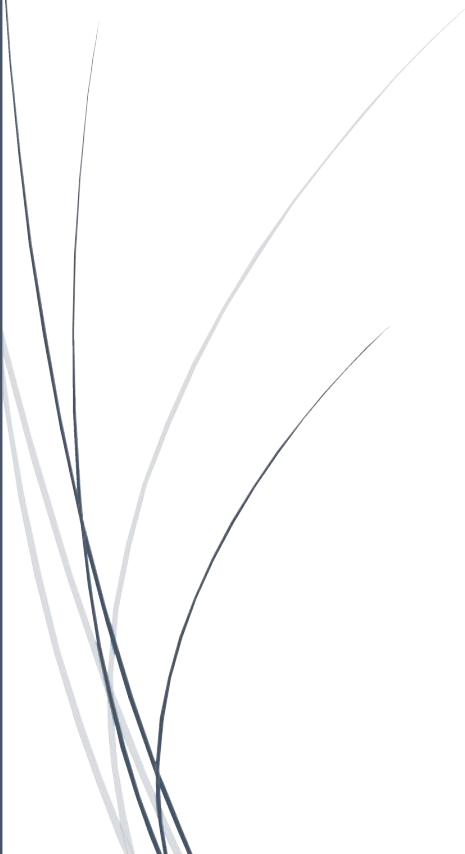


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# Doing Business with the UK

Case study - British Council

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English Culture for Business I



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Literature review .....	5
British Council and the UK's place in the world.....	11
History of British Council.....	12
Relationship with the UK government .....	13
Facts about the British Council.....	15
The Management Structure of the Company .....	16
British Council Network.....	17
British Council seen as a "valuable" and "trusted" brand .....	18
British Council and its importance in the World –Trying to make a difference.....	19
The British Council educational partnerships .....	22
The British Council educational situation .....	22
Key information about the British Council.....	23
How the British Council works? .....	24
How the British Council targets its work? .....	25
Partnerships and business development .....	27
English as Medium of Instruction (EMI).....	28
Partnership in Angola.....	29
Partnership with South East Asia .....	31
Conclusion.....	33
References.....	34



## Introduction

The primary aim of the following essay is to understand the cultural aspects underlying the business relations with the British society.

For that purpose, this paper is organized into two main parts. The first part will concentrate on the Literature Review, which will give a theoretical support for all discussed ideas. Throughout this section, the importance of culture and its impact on the business world will be presented. Furthermore, notions of multiculturalism and interculturalism will be discussed. As a final step, some aspects of the British business relations will be approached.

The second part, will approach the chosen Case-Study, namely the British Council. This section will include the historical background, the development path and the educational activities will be analysed.

## Literature review

Due to the emergence of Globalization in the late 80's, the world faced a new reality. On the one hand, this phenomenon brought about the falling of barriers and geographical borders, which boosted the free trade; on the other, it led to closer interactions between nations (Frankel, 2006). Given this fact, were forced to adapt themselves to different cultures and habits. Tomlinson (2003) and Scriven (n.d) claim that before the falling of barriers and geographical borders, people only dealt with their own cultural reality, but nowadays, due this intense flow of information provided by the media, immigration and tourism they are forced to deal with foreign cultures.

Following and complementing the ideas above, it would be relevant to understand the notion of culture. In fact, given its abstract nature, culture is a complex term to be defined. Several authors have been presenting definitions of this concept throughout the years, and often, their ideas are quite diverging, meaning that it is difficult to reach a consensus about what the culture actually is. In simple words, according to UNESCO (2009), it can be described as: “a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a certain society or social group, which encompasses art, literature, lifestyles, values system, traditions and beliefs.” Wood et.al (2006) adds that this set of differing characteristics of a certain society influences all kind of its interactions with others, by saying that people behave in the way that they behave because of the culture they have assimilated. It may be an ethnic culture, though it could equally be an organisational or professional culture that influences their reading of and responses to the world.

Taking into consideration these statements, it is possible to infer that a culture also affects the way people do business. According to (Nations & Civilizations, 2009), due to our globalised world, characterized by a more integrated and interdependent economy, business has assumed an important role in spreading cultural values. It is said to be a major actor that through commerce, trade and investment, promotes a cross-cultural exchange of ideas and knowledge. In fact, in a world where enterprises, the so-called “multinationals” are constantly allocating their resources, there should be no doubts that a business success is strongly linked with a company's ability to understand and respect the communities in which it operates. Therefore, the cultural diversity in the

workplace has become a top subject in the last few decades, which is shaping the business practices all over the world (Holmgren et. al, 2013).

Nevertheless, this closer interaction and the need for adaptation to different cultural realities do not occur only on a cross-border level, it also happens within the same society. A good example of it, is the British society. On the one hand, quoting O'Driscoll (2003) and Culturwise (2015), given its historic background, this society encompasses four native nations who share different cultural values, namely English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish. Actually, until the 19th century the term "British" did not exist: the inhabitants of Great Britain were English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish. It was only with the beginning of a powerful empire that the concept of being 'British' came into common use (O'Driscoll 2003).

On the other hand, Jackson (1998), mentions that after the WWII, the British society received a huge flow of immigrants, both from other parts of the United Kingdom and out of it. About 12.5% of the UK resident population was born overseas. Moreover, 37% of people living in London were born abroad. Nowadays, the British society encompasses not only different nationalities, but also several ethnic groups.

All these issues should be taken into account while setting up business relations with the United Kingdom. For instance, addressing Scottish people as "English" in business meetings is, in particular, likely to invite a robust response (Culturwise, 2015).

