Opportunities for Global Britain

July 2021
About the APPG:

The British Council All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is a cross-party group of Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords who have an interest in the work of the British Council. Its purpose is for parliamentarians to learn more about and better understand the British Council, to communicate the purpose of the British Council to their constituents, and to support the British Council by offering advice and encouragement in both its everyday and long-term work.

The British Council APPG host meetings in Parliament and virtually throughout the year. It runs a series of inquiries into areas of importance to the British Council’s work and the interests of the people of the United Kingdom.

The British Council support the work of the APPG by providing its secretariat and funding. In this role it takes direction from the APPG and the APPG Chair, and organises meetings and events according to the APPG’s agenda and priorities.

More information about the APPG can be found at: https://appg.britishcouncil.org/
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Foreword

The British Government’s recent Integrated Review sets out a new ambition to promote a truly Global Britain, confident on the world stage, and able to rally others to its cause.

In response, this inquiry finds plentiful and wide-ranging opportunities for the UK to realise this vision over the next decade. Whether it is meeting increasing demand for UK education provision in the Indo-Pacific; building new digital connections with young in Sub-Saharan Africa or providing protection for invaluable cultural heritage under threat from conflict or climate change, there is no shortage of ways the UK can positively engage on the international stage, to the mutual benefit of Britain and the rest of the world.

The Integrated Review also recognises that our soft power capabilities – our ability to attract, build trust and make connections – are key to realising the government’s ambition.

Despite a particularly challenging eighteen months, the vaccine and genome sequencing accomplishments of UK scientists, as well as the best rankings in decades for top UK universities, remind us of our considerable cultural, educational, and scientific soft power assets. Underpinning these assets is the British Council’s global network, whose role as connector, facilitator and trusted partner acts a golden thread running through the fabric of the UK’s international engagement.

However, while there is clear cause for optimism, the inquiry also confirms that the competition for influence is fiercer than ever, with systemic competitors such as China and Russia seeking to expand their reach and favourability around the world - particularly in so-called swing states across East Africa, the Indo-Pacific and South Asia. This is one reason why the Government’s decision to curtail British Council activity in 20 countries, which the British Council APPG and others strongly opposed, is short-sighted and leaves a vacuum which others will readily fill.

In the face of increasing competition and pressure on the international rules-based order, we must renew our efforts to ‘show not tell’ our values of openness and tolerance around the world. The global reputation of the British Council is evidence that soft power institutions are most effective, innovative and entrepreneurial when they have operational independence from government.

There are many exciting opportunities on the horizon for an ambitious global Britain to boost prosperity at home and to contribute to global security and resilience overseas. This is the moment for Britain to seize the opportunities in front of us and embrace an active, future-looking role.

John Baron is the Member of Parliament for Basildon & Billericay and Chairman of the British Council APPG
Executive summary

The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IR) sets out HMG’s vision for Global Britain: a ‘soft power superpower’ that takes a leading role in global security, trade, diplomacy and development. These ambitions come at a time of global health and economic crises against a background of considerable geopolitical change.

Despite these challenges, the UK has an impressive array of assets of attraction and influence which create significant opportunity for UK trade, leadership and soft power over the next decade. Through its international engagement and connections, the UK can boost prosperity at home and support resilient, open societies overseas.

This report sets out the opportunities in different parts in the world and the steps that can be taken to support a truly global Britain.

To increase trade and engagement with high-growth economies in Africa, Asia and the Americas manage relations with rising powers such as China, the APPG recommends:

- Flexibility in the visa system for international students to mitigate the challenges of the pandemic and to grow and diversify the UK’s international student cohort
- Joined-up, well-funded export strategies to support the UK’s world-leading creative industries to create international partnerships and meet rising demand for UK cultural goods and expertise
- Urgent measures to improve China literacy across all professions and sectors of society – especially among young people. There is a clear role here for the British Council, which is well-placed to provide young people with the language and intercultural skills they need.

To defend liberal values where they are contested and to maintain influence in competitive contexts, the APPG recommends:

- A coordinated, sophisticated and well-funded soft power approach – one that is responsive to the individual needs of different communities – in swing states and other highly competitive arenas. The Government should ensure that an ambitious funding package, across both ODA and non-ODA categories, is secured for our soft power institutions, such as the British Council and the BBC World Service, at the autumn Comprehensive Spending Review. There must be no further closures to the British Council’s overseas network – such an assurance has now been received.
- Greater engagement with Central Asia, including the establishment of a UK-Central Asia business and development forum, to support cultural and educational exchange; trading links for mutual prosperity and liberalisation agendas in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.
- Operational independence of trusted institutions such as the BBC and the British Council, which must be maintained if the UK is to effectively share its values in contested arenas around the world.

To renew and deepen relations with Commonwealth nations, the APPG recommends:

- Establishing – and supporting, where they exist - cross-cultural diaspora networks to promote UK values and should use existing networks to empower diaspora led investments.
- Supporting and expanding initiatives which facilitate higher education exchange, scholarships and research collaboration, especially the new Turing Schedule scheme, which provides a truly
global exchange model. The addition of reciprocal opportunities within the next iteration of the scheme would ensure the full benefits of international exchange can be felt by all parties.

- A strategic assessment of the potential of digital engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa and further afield to make the most of the lessons learned from the pandemic.

To act as a ‘force for good’ in fragile and conflicted-affected states, the APPG recommends:

- Improved coordination and a refined approach towards private sector engagement in post-conflict states by establishing communication channels and forums between private, state and NGO actors.

