various British Council education and society initiatives such as Skills Partnerships, our Global Social Enterprise programme. In addition to the aforementioned education programmes, the British Council manages and delivers several education programmes that have a strong Scotland focus and which receive grant funding from the Scottish Government; these include Language Assistants and the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience.

Edinburgh’s summer festivals constitute a powerful platform for international cultural relations. We optimise these opportunities through a number of global cultural partnership programmes, including the annual Momentum international delegate programme, and the biannual Edinburgh International Culture Summit and Edinburgh Showcase theatre programme. Our wider work in the arts is dedicated to showcasing the rich and diverse wealth of Scottish arts and cultural talent to the world. So far this year we have, in partnership with Creative Scotland, held two Scotland-specific open calls for the arts sector, one with a focus on EU/Europe projects in 2019, the other with a focus on taking part in the UK Japan Season 2019/20. We have supported delegations from the music sectors of China, Canada and Vietnam to attend Celtic Connections 2019 to make connections with their peers in Scottish music sector; and we hosted a visiting delegation from Russia of literature professionals who are seeking to make connections with their peers in Scotland. We also supported the critically-acclaimed Scotland + Venice presentation by Charlotte Prodger.

In addition to supporting Scotland’s dynamic international engagement in the arts and education sectors, we are also committed to helping ensure that children and young people in Scotland have the opportunity to develop a global outlook and international mindset. Working to achieve this goal was a significant driver of our involvement with Scotland’s Year of Young People in 2018. In partnership with Young Scot, we delivered a digital engagement campaign entitled Globescotters, and through this obtained direct insight into the international aspirations and views of young people, and the barriers they perceive in this regard. We will continue our work in this area to ensure that young people in Scotland have the opportunity to be internationally engaged.

Scottish Government International Offices and Innovation and Investment Hubs

In responding to this inquiry, we sought feedback from British Council staff in each of the locations where the Scottish Government has international offices and innovation and investment hubs. Each sent positive reports, particularly in places where there is a long-standing relationship between the British Council and the Scottish Government office, such as the Scottish Affairs Office in Beijing. Joint activity has included designing and delivering events during the First Minister's visits to China, and events in Scotland during people-to-people bilateral dialogues.

British Council colleagues based in Canada recently worked with the Scottish Government International Office in Toronto to support a delegation of Indigenous artists to attend Celtic Connections in Edinburgh, as did colleagues in Ireland who recently engaged with the Scottish Government Hub in Dublin around a poetry project for young people. Colleagues
working in other locations where there are Scottish Government Hubs report meeting regularly with their counterparts to assist and contribute towards Scottish Government activity being planned in country. This has covered arts events and showcases, Ministerial visits and events to explore higher education partnerships.

In each location, as well in places where the Scottish Government does not have an International Office or Hub, our teams are able and ready to contribute to Scotland’s interests in the country through their insight, deep local knowledge and access to networks.

**Cultural relations and soft power**

We are working in a global context of exponential change in all spheres of life – technology, economics, demographics, society and climate – and a transitional situation in the UK. We expect wider global trends to continue to occur as the UK repositions itself in the international arena and, at the same time, devolved systems of government follow diverse approaches and priorities across the nations, cities and city regions of the UK.

By fostering strong cultural relations between the UK and countries around the world, the British Council strengthens the UK’s international relationships and soft power.

We understand soft power as:

a nation’s ability to achieve its international objectives by gaining a more sympathetic appreciation of its policies and actions not through military might or other forms of coercion but through attraction and co-option. A nation creates soft power through the international connections made by people and institutions who represent its most attractive resources, including culture, education, language and values.

There is a growing body of research evidence that demonstrates the impact of cultural relations and soft power on trade, inward investment, tourism, international study and diplomatic influence. *Soft Power Today* (October 2017), a report published by the British Council and the University of Edinburgh, found that countries which invest in overseas cultural institutes see significant returns. For example, a 1% increase in the number of locations a cultural institution covers results in a near 0.66% increase in Foreign Direct Investment for the parent country. In 2016, such a rise would have been worth £1.3bn for the UK.

