



British Council  
APPG



# The value of international experience, skills and connections for young people in the UK

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## 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

In gathering the evidence for this inquiry and report, the APPG has heard from an unprecedented number of leading organisations across the UK – including educators, researchers, academics and above all young people themselves, who are the key to unlocking the potential of Global Britain.

The clear thread running through all of these submissions is that young people from all corners of the UK are hungry for the kind of international skills, opportunities and experiences that will allow both them and the country to flourish.

Having access to international and intercultural skills improves the life chances of young people, and international experiences help to boost their confidence and interpersonal skills. In turn, this helps to lift communities and create new and exciting opportunities for the country.

In short, ensuring young people have the opportunities to explore, experience, understand and contribute to the wider world, as this report demonstrates, is not only in the interests of young people themselves, but of the whole country as well.

However, access to these opportunities is uneven. Too many of our young people – particularly at an early age – do not have the chance to gain the international skills or forge the global connections that will allow them and Global Britain to flourish. As the Prime Minister stated, the mission to level up the UK is not only ‘morally right’ but is also essential if we are to allow our people and country ‘to fulfil their potential’.

For these reasons, the APPG wishes to see the Government work closely with all sectors to see **international skills and connections embedded in formal and non-formal learning**, with teachers and practitioners supported – from their training onwards – so that they can ensure children and young people have the skills and confidence to go out and be the ambassadors for Global Britain that the UK needs.

As part of this, the APPG recommends a **comprehensive Languages Strategy**, learning from best practice around the world, so that we can communicate with the world, create new opportunities for the UK, and broaden our national horizons and ambition.

The APPG believes that the Government must dedicate itself to this task, **utilising the expertise** of organisations like the British Council and others in their Internationalism Alliance.

Finally, the APPG calls on the Government to develop a **cross governmental strategy** and unit to ensure effective working, which will work to make sure young people acquire the international skills British businesses and our diplomatic networks need to truly fulfil the promise of Global Britain.

As we join others in our efforts to build back better at home, we submit our recommendations to ensure that our international capabilities can meet the UK’s ambitions, both now and in the future.

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



**John Baron MP**  
APPG Chairman

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Opportunities to connect internationally, experience life abroad and access internationally transferable skills raises the aspirations, confidence and attainment of young people in the UK.<sup>1</sup> An international experience, whether delivered virtually or through overseas travel, is recognised as an accelerator - re-engaging and fast tracking even some of the most disadvantaged young people on their journey to education, training or employment.<sup>2</sup> It also supports community cohesion at home by fostering greater understanding of difference and by building the confidence of young people.<sup>3</sup> This prepares them for study and work which will require a global mindset and the intercultural competence to work in diverse teams, regardless of their field.

At a time when the UK is re-imagining its place in the world, what benefit does 'Global Britain' bring back to the UK, not only to those living in our biggest, most globalised cities or to our national GDP, but to towns and regions across the UK striving to make prosperous and cohesive places to study, work and live? If we are to unleash the potential of our young people we must give them the skills, connections, opportunities and mindset necessary to do this by ensuring that the UK remains a global player, with increased influence in bilateral and multilateral fora on trade,

research, security and other key international issues. But at present this benefit is not always evenly distributed across the UK. As the need for foreign language skills and global competence becomes more important, opportunities to develop those skills are diminishing for many young people yet they are even more important for those who do not have opportunities to experience the world provided by their families or carers.<sup>4</sup> Failing to provide these experiences to less advantaged young people exacerbates inequalities, as children from wealthier backgrounds develop the confidence, social and cultural capital that will help them progress more easily.

The APPG believes that if we are to truly level up the whole of the UK we should ensure equal access to international skills, connections and opportunities, allowing the whole of the UK to benefit from the ambitions of Global Britain.