- A return to 0.7% GDP for international aid when the financial situation allows to support investment in the stability and resilience of future generations. Publicly maintaining that commitment will provide reassurance to our partners overseas.

To enhance trading and security relationships with allies and like-minded nations, the APPG recommends that:

- The UK build on the G7 and COP26 presidencies to ensure they are well-represented in international fora, especially within appropriate EU institutions and networks where there is a shared interest in doing so.

- Barriers to touring for UK artists and cultural practitioners are minimised in order for the UK’s creative industries to achieve their full potential in high-value markets in Europe and North America.

- The government should encourage and expand modern foreign language learning in schools, colleges and universities to ensure the next generation is equipped to thrive in a global economy. Consideration should be given as to early international experience, which may encourage young people to take on a foreign language during their studies.
High-growth economies

By some estimates, six of the seven largest economies in the world by 2050 will be countries currently classified as ‘emerging market economies’, led by China, India and Indonesia. Global shifts in political and economic power are leading to new opportunities and new priorities for UK foreign policy and international engagement.

Rapidly growing economies in Africa and Asia, in particular in the Indo-Pacific, create new openings for the UK to forge mutually beneficial trading relationships, bringing prosperity to the UK and supporting a sustained global rise in living standards.

As emerging markets mature, demand for high-value exports such as UK education provision rises.

Rapidly maturity markets often see growing demand for high-quality goods and services, which characterise UK exports. For example, the UK is well-placed to meet the needs of growing, increasingly affluent middle classes who are in search of quality tertiary education, both by attracting them to the UK as international students and by offering high-quality Transnational Education (TNE) in country. High-growth economies represent key markets for UK higher education institutions, with their worldwide reputation for quality provision and established export models.

UK higher education collaboration can also support sustainable development in emerging markets as they mature and help countries to address skills shortages that can arise as a consequence of rapid economic growth.

Engagement in key emerging markets can grow and diversify the UK’s international student cohort and forge new transnational links

In recent years, the UK has been the second most popular global destination for international students after the US. Although the UK remains an attractive destination for international students, particularly from the Indo-Pacific, young people from the region are increasingly looking closer to home, with providers in East Asia and the Pacific hosting an growing proportion of the world’s globally mobile students. Continued and consistent engagement with young people and education systems in rising powers such as India, Malaysia and Nigeria will enable the UK to play a significant role in meeting the growing global demand for high-quality education and in securing the trust of those young leaders.

Research from the British Council shows that exposure to and experience of the UK – especially cultural experiences – can positively influence choice of study destination. Enabling cultural engagement with these groups can therefore support higher education providers to grow and diversify their international student base, mitigating the impact of the pandemic and helping to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the sector.

Mobility can be supported by increased flexibility in the visa system for international students, such as the new Graduate Route post-study work visa, which has already had a significant impact on visa applications from key markets such as India.

The economic contributions of international students to the UK and its regional economies

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1 Chinese students currently make up 35% of all non-EU international students at UK institutions, followed by

India, which increased the number of international students it sent to the UK by 46% between 2014/15 and 2018/20.
are well-documented. However, international student cohorts from these key emerging markets can also help to forge transnational links between the UK and their home countries after graduating. In London, 60% of international students and alumni of UK universities said that they are more likely to do business with the UK having studied here, deepening economic connections in addition to building cultural relations.

**UK creative excellence can build connections, develop capacity and support growth and recovery in maturing economies**

As nations transition to ‘knowledge-based’ economies, more reliant on information, skills, and innovation, greater currency is placed on creativity. The pandemic has accelerated global interest in the social and economic benefits of the creative industries and their potential to stimulate regeneration and recovery. While the impact of the pandemic, as in many sectors, has been severe, the creative industries remain one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the world economy, generating nearly 30 million jobs worldwide.

The UK’s creative industries – which in 2018 grew five times faster than the UK economy as a whole, contributing £111.7 billion - have a global reputation for creative excellence. Demand for UK expertise and opportunities for international cultural exchange are increasing. Greater international engagement has a mutually reinforcing impact, raising the profile of the UK’s creative sectors as well as facilitating access to international expertise and markets.

**UK Museums & Archives**

The UK’s museums and archives are generally considered to be among the most professional in the world. The sector is, by its very nature, inherently international, with expertise and exhibits touring regularly and genuine international collaboration a fundamental prerequisite.

This presents real opportunities in terms of offering training opportunities for international partners around the world, alongside domestic courses in the UK, building capacity in areas such as audience development, collections management, digital preservation and museum design.

These relationships connect UK staff with new approaches and peers across the world; extending reach and influence and raising the profile of UK museums.

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**Submission to this inquiry from the Russell Group shows that in 2018, UK education exports eclipsed financial exports by £1.5b**

**National film industry body the BFI has recently received requests to explore closer cultural and commercial relationships with India, Nigeria and Uruguay**
China

Foreword

At 740,000, if the number of Chinese students who have benefited from a UK education were a UK city they would be the third most populous after London and Birmingham.

This figure reveals both the opportunity, but also the asymmetry, in the understanding of each other’s countries and cultures.

In terms of opportunity the UK stands to benefit from the economic contribution that Chinese students make to UK PLC. Our universities benefit from welcoming what are oftentimes amongst the most highly motivated students. It benefits the fabric of our society, while also giving the UK the opportunity to showcase our values and the elements that has made us one of the most robust and creative societies in recent millennia.