Thus, this society has become multicultural throughout the years. Rosado (1996), refers to multiculturalism as a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes the presence of all different groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages their contribution to an inclusive cultural environment.

However, Wood et.al (2006) and Vartovec (2006) argue, on their turn, that the multiculturalism isn't as positive as it may seem, as it is based on the attitude of tolerance between the coexisting cultures, rather than on the interaction. For them, this politically current attitude towards the others only contributes to more isolation within cultures.

Kromidas (2011) also adds that a multicultural approach tends to categorize people according to their cultural values, instead of fostering communication. So,

multicultural places are not necessarily open places. Moreover, there is a certain predominance of the main culture over the ethnical minorities. This is what actually occurs in Britain. Due to a certain predominance of the English culture, there is a common tendency to assume that all Brits should be approached in the same way. For (Nations & Civilizations, 2009), such general approaches usually lead to losses in productivity and may have a negative impact on a company's reputation.

Given this fact, there is an attempt to move towards interculturalism. According to Wood et.al (2006) and Vartovec et.al (2006), interculturalism requires a high degree of openness as a prerequisite. It is important to remark, however, that openness in itself is not the guarantee of interculturalism, but it is an important step for interculturalism to develop. Another crucial point underlying an intercultural approach is the communication, since it is what facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds. Meer, et.al (2011) also call our attention to the importance of a so-called Cultural Literacy, meaning that there should be a continuous sharing and mutual learning within the several cultures of a certain society, which should occur on day-to-day interactions. For these authors, the members of minority cultures have always something to teach us, therefore they should be encouraged to cultivate and share their values.

Following the previous perspectives, Palmer (2004) states that cultures should not be seen as a static reality, but a changeable process with several stakeholders. It is through interculturalism that the coexisting cultures are kept alive.

Wood et. al (2006), go further in their observations by saying that due to the current international environment, there is increasing need for youngsters to able to communicate with people of all varieties in their future careers, therefore interculturalism should be promoted at schools, so that people develop a broaden world vision since an early age. Thus, the education system needs to understand and encourage the spiritual, moral and social growth of its pupils, always supporting their cultural backgrounds. Regardless of their ethnicity or social class, all children need to feel that their history and roots are appreciated in the school context. On the hand, it is also relevant that children become aware of the existence of other cultural realities, beyond their own.



By these words, it is possible to understand that culture is the key factor that shapes our worldview since an early age, and has a great impact on all spheres of our life, even if we are not aware of that fact.

Having given this overview on the importance of culture and cross-cultural interactions in the current world, it is possible to move on to specific behaviours adopted in the business relations.

According to Holmgren et. al (2013); IOR (2016) and Hofstede (2016), state that business interactions are usually based on various antagonistic features: hierarchy versus equality; individualism versus group orientation; direct versus indirect communication style. Depending on their cultural background, people adopt these attitudes while interacting with their business partners.

Considering the statement above, let's now analyse the British case. However, before presenting some dominant characteristics regarding the attitude of Brits towards business, it is important to remember the cultural diversity underlying this society. Therefore, there is no only one British way. This means that any kind of generalisations should be avoided. In fact, the existing business guides should never be seen as something dogmatic and unchangeable:

- Despite a strong sense of equality, they still pay attention to authority. Even though communication between supervisors and subordinates tends to be informal, this shouldn't lead anyone to believe that there's no hierarchical differentiation. But the concept of "fairness" is instilled in British society, and supervisors will try to reach consensus rather than order staff around. Instead, instructions take the form of polite requests (IOR, 2016, Cultural Atlas, 2016, and Culturewise, 2015).
- The team spirit is also important to the British. Individuality is applauded but only within the context of the group. Anyone trying to stand out from the group by boasting a certain amount of self-importance will not be appreciated (IOR, 2016, Cultural Atlas, 2016, and Culturewise, 2015).
- The British in the workplace are governed by many rules and regulations, but these tend to be implicit. In contemporary business practices, of course,

contracts and policies are the order of the day, but the concept of these unwritten rules and agreements still plays an underlying role. Tradition is important, change is accepted reluctantly and its implementation takes a long time. In business, this results in what people from "faster" business cultures such as the USA will perceive as slow decision-making processes, an unwillingness to take risk, and a short-term rather than longer term outlook on business development (IOR, 2016, Culture Atlas, 2016 and Culturewise, 2015).

- A common reason for misunderstanding when dealing with the British partners has to do with the communication style. Brits tend to be indirect, subtle and suggestive communicators. "Perhaps we could ask John whether he could finish that report by Monday" actually means "Tell John he must finish the report by Monday." This is where the notorious understatement comes in. As the communication style is typically devoid of emotion, Brits are masters of understatement. Phrases such as "that's quite a nuisance" or "we are having a bit of a problem" actually mean absolute something more serious. For people from cultures with a direct communication style, for example, from Netherlands and Germany, British indirect communication can create huge challenges in day-to-day interactions in the workplace. For the British, however, more direct communication styles can seem blunt and even rude (IOR, 2016; Cultural Atlas, 2016 and Culturewise, 2015)
- Politeness is also an important value in the British society, often accomplished by some rather pointless exchanges of pleasantries. When entering a business meeting, expect to spend the first few minutes exchanging informal ideas before moving into business (IOR, 2016; Cultural Atlas, 2016 and Culturewise, 2015).
- Humour plays a key role here as well; when feeling uncomfortable, the British use humour to make sense of the situation. To the non-British colleague, however, the subtle joke may be lost (IOR, 2016; Cultural Atlas, 2016 and Culturewise, 2015).