**The APPG therefore calls for all young people to have access to international skills and opportunities, and that the expertise of the British Council and similar organisations should be utilised to deliver this, with a particular focus on delivering for the most disadvantaged parts of the UK.**

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<sup>1</sup> Livingstone et al (2018), *British Council Schools Programmes in Scotland: An Impact Study*, University of Glasgow, <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/180725/>

<sup>2</sup> This was consistently referenced, particularly by youth services supporting young people at risk of falling out of education or training. For example, the Inside Out Programme, Northern Ireland

<sup>3</sup> Evidence was provided by many school and youth programmes, including Poplars Farm Primary School, Bradford, England, Durham County Council and VSO.

Detailed evaluation reports are available through Results and Publications, Erasmus+ Youth in Action, <https://www.researchyouth.eu/results-erasmus-youth-in-action>

<sup>4</sup> Collen, Ian, *Language Trends 2021*, British Council <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/language-trends-2021>.

The APPG calls on the Government to:

- **Support Community Hubs** to bring together education, the arts, non-formal learning and business stakeholders to identify the skills needed to realise the potential of Global Britain, and to support engagement with young people through careers advice and inspirational role models and to **introduce financial incentives for businesses to support international exchange for apprentices and trainees.**
- **Support the British Council and other FE Sector bodies to fund and broker partnerships for FE institutions with international peers and employers.**
- Offer **international opportunities in the national curriculum**, supported by **teacher training**, and consider how **Ofsted** can further incentivise international skills and connections.
- **Institute a National Languages Strategy**, learning from global best practice and forging international partnerships, supported digitally, to enhance learning.
- Set an aspiration for **ensuring all young people have access to international experience and skills before leaving school.** This should include digital elements and virtual classroom connections.
- **Ensure all schools have access to a safe and secure digital platform to facilitate international partnerships**, with

the British Council able to offer its expertise through programmes such as *Connecting Classrooms* and the *International School Awards*

- Build on the strong platform of existing **outward mobility schemes by expanding their scope and including funded reciprocal arrangements.** Provision for the inclusion of professional exchange and youth groups to ensure young people engaged in non-formal education also have access to international connections and skills. Existing practices around targeted grants should be expanded and viewed as the model for future programmes.
- **Foster better cross-Government and sectoral coordination.** The APPG recommends the creation of a Whitehall Unit to support cross-government coordination on the provision of international skills in support of domestic and foreign policy priorities.
- The APPG further calls for **increased support for the UK Internationalism Alliance**, supported by the British Council, to aid in the sharing of expertise and facilitation of local, national and overseas collaboration.

# INTRODUCTION

In the last year, two debates have loomed large in our political discourse: Britain's future role in the world as we face major global challenges, and tackling the UK's economic and social divides to ensure no community or individual is 'left behind'. Both are fundamental to the future of our society and will affect the lives of future generations. While they seem to be on opposite sides of the policy debate – international and domestic – they are fundamentally linked.

Over the past year we have experienced how global threats and challenges inevitably affect us all – from Wuhan to Wales, Teesside to Tunisia, Bolton to Brazil, Peterborough to Poland – as well as how international collaboration and global networks are needed to tackle them.

For the UK to flourish and prosper in the century to come it must be in a position to compete and succeed internationally. To do this and to realise the full potential of Global Britain and the British people, we should not leave anyone behind.

However, there are concerns that the pandemic has caused the 'disadvantage gap' to widen.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, we are preparing future generations for jobs that don't exist yet, and this presents a huge challenge to children and young people and those that support them.<sup>6</sup> This risks strengthening the cycle of inequality and hindering UK economic

development just as we need our towns and regions to recover from the pandemic. In this report, the British Council APPG argues that the UK must support the next generation to ensure they have the skills and experiences to succeed in the wider world. This will not only improve the life chances of these young people, lifting up their communities, but will create champions and ambassadors for a new globally-minded UK to support government ambitions to sustain and strengthen the UK's invisible, but vital, chain of soft power.