But there is an acute imbalance in respective understanding. The number of UK students enrolled in Chinese studies in any given year wouldn’t even be enough to fill many apartment complexes, let alone a city. Starting from a low base, there is therefore a huge opportunity and necessity to improve understanding of China from the green benches of Parliament, to the wooden desks of the classrooms (sorry it’s a long time since I was a school!).

This APPG inquiry offers the space for us to debate the opportunities that exist, the challenges that cause anxiety, along with the inspiration for how we level-up our understanding of what will shortly become the world’s largest economy. I believe we can and must embrace this changing world with the confidence that has made British soft power so powerful.

Mark Logan is the Member of Parliament for Bolton North East and East Asia Vice-Chair of the British Council APPG.
The rise of China is the most significant long-term trend in geopolitics and economics and requires a proactive, strategic and consistent response

China’s growing economic, cultural and military power presents a challenge to the UK’s values, influence and the liberal world order. The UK’s approach should be robust but nuanced, staying true to UK values and recognising where there is competition and where there is opportunity for collaboration.

Amid deteriorating bilateral relations, the UK has an opportunity to build connections with people in China through depoliticised channels such as culture and education. Despite growing tensions, the UK has an attractive and distinct cultural and economic offer in China: across all G20 nations, Chinese young people rank the UK second as a place to study, second as a source of arts and culture and third as a place to do business or trade.¹ Through these relationships and that exposure to the UK and its values, we expose China’s next generation to openness and tolerance.

However, in every forum through which it currently engages – diplomacy, trade, people-to-people - the UK does so from position of deficit. China knows more about the UK than UK does of China. Greater understanding of China, its culture, its history and its people – or ‘China literacy’ - among UK political and civic leaders, as well as among the general population - can support a clear-eyed approach to UK-China relations. Schools and education institutions are well-placed to advance understandings of China among the next generation and, in doing so, help encourage the future prosperity and security of the UK and hopefully a more stable, mutually-beneficial UK-China relationship in the future.

Economic and intellectual collaboration with China can bring mutual benefit and tackle shared issues such as climate change

China has the world’s largest repository of intellectual capital and has overtaken the US as the largest producer of peer reviewed research papers. It will become increasingly difficult for our research-intensive universities and other research bodies to remain at the forefront of global research without some collaboration with their Chinese counterparts. Collaboration with China is certainly not without its risks, but when approached in a considered and transparent manner which is sensitive to those risks and protects UK interests, our universities and academics stand to gain significant benefit from partnerships, co-operation and the sharing of innovation and research. In some areas such as green technology, China is truly innovative and collaboration offers the UK opportunities to strengthen its own research and development capacity.

In addition to their academic and cultural contribution, mainland Chinese students choosing to study in the UK are a significant contributor to the economy - over £5 billion in 2019/20. There are also now 740,000 Chinese people living in China who have benefitted from a UK education. The UK should recognise this as a hugely powerful resource of individuals who are likely to reach the highest echelons of their country’s politics, business, education and culture. The British Council, through its alumni programme, is exploring how those relationships can be sustained for the long term for mutual benefit.

There is also huge potential for the UK’s creative industries in China. For example, the Chinese recorded music market shows a growth rate of 950+% for UK sales between 2015-2019 and it is now the seventh biggest music market in the world accounting for 17% of UK recorded revenues from Asia in 2019.²

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¹ More than 40% of these young people say they were influenced to come to the UK through engagement with the British Council and its activities.

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Americas

Foreword

My first really memorable experience of the British Council came in South America, in Rio, in 2016 just after I had been appointed Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and was given the chance to represent the Government at the Rio Olympics and Paralympics.

Seeing on the ground the work that the British Council was involved in across Brazil was truly inspirational and I was therefore in no doubt that becoming Vice Chair of the APPG with responsibility for the Americas would be a huge honour.

The Americas is a region full of potential but is at times overlooked. Across the region, the British Council’s English language tuition is widely recognised as the market leader. But it is in the area of soft power and cultural promotion that the British Council really excels.

Through championing our creative industries, cultural excellence and artistic diversity, we can build connections and shares British values across the region, contributing to a more tolerant, open and connected world.

This kind of engagement is not just a ‘nice to have’ but makes a real difference: to trading prospects; to collaboration on key issues such as climate change, and to lives of people around the world.

The Rt Hon Karen Bradley is Member of Parliament for Staffordshire Moorlands and Americas Vice-Chair of the British Council APPG.
Greater cultural understanding between the Americas and the UK can counter outdated perceptions and support closer trading links.

Latin America is the second most urbanised region in the world, with 78% of its population living in cities, which has led to a burgeoning, cosmopolitan middle class.¹ This should be an attractive market for the kind of modern goods and services that the UK can provide, however UK imports remain low and lag behind those from other Western European countries such as France and Spain.

This has in part been attributed to a lack of familiarity and confidence to engage with the region on the part of companies and institutions in the UK. Renewed efforts to build cultural and educational connections, trust and understanding between UK and Latin American partners would therefore support wider government efforts to increase trade with the region, including the UK’s application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) which encompasses Chile, Mexico and Peru.

Work with policymakers and governments can support Latin America’s inclusive growth and pandemic recovery and help to position the UK as a trusted partner.