To complement the information above, Clifford (n.d) presents his perspective on the business relations with British people:

- British people have the habit to shake hands, when being introduced or when meeting someone, as well as when leaving.
- Business cards are welcomed in business culture and are generally exchanged at the end of business meetings.
- In Britain, it is common to use first names almost immediately when conducting business with colleagues and business associates.
- British businessmen do not appreciate hard sell or aggressive sales techniques and deplore any pressure that may be applied in the decision making process.
- Misplaced or exaggerated praise is not appreciated in British business culture.
- It is considered to be impolite and rude to maintain a constant eye contact, to stand too close when speaking or to talk loudly. British businessmen value personal space, therefore keeping an acceptable distance is recommended.

The characteristics described above may be very helpful, when planning to do business with United Kingdom, nevertheless, once again, these should not be taken literally. We should always use common sense, pay attention to our surroundings and take some time to reflect not only on other people's behaviours, but also on our own. One has to be aware of the fact that even in our own culture there are plenty of differences and we would not like others to assume that we are all the same.

Thus, any stereotypes and pre-assumptions towards others should be avoided, especially when the subject is such a diverse society as the British.

## British Council and the UK's place in the world

In the world we live in, the UK plays a key role in the international context. Even with the departure of the United Kingdom of the European Union (marked by Brexit), it remains one of the countries with greater importance in the future of international trade, as it will extend its trade areas in the future of diplomatic relations between the various World countries and their consequent prosperity and security.

Moreover, it has a vital role in organizations such as the G8, the Commonwealth and the United Nations Security Council. It is of our belief that no country is more internationally connected than the UK in terms of business, commerce, politics, economy and transnational institutions.

This connection that the United Kingdom has with the world in general is essential for it to build a path governed by economic success, prosperity and security in view of its diplomatic and development objectives, as well as to support projects of prosperity, development and international stability.

To this end, the British Council acts as a mediator for achieving these objectives, in particular in the sense that the institution works in more than 100 countries around the world, creating international opportunities for the people living in the UK and other countries, by building a future of trust between them, through the promotion of a greater knowledge of the UK and English, changing lives around the world through access to UK education, skills, qualifications, culture and society, improving cultural and educational understanding, relationships and co-operation between the UK and countries around the world, and attracting people who matter to our future to engage with the UK's vibrant cultural and arts scene, education opportunities and diverse, modern, open society.

The British Council uses these objectives in order to leave a lasting impact on the lives of many people around the world, providing the creation of lasting relationships of mutual understanding and trust between the institution and the people and other institutions with which it works.

To this end, the organization works together with established leaders who support and transform the educational, cultural, social and artistic practices of the British Council. The target groups the institution works with range from young people at the beginning of their careers to world leaders and policy makers who work in areas

of emerging importance such as quality education, justice, society and good governance, working together with these people Working with these people from different backgrounds to have a lasting and significant impact through their programmes and services in the arts, education, society and the English language.

## History of British Council

The British Council was founded in 1934 by the British government. Its original name was “British Committee for Relations with Other Countries”. The Council’s first overseas offices opened in 1938.

The main reason for its creation was the political and economic instability originated by the First World War, namely the Wall Street crash, which led to the Great Depression (drop in living standards and international trade, high levels of unemployment), dictatorships and extreme ideologies, such as Fascism and Nazism. Given this environment, Britain’s started losing its position in trade and diplomacy issues.

At that time, its original purposes were to promote a wider knowledge of Britain, the English language, and also to develop cultural relations with other countries. Nowadays, the British Council was in its basis a non-political organization.

The organisation’s aim is set out in this extract, retrieved from the official British Council’s online platform (related to 1940-41 Annual Report):

“The Council’s aim is to create in a country overseas a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding of the people of this country, of their philosophy and way of life, which will lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy, whatever for the moment that policy may be and from whatever political conviction it may spring. While in times of danger this friendly knowledge and understanding becomes vital to the successful prosecution of war (that is the Council’s place in the war effort), in times of peace it is not less valuable”. (Council, 2016)

The organization’s mission in the Royal Charter (official document issued by the monarch) was stated as: “promoting a wider knowledge of [the United Kingdom] and the English language abroad and developing closer cultural relations between [the UK] and other countries”. It was granted a royal charter by King George VI in 1940 and received a Supplementary Charter in 1992 (Council, Guiding principles and procedures - Charitable purpose)

The vision of the British Council is to create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide. The Royal Charter that governs its work states that the objects for which it exist are: “to advance any purpose which is exclusively charitable and which shall: promote cultural relationships and the understanding of different cultures between people and peoples of the United Kingdom and other countries; promote a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom; develop a wider knowledge of the English language; encourage cultural, scientific, technological and other educational cooperation between the United Kingdom and other countries; or otherwise promote the advancement of education.” (Publications), 2016) (Council, Guiding principles and procedures - Charitable purpose)

Regardless of the source of funding (such as UK government grant, partnership co-funding, sponsorship or client income), the work of this organization should always meet its charitable objectives. Its headquarters are located in London having one general director and a board with 17 advisory committees.

Regarding its overseas offices, it is possible to say that they are located all over the world, being that the first ones emerged in Europe, Latin America and West Asia. Later on, during the 1950s the organization’s work extended to the field of educational work in Commonwealth and other countries. Moreover, in the 1980s the Council merged with the Inter-University Council, thus making a link between British and overseas universities. In terms of language scholarship and teaching, the organization is advised by an English Teaching Advisory Committee.