The British Council has a unique track record of contributing to this by supporting international exchange in formal and non-formal education and the arts over the last 80 years. In 2019 it partnered with The Prince's Trust to establish the Internationalism Alliance,<sup>7</sup> a group of more than 80 organisations committed to improving the life chances of children and young people in the UK through international and intercultural opportunities. Last year, the British Council APPG's inquiry *Influence and the Integrated Review: Opportunities for Britain's Global Vision* called for the government to place Soft Power at the heart of the Integrated Review and the UK's approach to the world.<sup>8</sup> The report celebrated the UK's considerable assets of culture, education, media, sport and tourism and highlighted the opportunities for an ambitious *Global Britain* to support our national and global prosperity, while demonstrating

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<sup>5</sup> Riordan, Sally et al, *Against the Odds: achieving greater progress for secondary students facing socio-economic disadvantage*, Social Mobility Commission, 2021, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/997897/Against\\_the\\_odds\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/997897/Against_the_odds_report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented yet. *Future of Work: Forecasting Emerging Technologies' Impact On Work In the Next Era of Human-Machine Partnerships*, Institute for the Future/Dell Technologies, 2017

<https://www.delltechnologies.com/en-us/perspectives/realizing-2030.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/work/partner/internationalism-alliance>

<sup>8</sup> *Influence and the Integrated Review: Opportunities for Britain's Global Vision*, British Council APPG Inquiry, 2020

[https://appg.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/influence\\_and\\_the\\_integrated\\_review.pdf](https://appg.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/influence_and_the_integrated_review.pdf)

UK leadership in responding to global challenges.

Here, we look a little closer to home and consider what 'Global Britain' means to individuals and communities across the UK, and what we need to achieve domestically to meet our international ambitions. We have focused on young people as they are not only the greatest asset that the UK has, but they will also be most affected by the policy decisions we make today.

### **What do we mean by international connections and skills?**

Defining what we mean by international connections and skills is important as a first step towards improving them. Respondents to our inquiry referred to **intercultural competence**: a combination of attitudes, behaviours and skills that enable collaboration between people of different countries and cultures. This includes developing global networks that often stay with a young person throughout their lives, as well as the ability to understand and work with people of different background or cultures. International skills - in particular language skills, but also knowledge of geographical contexts and cultures, or specific industry or subject knowledge - equip young people with a degree of fluency to work in a global economy. Evidence illustrated the diverse ways in which educators and youth leaders can equip young people with these skills, which fell broadly into two complementary strands:

- **International mobility**: a period of time spent overseas engaging with another society, language and culture, for example through study, voluntary work, employment or self-organised travel

- **International experience at home**: collaborating with people of other countries and cultures living within the UK or through virtual connections with people overseas.

In all the evidence we reviewed, experiential learning through intercultural encounters with people of different countries and cultures was critical. The value of reflection and analysis of the skills and perspectives learned through these experiences was also deemed valuable.

The most impressive examples illustrated how mobility and at home experiences mutually support and enhance each other to provide sustained engagement for the young people involved.



## BENEFIT TO UK

There is an overwhelming evidence base which illustrates the value that international experience for young people has on the UK as a whole.

The **business community** is calling for a workforce with the skills to drive the UK economy in a global marketplace. Research has been able to quantify the economic loss to the UK due to poor languages skills at about £48bn a year, or 3.5% of GDP.<sup>9</sup> This loss is not only for big business: without the resources to access a global workforce or costly translation services, SMEs are even more in need of intercultural and language skills to develop the export markets they need to survive and thrive.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to higher education, **graduates** with global perspectives contribute to intercultural understanding in the companies they join, and navigate the complexity of international and intercultural teams more easily.<sup>11</sup> UK graduates need to be able to work across national borders, manage complex international and intercultural relationships, and understand global aspects of the world of work. *'At a time when competition amongst universities to provide the best student experience for potential undergraduates is at an all-time high, programmes such as Study Abroad allow students to gain*

*independence and increase their resilience and employability.'*<sup>12</sup>

But the value of international skills is not limited to graduate employment. Resilience, adaptability and intercultural awareness are equally important for roles at all levels across UK industries, some of which do not exist yet,<sup>13</sup> and some of which are vital to bring economic development to the UK's 'left behind' regions.