Latin America and the Caribbean have been hard hit by COVID-19. Sectors with high levels of insecure and informal employment such as the creative and culture sector have been particularly affected. When it comes to cultural policy, the UK has an opportunity to deepen existing partnerships between state and federal governments in Latin America and institutions like the British Council to respond to this crisis, reinvigorate the sector and support more inclusive recovery that benefits the most vulnerable.

Recommendations

- The UK should build on the success of the new graduate visa route by continuing to allow flexibility in the visa system for international students to mitigate the challenges of the pandemic and to grow and diversify the UK’s international student cohort

- Joined-up, well-funded export strategies would support the UK’s world-leading creative industries to create international partnerships and meet rising demand for UK cultural goods and expertise

- There is an urgent need for measures to improve China literacy across all professions and sectors of society – especially among young people. There is a clear role here for the British Council, which is well-placed to provide young people with the language and intercultural skills they need to gain a deeper understanding of China and to aid interaction and engagement with its people.
Contested arenas

The UK is facing a world where values and attitudes are increasingly contested and opposed.

For the first time since 2001, autocracies are home to a majority (54%) of the global population, with a further 35% living in countries that are becoming increasingly autocratic.¹ It is predicated that within a decade the combined GDP of autocratic regimes will exceed the combined GDP of the world’s democracies.² Elsewhere, competition for ‘hearts and minds’ is becoming more fierce and nations are investing more in ways to exert and expand their influence.

In the context of increasing authoritarianism and the challenge to the rules-based international system posed by authoritarian states, the UK should look for opportunities to champion the values which underpin it, such as equality, inclusion, human rights, freedom of expression and enterprise.

Russia

Long-term connections based on mutual respect for each other’s culture can maintain dialogue between the UK and Russia during one of the most-strained periods for bilateral relations since the Cold War

Following constitutional changes approved in 2020, the current administration is able to stay in office until 2036. In a challenging bilateral context, institutional relationships between UK and Russian universities and cultural institutions are a way to maintain channels for dialogue and cooperation that is distanced from political tensions while remaining effective.

For example, following the success of the inaugural Russia-UK University Rectors forum in 2019, organised by the Russian Rectors Union, UUKi, the Russian Embassy and the British Council, a return delegation of representatives and Vice Chancellors from Russian universities will visit the UK in Autumn 2021. This initiative demonstrates that collaboration is valued by higher education institutions in both countries and represents a commitment to strengthen future cooperation.

Long-term engagement undertaken by well-networked, interculturally competent professionals has been identified as a crucial enabler for building constructive relations.³ Facilitating greater people-to-people engagement between the two countries can also counter reductionist perceptions of Russia and build much-needed linguistic and cultural competency within the UK.⁴ These connections also support trade between the UK and Russia, which has increased for the fourth year in a row amid demand for UK services and exports.⁵
Central Asia

Foreword

I have had the opportunity and privilege to travel and work in several of the countries of Central Asia since 2014 and have witnessed the many changes happening there.

All of the Central Asian countries have their own rich histories and culture but one thing that they share is a dynamic and young population who now have a much more global view of the world than their parents and grandparents did in the former Soviet Union. In Uzbekistan 60% of the population is below the age of 30. There is a tremendous desire to learn English and for UK culture and education.

With their rich cultural heritages, Silk Road history and areas of natural beauty and with a regional population of over 70 million, Central Asia represents a unique opportunity for the United Kingdom to work to develop long term relationships and joint working in sectors such as digital, creative, and environmental projects. Enhancing these relationships now is an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and to develop strong cultural and educational links, as well as trading opportunities.

We’re pushing at an open door in Central Asia but must invest more in soft power efforts now or risk losing opportunities and influence to other international actors in this dynamic and fast-changing region.

Baroness Suttie is a life peer in the House of Lords and Wider Europe Vice-Chair of the British Council APPG.
Emerging demand in Central Asia presents a unique opportunity for UK economic and education sector engagement

Economic, security and geopolitical considerations recommend Central Asia as an area of focus for UK engagement. From the point of view of trade, the region's potential comes from complementary markets and demand for UK exports from growing middle classes.

Reform agendas in countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan present a key opportunity for UK engagement, particularly in the education sector. Through support in areas such as curriculum development and quality assurance, the UK has the chance to position itself as the partner of choice as these countries internationalise and improve English standards, capitalising on the obvious commercial opportunities in the English language sector and the longer term power of English language to unite people through dialogue.

Eastern Partnership

In Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), the UK can work with young people and trusted institutions to support open and inclusive societies.

The UK has a firm tradition of 'show don’t tell’ when it comes to the way we talk about our values overseas. Creativity, inclusion, innovation and freedom of expression – often shared through culture and media - are all means through which the UK can express its values without being overly demonstrative.1

Working in partnership with young people to find areas for mutually-beneficial collaboration has the potential to make a much greater impact than straightforward promotion. For many young people in the region, this means access to the key skills and connections they need for a successful future and a focus on key issues such as education, employability, environment, digital transformation and English language.

The UK’s independent institutions, such as the BBC World Service and the British Council and its civil, cultural and educational institutions are highly trusted and respected. At the heart of their trusted status is their operational independence from government, their freedom from censorship and the space they create for debate, criticism and plurality of views. Upholding distance from the state is necessary if the UK is to place these institutions at the forefront of its international engagement in the region and champion tolerance, diversity, and openness.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Despite its close economic integration with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as members of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia has only invested $20 billion in the region since the fall of the USSR, largely because it shares many of the same resources as Central Asian countries, such as unrefined minerals and energy reserves.