In the nineties, British Council encompassed 54 teaching centres in 35 countries, in comparison to the existence of offices in 84 countries. It promotes a wide range of educational, technical, and cultural activities, and Council Directors work closely with but separately from British embassies and high commissions. (British Council, The. " Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language", 2016)

## Relationship with the UK government

Turning now to the relation between the British Council and the UK government, it is of major importance to state that the first one is independent from the latter, as regards its way of functioning.

The British Council is governed by a Board of Trustees and is accountable to the UK's Charity Commission for its activities, for the organisation's assets, work and finances. It sets a strategy in line with the charitable objectives in the Royal Charter. To that end, the institution works closely with all the UK governments and their decentralized administrations, in order to ensure strategic alignment and measures that meet the UK's political priorities, that is to say the organization must bring into line its long term plans with the UK's long term foreign policy priorities and interests. The British Council's Board of Trustees sets the organisation's strategy, objectives, targets and priorities, via the Corporate Plan. The British Council consults the UK Government and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the content of the Corporate Plan.

Since the Institution is also a recipient and beneficiary of public funds to aid its functioning and efficiency, it is important to mention that it is subject to certain notification and authorization requirements, and also seek approval in specific matters directly from UK government ministers, in order to coordinate its activities and the alignment between the Institution interests and UK government's. An example of this co-operation between the two entities relates to the content of the Corporate Plan, where for the formulation procedure of this document, the British Council should consult the UK government and its decentralized administrations. (Council, Relationship with the UK government) Before moving on to the bureaucratic duties of the British Council, it is important to clarify how the company's Corporate Plan is formulated. It follows several steps until its formulation and final publication. First, the UK government departments and their decentralized administrations discuss strategy and spending parameters at the planning stage along with the FCO. Secondly, the corporate plan is ratified by the various UK government ministers before finally being approved by the Board of Trustees of the British Council.

However, despite the institution being subject to certain bureaucratic duties, notably with the UK government and its other administrations, it is important to clarify that it is operationally independent; this meaning that their status makes the organization is not formal part of the UK government. In other words, British Council employees are public servants and are not government employees or part of the UK civil service.

The work of the British Council in the field of arts, education and society is supported by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office in the form of grants and grants (so-called grant-in-aid) in order to provide international opportunities and trust for the UK through the promotion of the English language and its importance, together with the projects already mentioned above (programs undertaken in the arts, education and society).

In the light of the foregoing, this support by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office is of a non-restrictive nature, meaning that the ways in which these funds are invested possess a freedom and operational discretion guaranteed by the UK Treasury which categorizes this process as "unrestricted". However, expenses are targeted in view of the corporate plan of the company, meaning the funds operate in a contractual basis and in partnership with government departments, organisations and agencies of the devolved administrations, in order to promote and deliver their international cultural relations outcomes, present in the corporate plan.

This can be expressed in the following sentence, retrieved from the official website of the British Council:

“The British Council’s work for the UK requires the organisation to give an account of its impact and use of taxpayer funding to all four UK governments, parliaments and assemblies. The Foreign Secretary is ultimately accountable to Parliament for the work of the British Council. The organisation is therefore required to respond to parliamentary questions and is accountable to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee.” (Council, Relationship with the UK government)

## Facts about the British Council

The British Council is subject, as a Royal Charter body, to the supervision and oversight by the Privy Council, which is a body of UK sovereign counsellors.

According to (Council, Relationship with the UK government) “where it is legally appropriate, the British Council operates overseas as a branch of the British Council UK charity. If that is not possible, it tries to agree an alternative status with the host government. There are only two countries in the world where it operates with diplomatic status: China and India, as agreed with their governments.”

Regarding the way the organization manages the opening of new branches in foreign countries, namely the sharing of facilities with other companies, it is important



to note that the British Council carries out an assessment of the opportunities available with the FCO, the Department for International Development, UK Trade and investment and other UK international organizations operating in foreign countries with a view to sharing facilities (co-locate) provided that such action is in tune with the purposes and missions of the organization, taking into account the budget. However, the organization should consult the FCO for approval of any intentions it has in this regard, and may not open new branches or co-locate in other countries if its business is revenue generating.

## The Management Structure of the Company

Members of the Board of Trustees are recruited through open advertisement and elected by the board. The only exception is that the Foreign Secretary reserves the right to nominate one member of the board. This trustee has no special voting rights.

There are five formal sub committees to the Board: Audit and Finance, Risk, Remuneration and Nominations and Contracts. The Chair and Deputy Chair are elected by the Board of Trustees. However, the Foreign Secretary must preapprove their appointment. The Foreign Secretary must also pre-approve the appointment and term of office of the Chief Executive.

The British Council is an executive non-departmental public body, a public corporation (in accounting terms) and a charity under registration numbers 209131 (England and Wales) and SC037733 (Scotland). Although we receive a government grant in aid, the British Council is operationally independent from the UK government and does not carry out functions on behalf of the Crown. More than two-thirds of our income is generated from teaching English, administering exams overseas and from partnerships and contracts. The remainder comes from government as grant in aid.

The Executive Board is responsible for the overall strategy, direction and management of the organisation. The Board of Trustees are the guardians of the British Council's purpose and are ultimately accountable for the organisation. They hold the Executive Board responsible for the organisation's performance, strategy and policy.

