

ACTION PLAN FOR THE ARTS

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SUMMARY

The British Council's purpose is to build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide. Harnessing the power of the UK's arts and creative practice is vital in delivering this cultural relations purpose. Earlier this year the UK's creative sector expressed grave concern over the future of the British Council's arts work. In response, we launched an extensive consultation with the sector and are committed to a renaissance of arts and creative economy work across our network.

In summary, we commit to redressing the decline in the quantity of our arts and creative economy work in the last few years by:

- increasing our co-operation with relevant government departments, the devolved administrations, regional development agencies, the arts councils and similar organisations that have an interest in representing UK arts, culture and creative industries abroad
- maintaining all our arts functions: visual arts, drama and dance, music, film, design and architecture, literature and creative economy – and adding a new media function
- increasing the Arts budget to £30 million
- investing in our international network of professional expertise including specialist posts and external advisers
- re-establishing an external advisory function for the arts
- appointing an external adviser, Graham Devlin, to work with us to refine how we select and develop content for our arts and creative economy work globally.

The British Council does not offer support to arts and creative economy work that is unlikely to contribute to the development of cultural relations between the UK and the rest of the world.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The British Council's purpose is to build engagement and trust for the UK through the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people worldwide. This is a powerful cultural relations agenda that will bring value to the UK.
- 1.2 The excellence and innovation of the UK's creative practice contribute powerfully to the development of cultural relations. Creative work expresses the values and the vitality of the UK and can exert influence in unique ways. A cutting-edge arts and creative economy offer is essential if we are to represent the strengths of the UK accurately, and to deliver the international impact we are mandated to achieve for the UK.
- 1.3 Earlier this year three factors led the UK's creative sector to express grave concern over the future of the British Council's arts work: a lack of clarity about our cultural relations objectives; a proposed strategy developed in isolation from the sector; and the proposed restructuring of the London Arts teams that accompanied that strategy.
- 1.4 Because all of the British Council's arts and creative work is developed through partnerships, without the full confidence of the sector it loses viability and legitimacy. In the wake of these expressions of concern the British Council launched an extensive consultation with the sector. This paper sets out our action plan for reinvigorating our global arts programme.

2 The external environment for the UK's creative and cultural sector

- 2.1 The arts have been privileged over time to act as a representation of the beliefs and values of most cultures and societies. Creative practice is vital to global communities, high-quality education and rewarding entertainment, and it informs individual and collective identities. The UK is recognised internationally as a leader in creative practice.
- 2.2 Since 1997 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has highlighted the importance of creativity to the UK's economic health and cultural status. In the McMaster report and the *Creative Britain* strategy paper, the UK's aspiration to become a 'creative hub for the world' is repeatedly articulated.
- 2.3 The devolved administrations and English regions also cite the role of cultural and creative industries in their strategies for economic growth and regeneration. Their new international agendas see a pivotal role for innovation and culture in forging relationships.
- 2.4 The UK government understands and values the role of the arts in international cultural diplomacy. There is growing interest within several departments – including, naturally, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. London 2012 and the associated Cultural Olympiad and legacy projects present important opportunities to showcase the UK's creative talent.
- 2.5 There have been changes beyond government policy in our UK operating environment. Almost all cultural agencies and many larger cultural organisations in Britain now have international strategies, including Tate, the British Museum and the UK Film Council. Their corporate objectives lead them to focus on one-way presentation, income generation, talent migration and the international enrichment of the arts for their own sake. All of these areas yield their own benefits for the UK. However, none of these institutions is focused primarily on the development of cultural relations for the UK, without which the UK would lose an important international dividend.