By contrast, UK exports - centred around high-quality goods and services - would appeal to a rapidly growing middle class in key countries, such as Kazakhstan. Similar exports from Italy and Germany are currently three and four times higher respectively than those from the UK.1 By building deeper cultural links with these countries, there is a real opportunity to open the door to further trade with these resource rich countries.

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1 One such initiative is the British Council Unlimited programme, which works with governments, artists and cultural institutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine to support the development of the disability arts sector and has been found to have had a significant impact on the arts and culture sector, public policy and the lives of disabled people in these countries.
Swing states

Greater investment in soft power will enable the UK to maintain influence in increasingly competitive and contested arenas around the world.

Nations are increasingly investing in ways to grow project their values and grow their international influence and attractiveness and the number of actors exerting, or trying to exert, influence is growing. France, Germany, Russia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and China have been investing more in ‘soft power’ as a proportion of GDP and population than the UK.¹

Competition is particularly fierce in those states which are rising in economic and geopolitical power but remain ambivalent to existing international arrangements, often falling within multiple spheres of influence. The UK should remain alive to these geopolitical developments and take the opportunity to engage in ‘swing states’, or risk losing long-term influence. In ‘crowded’ contexts, there is a need for a strong and distinct UK offer which is attractive, responsive and mutually beneficial without the strings that can be attached to investment and engagement from other international players.

Recommendations

- Operational independence of trusted institutions such as the BBC and the British Council must be maintained if the UK is to effectively share its values in contested arenas around the world.

- The UK should seek greater engagement with Central Asia, including the establishment of a UK-Central Asia business and development forum, to support cultural and educational exchange; trading links for mutual prosperity and liberalisation agendas in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

- A coordinated, sophisticated and well-funded soft power approach – one that is responsive to the individual needs of different communities - is needed if the UK is to maintain influence in swing states and other highly competitive arenas. The Government should ensure that an ambitious funding package, across both ODA and non-ODA categories, is secured for our soft power institutions, such as the British Council and the BBC World Service, at the autumn Comprehensive Spending Review. There must be no further closures to the British Council’s overseas network – such an assurance has now been received.
Commonwealth nations

The Commonwealth represents 54 diverse and dynamic countries across Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific and is home to 2.4 billion people. There is real potential for collaboration and the deepening of links with these countries, with whom the UK shares close cultural and historical connections.

However, effective engagement in the Commonwealth must recognise the exploitation, racism and oppression that characterise the UK’s historical relations with former colonies. Looking forward, the UK should continue to seek closer ties with the Commonwealth nations based on equal and mutually-beneficial partnerships.

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and upcoming independence anniversaries in India and Pakistan are key milestones for the UK to reinvigorate its relations with Commonwealth nations.

Sport and athletics are important levers of soft power that provide significant opportunities for dialogue and cooperation with people and governments around the world. Beyond the athletic competition, the Games, Queen’s Baton Relay and accompanying cultural and educational programmes are an opportunity to establish long-lasting links between communities in the West Midlands and around the Commonwealth, ensuring a lasting legacy of the competition.

Independence anniversaries in India and Pakistan in 2022 also represent important milestones through which the UK – handled with sensitivity - can celebrate cultural links with the two nations and strengthen and renew future partnerships.

Engagement with UK diaspora communities is key to deepening and renewing links with Commonwealth nations

UK diaspora communities are a key asset when it comes to sharing the culture and values of the UK around the Commonwealth. Diaspora communities often maintain close links with their mother countries, playing a significant role in philanthropic giving (both within the UK and overseas); direct investment in their mother countries and social and cultural organising. UK donors of Pakistani origin donated an estimated total of £1,253 million in 2018: £636 million to Pakistan-based causes and £617 million to UK-based causes.¹ Support for existing diaspora networks – and the inclusion of diaspora communities in international cultural engagement - can amplify this activity and enable them to act as ambassadors for the UK.²

¹ The Premier Skills programme, a partnership between the British Council and the Premier League, is an example of how the global reputation of UK sporting institutions can be used to affect positive change in communities around the world. The programme has worked with communities and grassroots coaches in Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria, India, Botswana and Senegal and more, enabling them to achieve positive social and educational outcomes in their communities. Training for coaches is accompanied by football-based English language learning resources, including a football podcast with over 5 million listeners.

² Support for existing diaspora networks – and the inclusion of diaspora communities in international cultural engagement - can amplify this activity and enable them to act as ambassadors for the UK.
Sub-Saharan Africa

Foreword

During my many visits to Africa as an International Election Observer I have been impressed by how valued British Council libraries have been across the continent.

The region is changing rapidly, as is the way we share knowledge, information and content. This young, dynamic and increasingly digitally-connected part of the world is full of opportunity for the United Kingdom in terms of trade, development and support for open societies. Economic and population growth and developments, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, mean we stand to benefit enormously from stronger relationships with Africa.

But there are also challenges arising from the scale and diversity of the region and fierce competition for the hearts and minds of young Africans.

Digital and mobile technology is one answer and will play a big part in the way we reach the next generation. This, too, is a crowded and competitive space. Whether it is English-learning platforms, beaming the Premier League onto screens or streaming the best of UK music, our globally-recognised organisations, businesses and sporting and cultural institutions are key to connecting young people to the UK in a way that is meaningful to them.

Sub-Saharan Africa is changing fast and we must act now to seize the opportunities this exciting region presents.