The relationship of the organization with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is summarized in the following statement:

“The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is the British Council's sponsoring department and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth

Affairs is answerable to parliament for the policies, operations and performance of the British Council.” (Council, British Council)

The work of the British Council is overseen by a Board of Trustees. The present Chair of the Board is Sir Vernon Ellis. The Permanent Under-Secretary of the FCO is a member. The Board is supported by Country Committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Chief Executive of the British Council is Martin Davidson, CMG. Specialist Advisory Groups on the Arts and English support the work of the Council but are not part of its formal governance. Her Majesty The Queen is Royal Patron of the British Council. His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales is Vice Patron. Christopher Rodrigues was appointed Chair of the British Council in May 2016. (Council, Christopher Rodrigues CBE)

The Chair of the British Council provides leadership to the Board of Trustees, contributing to the strategic growth and development of the organisation as well as holding the Executive to account for the delivery of the organisation’s Corporate Plan. The Chair also represents the British Council in the UK and abroad, playing a critical role in maintaining and further developing the British Council’s relationships with key stakeholders and its audiences. Sir Ciarán Devane took up the role of Chief Executive in January 2015. Ciarán has focused on ensuring that all stakeholders understand and value the contribution that soft power, cultural relations and the British Council makes to security, prosperity and influence, and that the organisation and staff are aligned behind that vision. (Council, Sir Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive)

## British Council Network

Including the UK, the British Council has a presence in 110 countries and territories and operates in about 30 more. The British Council has teaching centres in the following countries: Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, Greece, Hungary, Georgia, France, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Egypt, Lybia, Morocco, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Bahrain, Iraqi Kurdistan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Burma, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. (Council, Our global network) The British Council employs 7334 staff, comprising 821 staff in management and administration in the UK and 4731

overseas and 1782 teachers overseas. British Council Country Directors report to seven Regional directors also located overseas. 19 of the British Council's overseas operations are headed by non-UK nationals. (Office, 2014)

## British Council seen as a “valuable” and “trusted” brand

British Council has been the mechanism through which the cultural relations between different countries have been achieved. The organization has a long-term commitment of sharing and promoting understanding between overseas countries and the UK, connecting teachers, students, artists, cultural professionals and decisions makers around the world, allowing them to work together, in full co-operation and exchange of ideas and values, to the benefit of all parties. Building up these values, the organization has acquired a good reputation in all the sectors it works in, so much so that UK stakeholders and partners of the organization value the British Council as a valuable brand with an inspiring reputation, and an ability to deliver and get things done in an effectively way, even in countries embraced by conflict (of any nature). UK stakeholders also value the company for its ability to access high-level stakeholders overseas and therefore recognize its knowledge and insights about overseas markets, and its impact on a global scale.

The organization being a renowned and global one, it is also recognized by its overseas learners, customers, teachers, donors, partner, governments, clients and audiences who value British Council for its status as a world leader with regard to its high quality English language teaching and assessment, its commitment to mutual benefit, its integrity and its ability to represent the UK on a non-political basis. These target audiences also appreciate the expertise of the companies with respect to cross-sector and cross-cultural partnerships.

Apart from the aspects already mentioned, its value overseas is also measured by an effort to improve understanding in the UK of overseas countries and their culture; improve learning outcomes, skills and employability; enhance policy insights and reform; promote sector growth, innovation, partnerships, business and trade with the UK; create and foster stronger overseas institutions and safer communities; promote safe spaces for dialogue and the sharing of new ideas; and finally, to promote cultural, educational, social and economic development. While the organization's value to the UK being further associated with shaping attitudes to the UK as a destination for study,

partnership, business and tourism; secondly, to promote UK policy and standards; thirdly, foster growth in innovation, business and sector in the UK; fourthly, to support the UK's commitment to international development; and finally, to support UK's soft power. Regarding the organization's sector outcomes, in education and society fields it wants to enhance UK leadership of and shared learning from international education; and aid to the existence of societies whose young people, citizens and institutions contribute to a more inclusive, open and prosperous world. In terms of the field of the arts, it expects to create new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through the arts; and in terms of English language, its sector outcomes relate with a more widespread and better quality teaching, and also with a "platform" learning and assessment of English worldwide.

The British Council works with students in higher and further education, schoolchildren, preschool children; young professionals; academics and young researchers; artists; teachers; senior influencers and leaders in government, business and communities; general public; and also with Institutions and Governments, such as Universities, colleges and schools; arts and cultural organisations; governments and ministries; private sector in English, education, arts and development, third sector, nongovernmental organisations and social enterprise; donors and foundations.

## British Council and its importance in the World –Trying to make a difference

The British Council is the main official UK body for cultural diplomacy and advocates the need to build up and contribute to societies which are open, where equality reigns, where pluralism exists, and where artistic, creative and academic expression, have freedom to construct their own roots, free of cultural constraints from other countries. In other words, the organization stands for stability and rapid transformation and development in societies worldwide, by means of promoting cultural engagement and not isolation.

The organization guides its work and its policy framework by taking into account what happens in other countries, that is to say, the global context and the state of the world. For instance, it operates in countries such as Brazil, China, India, South Africa, Turkey, Vietnam, Indonesia, Colombia, and Mexico which are emerging economies in the global set of things, and these same countries reveal a desire to receive

help from international institutions, in order to help accelerate their economic, social, political and cultural development. In other words, the British Council can establish successful institutional relations and stable business opportunities, given that in these countries, due to significant economic growth and an ambition to reduce poverty and inequality, there has been an increase in the middle classes that represent a large and increasingly growing market which do good and benefit the and from educational and artistic services of the United Kingdom and the British Council. However, this is not the only market niche from which the United Kingdom and ultimately the British Council, as a representative of the first one, may benefit, since in the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Wider Europe, South Asia and the Americas, there has been a trend known as developing economies, where economies not so advanced and large youth populations exist. This can provide opportunities for the UK and the British Council to promote development and cooperate, by sharing expertise and lessons learned, also, it can benefit from ever growing young populations who are interested in having access to international opportunities, that the British Council can provide them with. In contrast, in developed economies, where technology and economy is advanced, but where there are high levels of unemployment, due to a global recession, there is a need to engage young people, in particular through the arts and the English language, which can help them strive in the future.