3 The consultation

- 3.1 The sector responded generously to the consultation, with strong endorsement for the British Council's work. Details can be found in the accompanying report.¹
- 3.2 The issues raised most frequently were:
- Clarity about our role and positioning vis-à-vis other agencies and institutions. It was not clear to the sector what kind of content would support the development of cultural relations.
 - The need to develop closer strategic partnerships with relevant government departments, the devolved administrations, regional development agencies, the arts councils and similar organisations that are or should be involved in representing UK arts, culture and creative industries abroad.
 - The need to improve the corporate website and communications function as a matter of urgency.
 - Our failure to exploit new technologies in the arts fully, or to include digital media among our specialist areas.
 - The essential development and maintenance of specialist British Council expertise in the arts and creative economy, both in the UK and overseas, in order to provide up-to-date market intelligence and to develop long-term relationships. These are seen as our unique contribution to cultural relations.
 - Our strategic objectives and internal processes should not inhibit the artistic and creative process. Our strategic shift to larger programmes could be antithetical to the development of meaningful content. Large regional projects can be difficult for the arts to deliver given the different requirements of individual countries and the sometimes transient nature of artistic product.
 - Decision-making needs to be faster and more transparent. Decision-makers need to get and use more external advice from the sector. We should develop clearer points of entry and easier access for ideas and talent from the sector.
 - Our geographic priorities, particularly moving resources out of Europe, may have a deleterious impact on artists and UK arts organisations – many of them continue to focus on those markets or to use them to access other, less developed, markets.

¹ Independent report on the British Council consultation with the arts and creative economy sector, Frances Medley, FM Consultancy, June 2008.

4 Response to the consultation

- 4.1 We have reviewed the insights from the consultation and are bearing them in mind, alongside our wider cultural relations objectives and our own corporate strategy, as we rebuild our offer.
- 4.2 We will redress the decline in the quantity of the arts and creative economy work we have undertaken globally in recent years.

5 Arts and creative economy content

- 5.1 In the context of a new vision and purpose, and a new product development process in place for the whole organisation, we are explicitly addressing content.
- 5.2 The arts and creative economy offer must support the development of cultural relations between the UK and the rest of the world. In building partnerships, in selecting content and in deciding on the ways in which that content will be delivered we are focused on the building of trust and engagement between people of different cultures, and on optimising the opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and ideas. We will make our selection criteria more explicit.
- 5.3 We match our arts and creative economy offer to the particular geopolitical environment in which we are seeking engagement with the UK. The table at Annexe A gives examples.
- 5.4 We have appointed Graham Devlin to work with us to refine how we select and develop content for our arts and creative economy work globally. He will be addressing:
- what works; where, why and how
 - the role of the large single-art form, single location event, sometimes referred to as ‘showcasing’
 - arts and creative economy within wider programmes integrating science, education, governance and other areas
 - what is missing in our offer.

We will make his findings public in mid-autumn 2008.

6 New content in development

6.1 New content is already being developed, taking the consultation findings into account. The geopolitical environment framing this and all our work is set out in Annexe A. Some examples are:

- Creative Lives (in East and West Africa)
This programme offers two million young African participants, aged 18 to 35, skills development in the creative sector. Using African and UK expertise the programme will develop skills, map the creative industries across Africa, search for markets and implement ideas for business in the creative sector.
- International Cultural Leadership Programme (across Europe and the Middle East)
This programme will develop a new generation of cultural managers and help internationalise the current cultural leadership provision. It is currently being developed in co-operation with Arts Council England and has the potential to be delivered in more of our regions over seven years.
- Performance platforms (in the Near East and the Gulf)
This is a broad-based programme using performance to promote dialogue between artists and audiences in the UK and the Levant. Plays with British and Arab theatre practitioners will be showcased in the region and in Britain, accompanied by opportunities for debate and dialogue and by capacity building exercises in writing, performance and technical skills. Empowering young people to express themselves through theatre is an important ambition.
- Turner in China
The Tate Britain exhibition of 110 works by J.M.W. Turner, which will open in Moscow on 17 November 2008, now will additionally be seen at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, opening April 2009. Sponsorship for this is being sought now.

7 Strategic partnerships

7.1 We are increasing our areas of co-operation with relevant government departments, the devolved administrations, regional development agencies, the arts councils and similar organisations that have an interest in representing the UK's arts, culture and creative industries abroad.