Sir Roger Gale is the Member of Parliament for North Thanet and Sub-Saharan Africa Vice-Chair of the British Council APPG.
The UK has an opportunity to create millions of new connections through engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa’s young, digitally-savvy and rapidly-growing population

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world’s fastest growing population,¹ with Nigeria set to surpass the United States and become the third largest country in the world shortly before 2050.² The ever-increasing penetration of mobile phone technology across the region represents a significant opportunity for the UK to connect with the next generation of community leaders, entrepreneurs and English language learners through digital means.

Despite this, competition for attention and influence in the region is fierce and the digital sphere is crowded. UK content providers will need to understand and respond to the needs of young Africans if they are to build meaningful digital connections. Organisations providing some of these services, such as the British Council, will need to invest in their products so that it meets expectations and builds on the strong brand identity that many British businesses enjoy.

Shared cultural and historical connections can support dynamic, forward-looking connections between the UK and Sub-Saharan Africa

The UK’s colonial past should not be ignored. However, it should also be recognised that contemporary Britain currently enjoys a strong position among young people in the region. British Council soft power perceptions data shows that in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, the UK ranks first for attractiveness out of 35 of countries, including all G20 nations.³

However, the gap between the UK and other leading nations is slim. Efforts by foreign powers to win strategic influence in Sub-Saharan Africa – especially in ‘swing states’ in East Africa and elsewhere - have intensified over the past decade, through both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power (economic) means. This is especially true when it comes to China, who is the region’s largest foreign direct investor.⁴

The UK should not succumb to complacency but take the opportunity to build on its current strategic advantage to forge people-to-people connections that reflect contemporary realities and culture in the UK and Sub-Saharan Africa. The UK is well-placed to meet huge demand for English language and entrepreneurial skills which can support and enable young Africans – in particular young women - to affect positive change in their communities.

Cultural connections and engagement enable the UK to both support and benefit from the dynamism of Sub-Saharan Africa’s creative industries. For example, the success of Black Music genres in the UK’s mainstream music market, alongside increasing global popularity and recognition of the West African music scene, present a significant opportunity to strengthen both cultural and commercial links in growing markets such as Nigeria and Ghana.⁵
South Asia

Foreword

South Asia and particularly India remains an area of high growth, but more than that - long standing historic ties, shared culture and Prime Minister Modi’s Living Bridge bind us tightly. As a British MP, proud to represent a diverse and dynamic constituency in London, who became an adult and raised a family here, but was born and raised in India I am a product of that relationship.

In the years I have been part of both countries the relationship has changed and developed from imperial power and colony to a partnership. The UK needs to continue to evolve that role in the coming decades and further invest in a relationship based on trust and mutual benefit.

The UK and India share a vibrant and thriving democratic DNA, that is not something to be dismissed lightly, and India and the UK are natural allies and good friends. Continued and growing respect for Intellectual Property law and an increasing role in upholding the international rules-based system around the world will only help India build more bridges. While the UK needs to invest in a more friendly visa regime, a deepened interest in soft power and a forward-looking foreign policy that looks for innovative solutions to reap a dividend abroad in delivering key policy objectives.

The opportunities are there for a forward-looking UK that engages with partners as equals, honours trade deals and focuses on outcomes to respect cultural differences while still defending our key values.

Virendra Sharma is the Member of Parliament for Ealing, Southall and South Asia Vice-Chair of the British Council APPG.
In South Asia, the UK can support ambitions to increase the reach and quality of education provision on the subcontinent

South Asia has experienced a long period of robust economic growth, averaging 6% a year for the 20 years prior to the pandemic, although the benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed. Education and skills are a priority for the region as it strives to bounce back from the pandemic and combat socioeconomic inequalities.

An average of one million new graduates have been entering South Asia’s employment sector every month since 2014. This increases the urgency of developing academic systems, improving the quality of learning and identifying resources. The region’s higher education institutions are yet to make the same impact on world university rankings as their counterparts in East Asia, with development potential in both research and teaching capacity.

Strong higher education systems have been proven to support national success and global sustainable development goals. UK support for higher education systems, through government, federal and public-private partnerships is vital to help the region to develop its domestic infrastructure.

Collaborations can learn from successful initiatives such as the Pakistan UK Education Gateway, delivered by the British Council and the Pakistan Higher Education Commission, which create strategic partnerships between institutions and individuals as a vehicle for the development of capacity, knowledge and skills. This approach can bring broader socio-economic benefit to the sector and the country.

South Asia is a key partner for UK climate action

Climate change represents a significant threat to many nations in South Asia. Building on the legacy of COP26 in Glasgow, the UK has an opportunity to take a leading role working with young leaders across the region to address these global challenges.

Research collaboration, through vehicles such as the flagship Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), can also play a vital role in driving progress on shared policy priorities, from marine plastics to clean energy, contributing to the region’s sustainable development and advancing the UK’s ambitions to tackle climate change.

Beyond this, global cooperation in research can bring a range of benefits, including access to complementary expertise; knowledge and skills; access to unique sites, facilities or population groups; sharing costs and risks; and establishing standards (especially within industrial collaborations).

India

Student mobility, both from India to the UK and from the UK to India, has increased significantly over recent years. The impact of the Graduate Route post-work visa, which grants more flexibility for international students studying in the UK, has been especially significant: student visas granted to Indian nationals increased by 42% in 2020, the largest increase by nationality in sponsored visas last year.