Finally, in regions where conflict reigns, such as the Middle East, Ukraine and North-Africa, the UK and the British Council can be actors of change, by supporting institutional development and civil society development, by ways of building up the skills and opportunities available to young people and building strong relationships with individuals can make important contributions to more stable and secure futures.

In order for the British Council to adapt to these global contexts and take positive advantage to both parts (the countries it will work in and the organization itself), the organization assumed as its mission to take and share the UK's best cultural and educational assets with these countries, by sharing English and UK-backed qualifications, skills training, educational links and support to the development of state and public education systems; developing artistic capacity in conflict and fragile territories, supporting cultural recovery and regional stability through the organization's culture and development agenda; developing higher education, research and school links and skills for global employability including supporting the financial resilience of the UK sectors and enabling more plural, diverse, inclusive and peaceful expressions of

cultural identity and developing cultural links; by supporting sustainable and inclusive economic development and the empowerment of women and girls; and finally by promoting exchange between cultural institutions and artists and to support cultural policy and infrastructure, skills, education and entrepreneurship.

By doing this, the British Council hopes to achieve impact and be recognised as a partner of choice in the countries it works in, that including the UK. Achieving impact will be done by promoting greater connection, engagement, opportunity, understanding and trust. According to (Council, Corporate Plan (2015-2017)) the British Council will give major importance to social media and an ongoing investment in online learning platforms, so as to be able to share knowledge and ideas “with more than 30 million people”. Apart from this, the British Council will also “build on a successful British Council global digital transformation, develop more personalised digital services around the world and rise to meet the exponential global demand for English and digital learning. This includes supporting key English learning communities in the Middle East on Facebook, building on the British Council’s very successful first massive open online course (MOOC) Exploring English: Language and Culture on the UK’s groundbreaking FutureLearn platform, and building on the highly successful British Council LearnEnglish suite which serves young learners, teens and adults.” (Council, Corporate Plan (2015-2017))

## The British Council educational partnerships

### The British Council educational situation

The British Council builds mutually beneficial relationships between people in the United Kingdom and other countries. It is the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations, and operates in more than 100 countries. In 2006-07 it received some £195 million from public grants, mainly from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and earned further £350 million mainly by teaching English, delivering examinations overseas and managing client funded contracts.

The British Council's performance is strong and valued by its customers and stakeholders, although it is a challenge to secure consistently good performance across such a dispersed global network. The Council is allocating its resources to align with UK priorities, and continues to implement numerous and extensive change programmes aimed at increasing its effectiveness and efficiency.

Since 2006, the British Council has moved from country-specific cultural and educational projects to fewer, larger regional and global products, managed under a central commissioning process. Early projects have seen increasing audience numbers, and rising customer satisfaction. However, Regions have not moved to commissioned products in a consistent way or at similar pace. The Council's finance and management information systems do not delivery in this new, more complex, regional and global environment, where staff located in many countries need to work closely together. There are also been insufficient project management training to support staff. In 2007 the Council developed a new strategy to generate increased sponsorship and partner income.

The British Council English language teaching and examinations business has a high reputation in the market and is financially successful, generating surpluses in places such as Hong Kong and Spain which are used in part to support teaching centres in less established markets, some in the developing countries. The teaching and exams business also provides a platform for other activity in support of UK public diplomacy, particularly by helping overseas governments expand the teaching of English in their education systems. The problem is that the business has a high cost base, charges

premium prices, and has achieved limited reach outside overseas capital cities, with the number of teaching centres reducing rather than expanding.

## Key information about the British Council

The British Council remains independent of Government. In practical terms, this means that it decides for itself which products and services to deliver, to which audiences and using what methods. Its objects are shown below (Figure 1).



The British Council impact overseas is very strong and can be measured by the following points:

- In 2006-07 the Council worked in 110 countries/territories, including the UK. As a result, it worked directly with 16.5 million people, mainly through its large scale projects and English language teaching and exams activities.
- Over 15 million unique visitors used British Council websites, and viewed 108 million pages. Online resources include materials for learning the English language.
- It employed over 2,000 teachers who taught 1.2 million class hours of English to 300,00 learners in 53 countries.
- Delivered 1.3 million UK exams to 925,000 candidates worldwide, bringing £25 million in export earnings for UK exam boards.
- Worked with governments ministries in most countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, providing teaching training for English and support for modernisation of the state education system.



- Promoted international school links between the UK and overseas, reaching 4.7 million students.

- Implemented 141 development contracts in more than 40 countries worldwide to a value of £51 million.

- Held 1,435 arts events around the world.

## How the British Council works?

The British Council works with governments, teachers, schools and civil society partners to improve the quality of school education for children and young people. By promoting quality education, sharing international best practice and facilitating dialogue between policy makers, practitioners and education leaders the British Council influence the whole-system reform to help improve learning outcomes.

Its work can be divided in five essential parts:

- School leadership and management;
- Teacher development;
- Education sector and management reform;
- Curriculum development and assessment systems;
- English.

### School leadership and management

Through coaching, mentoring and reflective learning it focus on developing the ability of school leaders and managers to deliver improved learning outcomes for pupils and implement school development plans. The Council produce training materials and curricula to support the delivery of high-quality leadership training.