7.2 Currently we are:

- working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England (ACE) in developing a strategic response to the McMaster report
- exploring with ACE a revitalised and more strategic memorandum of understanding, which will play to the respective strengths of each organisation, and which we expect to have completed by January 2009
- working with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to promote and internationalise arts and culture from Northern Ireland
- recruiting for a full-time arts post to be based in Cardiff, to develop our relationship with Wales Arts International following the signing of our partnership agreement with the Arts Council of Wales in April 2008; the post will also have a UK-wide focus on new media arts
- recruiting for a full-time arts post to be based in Edinburgh, to ensure our strategic alignment with the emerging unitary body Creative Scotland; the post will also track EU cultural policy developments and project opportunities on behalf of colleagues in London, Cardiff and Belfast.

7.3 We will be looking at the scope for further alignment and engagement with other national and regional bodies, including Visiting Arts. Our objective is not only to expand international opportunities for UK artists and organisations, but also to increase the flow of international creative talent into the UK and to explore issues of common cultural interest such as diversity and cultural diplomacy. Just as we are clear that government-to-government conversations are insufficient to tackle the new challenges facing the world, so we are clear that developing international people-to-people connections through the arts requires the concerted action of many organisations and individuals. The challenge for all of us is to maintain a clear and open joint strategy, based on a recognition of the individual strengths of each party and the different outcomes we seek.

8 Investment in information provision and global expertise

- 8.1 Traditionally we have provided the UK sector with knowledge about international arts and the creative economy – about changes, developments and opportunities overseas. The expertise of our own staff in many of the countries in which we are present, and the maintenance of strong relationships in the creative sector, enabled us to do this.
- 8.2 The sector placed a high value on this information. However, we no longer offer the coverage or the high quality we once did. Many parts of our network have reduced sector specialist staff. Without this expertise the quality of our arts work globally is impossible to maintain.
- 8.3 We need to redress the shortage of expertise in our global network and in the UK, where we have also lost a significant number of experts. We will rebuild this knowledge in priority geographical areas using a variety of means, including external advisers and specialist posts, as appropriate. The first phase of this, concentrating on expertise in London, will start in September 2008.
- 8.4 We are examining potential partnerships and electronic methods of making the market information we gather available in an accessible and appropriate way.

9 Transparency

- 9.1 We are actively seeking to redress the criticism that we are opaque and unapproachable.
- 9.2 We intend to re-establish an external advisory function for the arts, which, like the British Council's other newly formed advisory groups, will work closely with the executive on developing content across the whole programme area, unconfined to subject specifics. The new advisory body will be in place by spring 2009.
- 9.3 We are also committed to trialling an open invitation for ideas against published criteria that, if selected, will be developed and delivered in the appropriate country or region. We are calling this the Ideas Park. We will launch it, with advice from Arts Council England and others, in spring 2009.

10 Conclusion

Greater international knowledge of the UK and recognition for UK achievements can only ever be partial without a strong representation of UK arts and creative economy. The British Council is crucial to this ambition. After a difficult period, caused by a combination of internal change and an increasingly distant relationship with a sector that has partnered us generously and for a long time, we are now committed to a renaissance of arts and creative economy work across our network, with a budget of £30 million.

Annexe A

Arts: geopolitical environment

GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>Countries closed and in stagnation. The British Council is one of very few points of international and UK contact, e.g. Burma.</p>	<p>Broken trust with UK and the West. The British Council has a subtle and intricate cultural and social mission to rebuild trust and long-term engagement for the UK, e.g. Syria.</p>	<p>Economies in exponential growth where the British Council plays a part with a large array of powerful partners to consolidate the attractiveness of the UK and to build a unique form of engagement that delivers long-term influence for the UK, e.g. China.</p>	<p>Poor, open and developing countries where the British Council provides access to a highly valued type of social and educational development and cultural contact, e.g. Kenya.</p>	<p>Open, developed countries in strong contact with the UK where the future of the British Council is in multilateral partnerships through which it will share experience, help to solve common problems and continue to build relationships for the UK, e.g. France.</p>
<p>Shaping appropriate Arts activity (Stand-alone and within other large products)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arts work provides safe space for concept development and challenge ■ Maintaining contact with professional counterparts and flow of information to nurture creative life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arts work supports liberal values and encourages societies to internationalise without the need to confront Westernisation ■ Creative engagement can hold up a mirror to regimes and encourage the development of alternative social models ■ Opportunities exist to develop creative interventions that support integration of diaspora communities within the UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arts and creative interventions provide a powerful source of ideas for social development ■ The UK needs to maintain an attractive face and set of relationships in a crowd of contenders. Arts provide an excellent means of doing this ■ Opportunity to demonstrate increasing mutual understanding and respect through encouraging reciprocity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arts as a tool for development focuses on two areas: entrepreneurial development, and the provision of space for individual and social expression ■ UK models of small and medium-sized enterprise development highly appropriate to environment and can be mediated through a range of artistic and creative interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Major change for arts intervention from British Council perspective; move away from stand-alone events towards networking ■ Extensive opportunities to work with other UK arts institutions to support new entries into the European arts market ■ Focus on major events for relationship building set within the agreed strategic framework

GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Examples of existing and/or future activity

Power in the Voice is a multinational competition that tests young people's powers to express themselves. Involving artists, schools and schoolchildren, 5,500 schoolchildren have taken part, with 175,500 people reached in the wider community. Around 4,000 people have attended the various launch events and its activities. These were covered by the media, reaching a quarter of the 90 million population of participating Southern African countries.

UK theatre directors and technicians worked with counterparts in Zimbabwe to stage three plays at the 2008 Harare International Festival of the Arts – The Art of Determination. Emerging from a script development process designed to encourage new local playwrights, they were a reflection of the reality of life for many – the challenges that families face in times of economic hardship.

Performance platforms in the Near East and the Gulf is a co-ordinated programme using artistic expression in theatre and dance to enhance intercultural dialogue between artists and audiences in the UK and in the Levant with a focus on improving the international awareness of young people in the region.

The Arab World was this year's 'guest of honour' at the London Book Fair. This provided an opportunity for writers and publishers from the Arab world to be heard in the West, and to counter negative stereotypes from the region.

British publishers and writers attended book fairs across the Arab world, helping to develop a market for Arab literature in the UK and to connect Arab publishers to Western markets. Hundreds of writers and publishers attended our programme, including Hisham Matar (Booker Prize nominee) Ahdaf Soueif, and Alaa Al-Aswany, author of *The Yacoubian Building*, which gives us an insight into contemporary Egypt.

UK-China Connections through Culture is a joint initiative between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council and Scottish government. Supporting cultural organisations in both countries, it builds partnerships leading to increased exchange of cultural product. This is achieved through information provision, networking, relationship brokering, promotional support and professional development.

'Turner in Russia' will create a new partnership between Tate Britain and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. The exhibition opens in November 2008. Showing one of Britain's greatest artists in Russia demonstrates Britain's leading role in the development of modern art. The Foundation for Art and Sport Moscow sponsored this exhibition (£1.5 million) and also donated £1 million to Tate Modern's extension, becoming a significant partner in the UK's most popular new institution for contemporary art.

Creative Lives is a programme for aspiring young creative entrepreneurs across Africa. It will develop skills, explore the creative industries in the African context, search for markets and implement ideas for business in the creative sector. Two million young participants, aged 18 to 35, will be offered core and sector-specific training, and mentorship programmes, giving them the opportunity to use their own creativity to develop themselves, their countries and their continent for many years to come.

The British Council has facilitated and participated in the first post-Apartheid mapping of the creative industries in Johannesburg. We partnered the National Department for Arts and Culture (South Africa) and the Gauteng region authorities. This model is being replicated in other South African regions and the British Council is being invited as the partner of choice.

The International Cultural Leadership Programme will develop a new generation of cultural managers and leaders across Europe and the Middle East and help internationalise the current cultural leadership provision. This programme is currently being developed in co-operation with Arts Council England and has the potential to be delivered in more of our regions over seven years.

Our showcases, e.g. Edinburgh, are held during important occasions for the arts industry and are programmed to show young, innovative and experimental work that would otherwise be unfamiliar to the international 'gatekeepers' of developed and burgeoning markets.

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