Opportunities for international exchange, and particularly international work placements – even of short duration – can be tremendous value in **vocational learning**. These experiences develop the same intercultural skills that are so important, as well as technical skills relating to disciplines ranging from hospitality through to engineering and construction.<sup>14</sup> Where strong international exchange is embedded in vocational learning, leaders cited not only benefit to individual employment outcomes, but the economic benefit to local businesses that can draw on international expertise, and even direct inward investment for key industries.

For example, the strategic development of international partnerships in digital courses by DN Colleges Group in Doncaster and North Lindsey led to securing external funding of £1.5m that

<sup>9</sup> Foreman-Peck, J and Wang, Yi, *The Costs to the UK of Language Deficiencies as a Barrier to UK Engagement in Exporting: A Report to UK Trade & Investment*, Cardiff Business School, 2013 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/309899/Costs\\_to\\_UK\\_of\\_language\\_deficiencies\\_as\\_barrier\\_to\\_UK\\_engagement\\_in\\_exporting.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/309899/Costs_to_UK_of_language_deficiencies_as_barrier_to_UK_engagement_in_exporting.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Tibrewal, A, LO-C 30 Report: Role of Languages in International Performance for UK SMEs, Aston Business School, 2021, <https://atc.org.uk/research-and-initiatives/lo-c-30-report/>

<sup>11</sup> Kammerer, A et al, *Creating Global Citizens: The AFS Effect (The Impact of an AFS Exchange on Life and*

*Career: A Report on a Global AFS Alumni Survey)*, AFS, 2019, <https://www.afsusa.org/blog/alumni-articles/read-the-new-creating-global-citizens-the-afs-effect-report/>

<sup>12</sup> Newcastle University, England

<sup>13</sup> *Realizing 2030: A Divided Vision of the Future*, Institute for the Future/Dell Technologies, <https://www.delltechnologies.com/en-us/perspectives/realizing-2030.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Submissions from the TVET sector were unanimous in this view, including Association of Colleges, Burton and South Derbyshire College, College Development Network, Colleges Wales, Gower College, Grimsby Institute, and South Eastern Regional College.

directly supports an investment priority for the region.<sup>15</sup>

*Scotland's vocational sector has taken a lead position in challenging the perceived international value of the education sector as an export in and of itself, but also as an 'enabling sector' that fosters the skills, innovation and networks the UK needs to excel globally.*<sup>16</sup>

While extensive research and existing studies have already evidenced the value of international skills to the UK national economy, we received compelling submissions translating this **value to regional and local priorities for economic and social development.** Business Durham reported that *'[school leavers] lack both language skills and intercultural skills in a growing service sector and tourism economy. There is a gap in the hospitality sector staffing which had been filled by hospitality workers from other parts of Europe.'*<sup>17</sup> Recognising the skills required for post-industrial towns and regions to pivot to new economies, and meeting those, must be a priority for the UK as a whole to feel the benefit of economic recovery.

*In NI, the Department for the Economy report A 10X Economy (A summary of the economic vision for a decade of innovation) is the economic vision to lead to better jobs with better wages and an improvement in people's quality of life. It also aims to position Northern Ireland amongst the elite small open economies in the world. This policy aims to bring innovation, life chances and wellbeing together to drive economic policy. International experiences for young people, especially those with low qualifications and low skills, can contribute to this policy.*<sup>18</sup>

International exchange does not only prepare young people for jobs. Exposure to new cultures and ideas generates curiosity and innovation, **driving entrepreneurship and inward investment as well.**

*'When he came back [from an overseas placement] his work was totally different to what everyone else was doing and because of that he got more commissions and more work because people saw his [work] as totally unique.'*<sup>19</sup>

SME start-ups from technical and vocational (TVET) graduates are far ranging: one health and social care alumnus of Petroc college in Devon set up a Forest School based on approaches learned during a work placement in Sweden, creating a thriving business and employment opportunities for the area.<sup>20</sup>