### Teacher development

It helps develop the skills of teachers by working with professional development institutions and governments to create new training curricula and materials and to

deliver training more effectively. The British Council focus on participatory learning and on sharing the latest pedagogical practices from across the world.

### Education sector and management reform

The Council support national and local governments and development partners to deliver education reform programmes, focusing on the development of governance and accountability systems, the development of national frameworks and standards, quality assurance and inspection services and public financial management.

### Curriculum development and assessment systems

The Council support governments and organisations with curriculum development, designing and implementing national assessment systems, establishing national assessment centres and implementing Education Management Information Systems.

### English

Strong English language skills are a priority for governments worldwide. Using its extensive experience of English teaching, the Council work with a range of institutions to support teachers, teacher trainers and school leaders to improve English language teaching.

### How the British Council targets its work?

Working in many large countries, the Council needs to target its finite resources to maximise its ability to meet its corporate objectives. It has to target its work to best effect within very large and complex host country populations, and concentrate resources on those who have, or in time are likely to have, the ability to influence policy or decision making in its business areas. The Council identifies three main audience groups, segmented by the level or potential influence of the contact:

- High-level decision-makers and leaders – are people in key positions of influence including government ministers, important media figures and commentators, leading sports or culture personalities, national religious leaders and UK-based ambassadors of overseas countries.

- Key influencers – are current (or potential) leading members or organisations, groups and networks who develop or deliver policy, or have a significant influence on the lives and opinions of others.

- People with potential – are far more numerous. They tend to be younger (under 35) and identified by category rather than being in key positions. They include students of English or those wishing to study overseas.

British Council India has identified six “people with potential” groups to focus their resources on (Table 1).

Characteristics	Investment priority	Main reason for engagement
Aged 19-24, strong English, low price sensitivity, high internationalism and aspirations	High	They are likely to be future opinion formers, are open-minded and have potential to act as multipliers
Aged 25-29, strong English, low price sensitivity, high internationalism and aspirations	High	Will be gaining positions of influence within their organisations and communities
Aged 15-18, strong English, high price sensitivity, high aspirations	Medium	Potential to become future opinion formers and possibly want to study overseas
Aged 30-34, strong English, low price sensitivity, high aspirations	Medium	Generally, time poor, but in positions of influence. Open to creative ideas
Aged 15-18, weak English, high price sensitivity, high aspirations	Low	Families are willing to invest in improving their prospects.
Aged 19-24, weak English, high price sensitivity, high aspirations	Low	They are willing to invest in improving their prospects

## Partnerships and business development

The British Council has many partnerships with well-known brands in order to create educational and work programmes across the world.

### North Africa, Middle East and Pakistan

The HSBC-backed reading programme is helping 25,000 primary school children across 13 countries develop good reading habits through access to storytelling.

### Africa

The Council partnership with Tullow Oil is developing the future workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa through a £9 million scholarship scheme.

Badiliko is delivering digital access for schools, teachers and pupils in six countries in Africa.

### Worldwide

The Council is working with Intel to support English language education in 100 countries by placing 100 million PC's and devices featuring British Council "LearnEnglish" content in classrooms and homes.

Its partnership with the Premier League has seen more than 1,500 coaches trained, over 300,000 young people reached and over one million football-focused English language materials distributed globally.

### China

The biggest ever festival of British arts and creative industries held in China, the UK Now project, which the British Council is managing and delivering on behalf of a group of private sector Founder Sponsors, features hundreds of world-class events in 17 cities across the country.

### Across Asia

Lloyds Register Quality Assurance partners with us to find, support and mentor young eco-entrepreneurs in seven countries across the Asia-Pacific region with projects to make their communities more sustainable.

## English as Medium of Instruction (EMI)

A study conducted by Julie Dearden, the Senior Research and Development Fellow in EMI at Oxford University Department of Education, and her colleagues, presented the findings of a study which attempted to provide an initial picture of the rapidly growing global phenomenon of EMI. The researcher's working definition of EMI was: the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English.

The broad goal was to map the size, shape and future trends of EMI worldwide. In order to meet the challenge of researching a global phenomenon with limited resources it was decided that the methodology of the initial and unique study would be to ask British Council staff in 60 countries to act as 'informed respondents' for the countries in which they were resident. Open-ended questionnaires were sent to these respondents and they were asked to provide information on the current state of EMI under a number of headings. Information on 55 countries was obtained.

The main conclusions were:

- The general trend is towards a rapid expansion of EMI provision;
- There is official governmental backing for EMI but with some interesting exceptions;
- Although public opinion is not wholeheartedly in support of EMI, especially in the secondary phase, the attitudes can be described as 'equivocal' or 'controversial' rather than being 'against' its introduction and/or continued use;
- Where there are concerns these relate to the potentially socially divisive nature of EMI because instruction through English may limit access from lower socio-economic groups and/or a fear that the first language or national identity will be undermined.

In many countries the educational infrastructure does not support quality EMI provision: there is a shortage of linguistically qualified teachers; there are no stated expectations of English language proficiency; there appear to be few organisational or pedagogical guidelines which might lead to effective EMI teaching and learning; there is little or no EMI content in initial teacher education (teacher preparation) programmes and continuing professional development (in-service) courses.

The aims and purposes of the EMI are quite some way from a 'global' understanding because it appears to be a phenomenon which is being introduced 'top-

down' by policy makers and education managers rather than through consultation with the key stakeholders.