Indian nationals accounted for 23% of all sponsored study visas issued in 2020, up from 13% a year prior. This increase took place despite an initial reduction in visas granted amid the uncertainty of the early months of the pandemic.

There will be further opportunities to advance UK-India higher education collaboration when Mutual Recognition of Qualifications come into force, due to be established by the two governments by the end of 2021. This will cover Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral degrees. UK Masters degrees have historically not been recognised by the Indian Government.
Realising these opportunities will be critical to building and sustaining the UK’s strategic advantage in research and technology.\(^7\)

**Australia and New Zealand**

In Australia and New Zealand, stronger trade and security partnerships can build on shared histories and values, supported by people-to-people connections.

As the global centre of power shifts towards the Indo-Pacific, close cooperation with Australia and New Zealand will be key to the UK’s integration into strategic dialogues, trading agreements and security partnerships in the region. These nations have facilitated Britain’s accession bid to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and its joining of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as a dialogue partner. Changing geopolitical dynamics and changing climate mean that the UK, Australia and New Zealand all stand to gain from closer economic, defence and climate partnerships.

Shared values and histories, and significant diaspora communities, provide strong foundations from which to deepen collaboration. Ambitions to strengthen trading links can be supported by cultural relations activity, which results in a 21% increase in trust in the UK, rising to a 73% increase in trust when that activity is through the British Council. British Council research has shown those who trust the UK are almost twice as likely to seek to visit, study or do business with the UK.\(^8\)

**Recommendations**

- The UK should establish – and support, where they exist - cross-cultural diaspora networks to promote UK values and should use existing networks to empower diaspora led investments.

- Initiatives which facilitate higher education exchange, scholarships and research collaboration should be supported and expanded to engage with Commonwealth nations, especially the new Turing Schedule scheme, which provides a truly global exchange model. The addition of reciprocal opportunities within the next iteration of the scheme would ensure the full benefits of international exchange can be felt by all parties and provide a degree of international experience even to those who do not make it overseas.

- To make the most of the lessons learned from the pandemic, the UK should undertake a strategic assessment of the potential of digital engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa and further afield.
Fragile states

The risk of conflict and unrest in the most unstable regions of the world looks set to increase amid rising international tensions, the weakening of the international order and chronic fragility exacerbated by the fallout from COVID-19.

Vulnerabilities and instabilities dramatically reduce opportunities for developing mutually beneficial social and economic partnerships. In such contexts, both hard power and soft power capabilities are needed to enable an integrated contribution to the stabilisation and resilience of conflict-affected regions and communities.

As one the world’s largest aid donors, the UK is well-placed to help build resilient societies through investment in the next generation

UK intervention should include significant investment in the human and social capital in fragile states, supporting societies that have the resilience to manage shocks and changes peacefully. In particular, investment in the education of women and girls strengthens economies, reduces inequality and contributes to stable societies.¹ This should continue to be a priority for the UK given the devastating impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on access to education, which has put millions of children at risk of never returning to school by the time the pandemic has passed, including up to 20 million girls.²

In addition to education systems, a strong domestic private sector, encompassing micro, medium and larger businesses, can be an effective driver for post conflict recovery.³ To support private sector growth, the UK should invest to equip young people with the skills they need to affect change in their communities and to succeed in a global economy.

In particular, the English language can be an enabler for economic growth and international development and help communities that have been isolated through conflict or authoritarian rule make global connections. In such contexts, there is enormous demand and need for English in public education systems risk of political instability and unrest, particularly in areas with high youth populations such as MENA, SSA and South Asia. The risk is that increasing instability will drive conflict and greatly increase mass migration from afflicted regions.

Francophone and Lusophone Africa

In Francophone and Lusophone Africa, the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area – of which English is the lingua franca – and the prevalence of English in some of the region’s largest industries such as telecoms and oil and gas, have seen a sharp rise in demand for English language learning.

In the past year, English Connects – an FCDO and British Council programme which connects young Africans in French and Portuguese speaking Sub-Saharan Africa with the UK – saw a 189% increase in website hits and a 634% increase in downloads of the British Council LearnEnglish app compared to the previous year. 96% of the programme beneficiaries surveyed reported an increased feeling of connectedness with the UK.

This growing demand presents new opportunities for the UK to support young English learners to contribute to community prosperity and to build connections with people and governments across Africa.

¹ Without a meaningful path of education, these communities risk a generation of young people who lack the learning and skills they need to find a job and make the transition to an independent and fulfilling adulthood. High levels of exclusion from the system increases the
to boost stability, employability and prosperity.\(^4\)

**The UK’s heritage sector expertise can support communities in conflicted-affected areas to safeguard cultural heritage and increase social cohesion**

The UK has a reputation as a world leader in heritage preservation and protection. Programmes such as the Cultural Protection Fund – a partnership between the British Council and DCMS – have pioneered models of working with communities and community leaders to protect cultural heritage that is at risk of destruction. Current projects support preparedness measures for heritage at risk due to natural disasters and climate change across East Africa, including a joint workshop in natural flood management with the National Trust’s Skell Valley Riverlands project in the UK, and partners in Northern Uganda. The programme has demonstrated that a people-centred approach to heritage, that benefits all levels of society, contributes to social cohesion and economic growth.\(^5\)

### Recommendations

- The UK could improve coordination and refine its approach towards private sector engagement in post-conflict states by establishing communication channels and forums between private, state and NGO actors.