Contributions from the **creative sector** also emphasised the importance of

<sup>15</sup> Association of Colleges, UK

<sup>16</sup> College Development Network, Scotland

<sup>17</sup> Durham County Council, England

<sup>18</sup> Bytes, Northern Ireland Regional Voluntary Organisations, Northern Ireland

<sup>19</sup> Crafts Council, UK

<sup>20</sup> Association of Colleges, UK

attracting diverse talent to a global industry in which the UK excels. *'Film is an international business. In 2019, UK qualifying films earned a record worldwide gross of \$10.3 billion (25% of the global box office) [...]. The pipeline for UK filmmaking talent starts with young people, and the BFI is committed to supporting young people learn about film, and develop the confidence and the necessary skills to build a career in film in the UK and internationally.'*<sup>21</sup> In this way, by giving young people international skills and connections we boost the attractiveness of the UK, not only to investors but also to the best and brightest from around the world.

International exchange also makes an important **contribution to local economies**. International students at UK universities bring in a net value of over £20bn to the UK, with each Parliamentary constituency seeing an average of £31.3m net economic benefit from these students.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, international students, whose fees are uncapped, subsidise the costs of educating UK students and the vital research universities undertake. The cross-subsidy for research alone is estimated to be around £1.4bn per year for the UK. However, the economic impact of international exchange in *all* sectors is tangible and impressive. School visits from France and Germany alone numbered about 750,000 school pupils per year prior to Covid-19. In vocational education too *'the attraction of learners to the local community [in Burton and South Derbyshire] brings an additional £1m positive economic impact to the town through procurement of accommodation, localised trips and visits, retail spend and other associated purchasing with local suppliers and*

*businesses.'*<sup>23</sup> This brings not only valuable purchasing power, it also generates a sense of pride and community cohesion as whole communities become local ambassadors, particularly in towns and regions that see little inward tourism.

The **alumni networks** created by inward and outward exchange also create longstanding opportunities for the UK. Unfortunately, there is little resource outside of the Higher Education sector to foster that support, despite the huge potential it offers. As the UK's global reputation for vocational and English-language training in the College and accredited language school sectors thrive, so too does a global community of influential alumni, all of whom retain an understanding and connection to diverse communities across the UK.

*Edinburgh College's workshops for international groups of college principals and City of Glasgow College's training for Vietnamese government officials reviewing their social security legislation [...] - professional 'alumni', together with the large numbers of visiting ministerial delegations that colleges can receive, could present an opportunity to leverage more senior influence internationally, provided the data can be captured and shared appropriately'*<sup>24</sup>

The **societal impact** of international connections is also far-reaching, benefitting both the UK's global standing as a force for good and local cohesion. *'Intercultural skills not only enhance employability, they play a wider role in helping make diverse societies work*

<sup>21</sup> British Film Institute (BFI), UK

<sup>22</sup> Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International (2018), The costs and benefits of international students by parliamentary constituency <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Economic-benefits-of->

international-students-by-constituency-Final-11-01-2018.pdf

<sup>23</sup> Burton & South Derbyshire College (BSDC), England

<sup>24</sup> Colleges Development Network (CDN), Scotland

well.<sup>25</sup> An increased understanding of global issues and the ability to connect with people of difference fosters community dialogue and social action at home.<sup>26</sup>

*'Learning about different people's cultures can lead to less racism because then you can understand them better.'*<sup>27</sup>

This is equally important in supporting diverse communities that may not interact: *'Intercultural dialogue addresses the often negative stereotyping that can exist on one's own doorstep or within other areas of the world'*<sup>28</sup>, as well as monocultural environments that can often feel isolated from the world.<sup>29</sup>

While local and national investment has sought to highlight the cultural heritage and attractiveness of the UK's nations and regions over the years, with initiatives from town twinning programmes through to UK Cities of Culture and international events, contributors spoke of the missed opportunities when local schools and youth organisations are not involved.