There is an urgent need for a research-driven approach which consults key stakeholders at a national and international level and which measures the complex processes involved in EMI and the effects of EMI both on the learning of academic subjects and on the acquisition of English proficiency.

## Partnership in Angola

### Where to invest?

According to Aguinaldo Jaime, the President of ANIP (the Angolan Private Investment Agency), the new minimum requirement for investments into Angola by non-nationals will be raised from US\$50,000 to US\$1 million.

Priority sectors for investment are:

- 1) Farming and cattle-breeding;
- 2) Processing industry;
- 3) Fishing and derivatives industry;
- 4) Civil construction;
- 5) Health and education;
- 6) Road, railway, port, airport, telecommunications, energy and water infrastructure;
- 7) Heavy cargo and passenger equipment.

### Opportunities for Angola-UK relations

Angola's political environment is open to foreign investment. This is especially the case for education and training, which President Dos Santos defined as a priority in a major speech in April 2011.

Angola has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and is again expected to reach double-digit growth in 2012. To sustain such growth, the Angolan economy needs well-trained and educated nationals, and given high oil prices, Angola has ready funds to support training (from both the public and the private sector).

English has become the first foreign language that students learn in school in Angola, and demand is increasing as more students enter secondary education. A

growing number of professionals and school leavers require English to get a job or progress in their career, particularly in the oil and related service industries. UK-based training and certification institutions are thus perfectly placed to provide the relevant and qualifications for oil companies seeking English language training and technical training in Angola.

The 'British brand' is perceived in Angola to offer quality and consistency and distinguishes the UK from many of its competitors: This is especially the case for the British tertiary education sector.

Other UK advantages include a well-established education service and training industry that is overseen by credible standards and certification authorities.

The UK is also an attractive option for Angolans wanting to learn and/or perfect their English-language skills.

Another advantage for any training/education enterprise vying to enter the Angolan market is that there is a ready-made constituency of British companies.

#### Partnership with the Americas

The British Council knows that people want a good education and the skills to get a job and join the global community.

Progressive leaders are seeking innovation to transform education and training systems and build more equitable societies. Hundreds of thousands of teachers need retraining to teach English and 21st century skills, while their schools and universities are eager to internationalise.

Prosperity and happiness are founded on trust and co-operation. That's why, with the Council's many partners in the UK and the region, they are embarking on a strategy for growth and innovation to help respond to these challenges.

The aim is to strengthen cultural relations with the Americas in ways which will enable more people in the UK to learn and benefit from their contacts with the region.

#### Opportunities for USA-UK relations

The USA is the UK's most important bilateral partner and both countries work closely in all areas, from research and culture to defence and the economy.

They are each other's largest source of foreign direct investment, directly supporting over two million jobs.

US demographics are changing. By 2060, non-Hispanic whites will be only 43 per cent of the population, predicts the Census Bureau. For more than half of the

population, the UK will not be part of their frame of reference unless we invest in refreshing the transatlantic relationship.

The USA and the UK are the world's top two education markets, dominating the top of all world rankings.

American research and development spend makes up a third of global research and development investments and a third of the UK's international collaboration research is done with the USA.

American students bring over £250 million to the UK economy each year.

New UK creative works are often unable to come to the USA without support in brokering on their behalf and sharing of the financial risk.

## Partnership with South East Asia

The UK-South East partnership is a strategic alliance between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the British Council. The aim is to promote the UK as a partner of choice for UK education, research and innovation, through strengthened links in South East Asia to share knowledge and capitalise on expertise that will contribute to economic growth and prosperity.

### Collaborative Development Award

Collaborative Development Awards were set up to catalyse research collaborations through new joint project development. This was done through South East Asia-based partners visiting the UK, or UK-based partners visiting South East Asia.

The awards were mobility funds to cover the travel, subsistence, and accommodation for one researcher or policy maker to travel between the UK and South East Asia to a maximum value of £2000. A total of 37 awards were granted.

### Event Graduation UK 2014



A first of its kind, Graduation UK sees 120 Malaysian alumni of UK universities given the chance to graduate in front of their families, many after ten to fifteen years after completing their studies.

There was a strong response to attend the graduation ceremony from 68 PhD, 52 Masters and over 50 graduates and post graduates who graduated in the last fifteen years, almost all being senior and executive professionals and entrepreneurs.

### The Innovation Design Forum

Innovation is the key driver for economic growth, but building a culture of innovation requires a concerted effort across society, from governments to individual companies to researchers. The Innovation Forum explored the ways in which the UK and the diverse and fast emerging countries of South East Asia can collaborate.

### Projects

Some projects resulting from the UK-South East Asia are:

- Curriculum Development of Transferable Skills;
- Atenio Law School, Philippines;
- Film Academy development in Laos;
- Feasibility Study of regional alumni engagement;
- ASEAN Research Excellence and Collaboration Study;
- University UK Alliance.

## Conclusion

Having written this essay, it is possible to conclude that, at a deeper level, everything in our life turns around culture. We are the way we are because of our culture, even if we don't realize it on a daily basis.

However, this doesn't mean that our values and habits are the only "right", which everyone should embrace. There should be also an effort from our side to understand and interact with other realities, even if they seem strange or challenging. This is the basis of the interculturalism, discussed in this essay. This can be related to the business world too, since these formal interactions also require a high degree of communication.

Doing businesses with such diverse society as the British is a real challenge, as many cultural issues should be taken into account. Therefore, one should develop an intercultural vision.

The British Council presented in this essay is a good example of an organization that have been developing a broaden worldview and adopting an intercultural approach in their operations. In fact, it is having a great impact on the countries 'development all over the world.

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