**Additionality and trust**

The British Council works in ways which are complementary to and sometimes distinctive from the approaches used by government. This additionality centres on two capabilities: trust-building and relationship-building over the long term. We have a deep understanding of how to build trust in many different cultures. This ability relies on:

- deep cultural insight derived from a long-standing presence in over 100 countries and which we share widely with our partners in the UK and internationally;
- a joined-up approach with the UK government and the devolved administrations in all aspects of strategy, planning, delivery and evaluation and at every level;
• well-established relationships and networks with opinion-formers, decision-makers, and current and future leaders at every level who will be important for the UK’s international relations and wider networks of influence for years to come;
• authoritative subject matter specialists who have in depth knowledge of both UK excellence in their field and how this is relevant to the needs and interests of partners around the world;
• the ability to mobilise people and organisations from all areas of the UK for international relationship-building – including artists, educators, scientists and researchers, civil society and city leaders, sportspeople, policy makers, next generation leaders and young people;
• a commitment to putting mutuality at the heart of all relationships.

It is the ability to combine these attributes in holistic approaches which are relevant to multiple audiences, particularly young people, which makes cultural relations so effective. The British Council is able to support international cultural relations for all parts of the UK because of a commitment to working for mutual benefit, long-term engagement and its operational independence from any government. The latter of these facets means that we are not seen as an instrument of the (often shorter term) objectives of any UK government. This enhances our effectiveness at times when government-to-government relations are difficult, and in contexts where the ability to build trust with civil society organisations is particularly valuable.

Mutual benefit and trust

Everything we do aims to create mutual benefit. By building long term trust we help to create a more favourable context in which people and organisations in the UK can achieve their international objectives in ways which support social, cultural and economic development for all participants. The British Council’s Value of Trust report (July 2018) explains the current relevance of multiple actors cooperating to build trust between nations:

Many concepts of trust in international relations have traditionally focused on state-to-state interactions and often specifically the personal bonds between leaders. Such a view reflects the importance of the individual human experience in perceptions of trust, but then neglects the myriad of other people-to-people connections and networks that are vital to sustaining trust between nations over a prolonged period. The most pressing opportunities and challenges facing the world today require co-operation which is both broader than government-to-government relationships, and longer term than election cycles. Challenges like poverty eradication can only be addressed through the combined efforts of governments, businesses and communities working together for the long term. The success of a framework like the Sustainable Development Goals relies on the continued co-operation of state and non-state actors, private sector and civil society.

Research by Ipsos MORI shows a strong association between trust and intentions to engage with the UK. Young people in the G20 who trust the UK are twice as likely to say they intend to engage compared with those who distrust the UK. The study reveals a strong association between trust in the UK and belief that the UK has values and qualities that people think are important. Among young people in the G20, we found that 76% of those
who think the UK stands for these values and qualities trust British people. Only 44% of those who think the UK is poor at supporting them trust the UK.

Cultural engagement is powerful for demonstrating national qualities and values and earning trust. 50% of those who have been involved with UK cultural relations report that they think the UK demonstrates trustful values and qualities, compared with 31% of those who have not been involved in cultural relations.

Scotland’s soft power

British Council Scotland is committed to ensuring that Scotland’s notable strengths continue to thrive. To that end, we recently commissioned research that builds on previous research commissioned by British Council Wales: *The Wales Soft Power Barometer (2018)*, published by the British Council in partnership with Portland Communications. This study constitutes the first empirical analysis of the measurement of the soft power resources of significant devolved geographies. While that study maintained a specific focus on Wales, the data generated can be analysed to the same effect for the other nine significant geographies it covered; those being:

- Catalonia, Spain
- Corsica, France
- Flanders, Belgium
- Hokkaido, Japan
- Jeju, South Korea
- Northern Ireland, UK
- Puerto Rico, USA
- Quebec, Canada
- Wales, UK

The research commissioned by British Council Scotland undertakes a deeper mining of this data from a Scotland perspective, to help provide insight into Scotland’s particular strengths as well as to identify areas for future focus. The final report is not yet available but can be shared with the Committee following completion of the study. However, from the Wales study, we can see that Scotland is placed:

- second overall;
- first in the categories of education, enterprise and digital;
- second in the culture category.

This is notable given that the methodology includes significant polling undertaken in key overseas countries, including those of particular interest to the Committee’s inquiry: Canada, China, United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Japan, Qatar and the United States of America.

Conclusion

We hope this evidence will be of interest to the Committee, and we will be happy to provide more information on any aspect of what we have discussed. We will also welcome any request to find out more about the wider work of the British Council in Scotland, the UK and internationally.