*'We [Wicked Wales International Film Festival] are a relatively small festival in North Wales but with a global reach. In the last 5 years we have had over 100 international visitors from the Network to our Festival, all to Wales for the first time and many to the UK for the first time.'*<sup>31</sup>

Some respondents expressed concern that new visa and entry arrangements could limit the number of **overseas volunteers that play a vital role in supporting local UK charities and services**, if a series of new trade and mobility agreements are not struck. Losing these volunteers would also mean the loss of an opportunity to promote understanding of difference in communities vulnerable through disadvantage or conflict.<sup>30</sup> Respondents drew attention to the fact that **overseas volunteering** continues to be dominated by individuals from more affluent backgrounds, while at the same time providing some of the most valuable and tangible work experience, and that more than 40% of returning young volunteers go on to contribute their expertise to good causes in their home communities.<sup>31</sup>

*'In March 2020, Molly, 22 [...] set up a food delivery service, Molly's Meals, to support those most vulnerable during the pandemic. Molly says it was her International Citizenship Service [ICS] placement on a youth employment project in Zanzibar, Tanzania that gave her the skills to help in her own community in Kenilworth, Warwickshire, and we were delighted when Molly received a UK Points of Light award from the UK government for this work during the pandemic.'*<sup>32</sup>

Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) also reminded the APPG of the UK's heritage and continuing pride in its expertise for **development aid and assistance**,

<sup>25</sup> Experiment in Living (EIL), UK

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> A young person contributing to the British Council's *Youth Conversations: How to increase access to international experiences at home and abroad?*, UKYouth, MyLifeMySay and British Council, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Poplars Farm Primary School, Bradford, England

<sup>29</sup> Education Authority Northern Ireland

<sup>30</sup> Poplars Farm Primary School, Bradford, England

<sup>31</sup> Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), UK

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

warning that we can't take this position for granted. People from more advantaged backgrounds are over-represented in voluntary work, and consequently in the charitable and voluntary sectors overall - to the point

that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are often seen negatively. This does not bode well for our professionalism in the charitable and development sectors.<sup>33</sup>

*ICS alumni are the community, business and political leaders of tomorrow, and by volunteering together and learning from each other through ICS, have created new bonds that span the world, which will shape Britain's trade, aid and political links with countries in the Global South for years to come. Without a government-funded international volunteering programme, [...] programmes will proliferate [... that send] young British people out into the world to volunteer on programmes of little value, and in some cases of active harm, to communities in the Global South.<sup>34</sup>*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The APPG recommends:

- **Financial incentives could be introduced for businesses to support international exchange.** International connections can be built around supply chains which will allow the UK to learn from the best practice of others around the world.
- Supporting **community hubs** that bring together educators, youth services, business and community leaders to develop international connections, and to identify the skills businesses need to realise the potential for Global Britain.
- Supporting the British Council and other FE Sector bodies like the UK Skills Partnership to **fund and broker partnerships for FE institutions** with international peers and employers, initially working on areas of mutual interest such as developing curriculum in high value courses, especially T-Levels.

<sup>33</sup> Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1a7042cb-e678-11ea-ad25-01aa75ed71a1>, The Inside Out Programme

<sup>34</sup> Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), UK. The UK Government-funded International Citizen Service creates overseas volunteering opportunities for young people aged 18-35. <https://www.vsointernational.org/volunteering/>



# THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS ON INDIVIDUALS

Educators, youth workers and young people testified unanimously to the life-changing benefits of international connections at every phase of development. The opportunity to work or learn alongside people of other cultures and countries builds confidence, self-reliance, motivation, empathy, critical thinking and team working. More tangible skills, from foreign language acquisition through to knowledge of country and world contexts and specific industry skills, also contribute to higher attainment levels across the curriculum and better employability outcomes for young people.

The **Higher Education** sector has consistently been able to demonstrate the importance of internationalism to study programmes. Students benefitting from a period of study abroad achieve higher degree outcomes, are more likely to be employed and will have higher starting salaries than their peers.<sup>35</sup> A period of study abroad also has a significant impact on a student's foreign language skills and attitude to continuing use of the language on return.<sup>36</sup> The benefits are more pronounced in students from disadvantaged backgrounds,<sup>37</sup> and universities have made efforts to ensure

opportunities and funding are targeted at 'widening participation' cohorts.

