

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

REVIEW OF THE BALANCE OF EU COMPETENCIES FOR CULTURE, TOURISM AND SPORT

Context

As the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, the British Council works closely with the EU institutions and programmes in the area of culture. We take an active interest in the EU's level of competence in this area and are delighted to have the opportunity to input to this timely review.

Given the British Council's key areas of expertise and work, this response primarily addresses the *Culture* aspect of this consultation and does not seek to comment on the *Tourism* and *Sport* competencies of the EU.

Key principles

The British Council strongly supports the European Union's motto '*United in Diversity*' which foregrounds the importance of national and local cultural diversity. Indeed, we believe that combination of shared values, free trade and movement of people, and importantly the distinctiveness of individual national cultures is the real strength of the European Union. Each of the EU member states has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. While we agree that the European Union should have a supporting competence in this area, it would be unnecessary and counterproductive for this to be extended.

In addition, the British Council firmly believes in the principle of subsidiarity and that in terms of cultural policy, this requires that primary responsibility should remain at national, devolved and local level rather than European level. However, the British Council does believe that there is a valuable role that the EU can play in supporting and celebrating cultural diversity and that it currently performs this effectively via its current programmes. We would therefore not wish to see any specific extension or repatriation of powers from the EU at the present time.

Specific responses to consultation issues

How important is EU funding to the UK cultural sector? And how beneficial to the UK is the EU's focus on a shared cultural heritage?

The pressure on public funding for culture is likely to lead to increased interest in EU funding sources. The Cultural Contact Point in the UK has highlighted that UK applications to the most popular strand of the current Culture Programme have almost

double the average success rate of other EU countries, though the UK puts in fewer applications per capita than other EU countries. The priorities of the new Creative Europe Programme include areas such as audience development and capacity building where the UK culture sector has leading expertise, so UK organisations should be well placed to compete successfully for future EU investment.

UK cultural organisations are currently more likely to focus on EU funding opportunities beyond the Culture Programme, which tend to offer larger funding rounds. Several national cultural policy organisations represented on the British Council's Cultural Diplomacy Group have identified EU funding in their strategies as an important source of support for future growth of their cultural sectors. Indeed, as reductions in public funding in the UK continue, then EU funding is likely to become increasingly important.

The benefits of the EU's focus on a shared cultural heritage is less important to the UK. For example, the UK has opted out of the 'European Heritage label' project.

Are EU cultural programmes effective and how can they be improved?

The Culture Programme is a successful programme which delivers significant benefit to the UK and other EU members states. The programme's aims align strongly with the mission and objectives of the British Council and we endorse the three main objectives of: promoting cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

The European Capitals of Culture Programme is very successful and the UK has derived significant benefit from its participation in this initiative. Both of the UK cities – Glasgow and Liverpool - to have been selected as European Capitals of Culture have reaped significant cultural and economic benefits. The British Council is also very supportive of the new UK Capital of Culture Programme which has been inspired by this model. We have been pleased to partner with the Derry/Londonderry City of Culture to support a wide range of international cultural activity linked to the festival. Our recent research – [Culture Means Business](#) - has demonstrated that sharing UK culture internationally makes a major contribution to UK prosperity and we believe that festivals of this type – with a strong international element - should continue to play an important role in the future.

Our experience has also been that the cultural projects which are funded as part of the EU's external aid programme (e.g. Libyan Street Theatre Project, Stage for Change in Solomon Islands, both managed by the British Council) have also been very successful.

What evidence is there that EU action in the areas of culture benefits or disadvantages the UK?

British Council research reports – [Culture Means Business](#) and [Trust Pays](#) - undertaken by IpsMori and YouGov have demonstrated a strong link between the sharing of UK culture internationally and benefits for the UK economy. European programmes make a contribution to this, where they support UK institutions' and arts organisations'

international agendas. However, national and devolved governments and national cultural institutions (including the British Council) remain the best placed level of government to support and champion such the internationalisation of their national arts and cultural sectors.

Do you think the EU should do more, or less in relation to culture and why?

The British Council believes that the EU should continue with its current level of activity without major change. Either an expansion or a diminution of its role in this area would be detrimental to the UK's national interest. This is because current programmes are effective and provide excellent support to the UK and its cultural institutions and organisations.

The EU currently also plays a helpful role in terms of promoting culture as a component in relations with third party parts of the world. The growing realisation in EU Institutions that culture is an essential element for socio economic development as well as political reforms is to be welcomed. We believe that Culture and Development should be a focus of the 2013-20 EU external aid programme.

What are the benefits or disadvantages of directing funding through the EU rather than national arrangements?

We believe that the level at which cultural funding is channelled should be decided by the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore cultural funding should primarily be directed via the current arrangements, with no significant changes.

Have you noticed any change in EU activity or emphasis since the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and is this welcome?

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What other areas of EU competence or activity impact on your sector and how?

The arts and cultural sector is also heavily affected by the EU competences for the Internal Market: Free Movement of Persons. This is an important area of competence for the EU and enables the free flow of artistic talent and ideas around the European Union. This supports a wider knowledge and familiarity with UK culture in other member states with significant economic and soft power benefits. It also enables UK institutions to attract the best artistic talent to work with and inspire UK artists and institutions. This supports the quality, richness and diversity of the UK cultural sector as well as making a major contribution to the UK economy.

The sector is also affected by the rules regarding State Aid. We strongly support the current ability of the Commission to be able to allow exemptions from the State Aid requirements in the area of culture. We would support a further strengthening of exemptions in this area.

What international bodies or arrangements are important to your sector beyond the EU?

The British Council works closely with a number of other international bodies. These include arts and cultural institutions in other member states, ministries of culture in EU countries and around the world. We also work with other European bodies such as the [European National Institutes of Culture](#) (EUNIC) of which the British Council is a member. Beyond the EU we also have strong working relationships with a wide range of other international bodies working in this field from the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Commonwealth Secretariat, to UNESCO and United Nations Alliance of Civilisations.

How could the EU coordinate its activity in these areas of competence to greater effect?

There should be greater coordination between the EU funding programmes in the culture sector and the otherwise unrelated cultural activities that Member States undertake in countries outside the EU. This could be achieved by involving EUNIC in an advisory role to the External Action Service and/or the Commission.

Any other comments?

The Commission and the European External Action Service are currently reviewing options for culture and external relations of the EU. The British Council would strongly recommend that the EU should support cultural exchange through independent, autonomous agencies (e.g. EUNIC and its members) rather than creating a cultural relations function within the EEAS .