- A return to 0.7% GDP for international aid when financial conditions allow will support the UK’s ambition to act as a ‘force for good’ in fragile and conflicted-affected states and allow crucial investment in the stability and resilience of future generations. Publicly maintaining that commitment will provide vital reassurance to our partners overseas.

The Government should renew its commitment to the Cultural Protection Fund, maintaining UK leadership in this field and capitalising on the expertise of those who deliver it. With additional funding, the CPF could be deployed in other regions to protect both tangible and intangible heritage assets and preserve them for future generations.
Like-minded nations

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a global response to key challenges such as climate change, global health and poverty alleviation and economic inequalities.

In an era of disruption, rising authoritarianism and geopolitical change, strong relations with allies that share our values and commitment to liberal democracy are at the core of UK prosperity and security.

Europe

In Europe, the UK should seek roles as trusted partner and broker through engagement at multilateral and bilateral levels.

Despite turbulence as the UK-EU political and economic settlement is renegotiated and bedded down, continued collaboration with European neighbours and allies will be key to UK defence, development and climate ambitions. When it comes to engagement beyond Europe, especially in the Indo-Pacific region, it is desirable that the UK is seen as a credible partner within the EU, and vice versa. The 2021 joint UK-Italy COP26 presidency is an opportunity for the UK to forge a role as both partner and broker of strategic partnerships. This will be helped by ensuring the UK is well-represented in European networks, forums and dialogue as well as seeking to strengthen bilateral relations with key strategic partners such as France, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands.

The UK should also use all of the tools available to it, including the soft power resource of its arts and sports sectors and the expertise of organisations like the British Council, to engage with European nation states on a bilateral level. Support for Baltic States and Eastern EU countries can also help to bolster the UK’s influence in the region and capitalise on the close affinities we share with many of these countries, many of whom have significant diaspora populations living in the UK. This could include working to equip young people with the necessary critical thinking skills to counter disinformation and malign influence, which would both strengthen UK bilateral relations as well as contribute to the wider security of the region.¹

Greater cultural and educational engagement can help to build trust and people-to-people connections between the UK and Europe.

Future UK-EU relations should be underpinned by mutual trust if the UK is to maintain strategic influence and attraction.² However, public perceptions data from young people across the European Union shows the fractious process of exiting the political union has had an enduring negative impact on the perceived trust and attractiveness of the UK.³ The UK’s approach should therefore consider renewing relations with young Europeans, building trust through positive engagements. Cultural and education institutions are well-placed to do this: participation in a UK cultural initiative has a proven positive impact on perceptions, with impact increasing by thirteen percentage points when the initiative was curated by the British Council.⁴

Language-learning and linguistic exchange with European partners can support the UK’s prosperity and productivity.

In Europe, the UK’s reputation as a global leader in multilingual education has enabled UK institutions such as the British Council to partner with education systems in governments in Spain, France and Germany to develop curricula and teaching capacity. In the UK, 62% of English Language Teaching (ELT) centres reported Europe as their key source market.⁵ The UK should continue to maximise these engagement and commercial opportunities with European partners.

However, demand for the English language can come at the expense of British language learning. Too many Britons are monolingual in a bi- or multi-lingual world. This threatens to
hinder UK efforts to enhance productivity, pursue an export-led economy and build relationships within the EU and beyond. Addressing this problem will be central to helping young people across the whole of the UK reach their potential and secure good jobs in a global economy, where they will be competing against highly educated, interculturally literate and multilingual peers.

The EU and North America are the largest consumer markets for UK cultural exports, but fewer barriers to artist mobility would help them achieve their full potential.

North America and the EU are the largest markets for the UK’s cultural industries. In 2019, music exports to North America accounted for 43% of UK artists’ recorded music revenues (£211m). The European music sector is dynamic and expected to grow: pre-pandemic revenues in Europe grew by 3.5% in 2019, driven by streaming growth of 20.7%. Despite this, slow and expensive visa procedures can often be prohibitive for UK artists looking to work in international markets. Export initiatives, touring funds and improved visa arrangements by other countries could all help the UK’s creative talent reach its full international potential.

Recommendations

- The UK should build on the G7 and COP26 presidencies to ensure they are well-represented in international forums, especially within appropriate EU institutions and networks where there is a shared interest in doing so.

- Intervention to remove barriers to touring for UK artists and cultural practitioners is needed in order for the UK’s creative industries to achieve their full potential in the world’s highest-value markets, in Europe and North America.

- The government should encourage and expand modern foreign language learning in schools, colleges and universities to ensure the next generation is equipped to thrive in a global economy and further strengthen the UK’s role as a global trading nation. Consideration should be given as to early international experience which may encourage young people to take on a foreign language during their studies.
Acknowledgments

The APPG would like to thank the British Council for their support in producing this report, most prominently Lizzie Parker for her support in producing the document.

Thanks to go to Benjamin Yates, Calum O’Byrne Mulligan and David Thompson for editorial assistance, as well as Graham Whitby and Harumi Leitch for their support with the APPG webpage, and all those who provided written submissions to the inquiry:

The Association of Commonwealth Universities
Academy of Sport, University of Edinburgh and Toronto
Henry Jackson Society
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM)
BFI
PRS Foundation
Labour Foreign Policy Group
Russell Group
Creative Scotland
National Archives
National Museum Directors’ Council
Directorate for External Affairs, Scottish Government

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