International opportunities in **school** contribute to raising attainment and to mitigating the impact of poverty by raising aspirations, widening horizons, engaging and motivating learners. Moreover, short-term school visits for pupils are significant, supporting linguistic proficiency and shaping attitudes towards international experience that influence transition into secondary education and beyond.<sup>38</sup>

In **vocational training**, 100% of students returning from a work placement overseas reported improved confidence, and 91% return with improved technical skills in their field of study, often acquiring vital knowledge, be that in engineering, health and social care or digital industries, that bring a critical advantage to future employers.<sup>39</sup> Yet vocational courses are much less likely to include an international element which, the evidence would suggest, would have tangible benefits for the individuals involved, their future work and their prospects.

Some of the most compelling narratives came from the **non-formal and voluntary sector**, which often provides a lifeline for children and young people at greater risk of falling out of formal education or training. A review of International Youth Work by the Northern Ireland government rated it as particularly effective in meeting all six 'capability outcomes: Enhanced personal capabilities; Development of positive relations with others; Development of thinking and life skills; Increased participation; Active

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<sup>35</sup> *Study Abroad*, British Council, 2018

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> GenerationUK Programme, British Council, UK and China

<sup>38</sup> This argument was presented by most educators, including UK Global Learning Association, Durham County Council and Cardiff Council, Wales.

<sup>39</sup> Association of Colleges, UK

citizenship and Improved health and well-being.<sup>40</sup>

Whether in formal or non-formal learning environments, many contributors drew on **creativity and sport** as universal languages that connect young people, regardless of language or background, and can support cross-cultural collaboration across the curriculum. Outreach programmes from both prestigious national institutions as well as grass roots community groups demonstrated how connecting with difference through the arts inspires even some of the most demotivated children and young people to engage and achieve higher outcomes.

While most respondents emphasised that nothing can replace the transformative experience of a physical overseas visit, equal importance was given to **international experience at home** through inward visits, connecting across communities in the UK, studying alongside overseas students, and virtual programmes as essential components of an international 'eco-system' for children and young people. These bring depth and substance to sustain engagement beyond the 'one-off' overseas visit. They also dramatically widen participation for those unable to travel – creating invaluable experiences in their own right as well as raising aspirations and motivation for future opportunities. In addition, inward visits empower young people to act as ambassadors for their own communities and help to establish equitable learning partnerships with their peers overseas.

*Bethnal Primary School in Hackney takes year 5 pupils to their partner school in Madrid every year. They report that it has resulted in the pupils developing leadership skills as a result of the visits. They begin to act as mentors to the following year's group who will take part in the visit and help prepare them. They also act as ambassadors and speak to the year 5s about why they should take part. This is a school in a deprived area where it can be difficult to motivate pupils. The school also reports that the visit has had a positive impact on behaviour, not only in Spanish lessons, but also across the board. Pupils have continued to communicate with their partners long after the visits. This is helped by this relationship being reciprocal, with their partner school bringing pupils to visit each year as well. The school also feels that it provides good value for money for the UK taxpayer as it reduces the amount of intervention that the school has to carry in terms of*

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<sup>40</sup> Northern Ireland's framework of six capability outcomes: Enhanced personal capabilities; Development of positive relations with others; Development of thinking and life skills; Increased

participation; Active citizenship; Improved health and well-being, (Education Authority Northern Ireland)

*behaviour management and in learning catch up.*<sup>41</sup>

Overwhelmingly, contributors spoke of the currency of **social and cultural capital** created by international experiences, arming young people with the experiences and narratives that help them gain access to training, higher education and employment. At every stage in life, *‘international connections enable greater resilience to difference and [...] develop people’s ability to*

*engage with people who are different from them*<sup>43</sup>, helping to foster more

cohesive communities in the UK. For those whose life experiences are narrowed by disadvantage and lack of relatable role models to inspire them, this is all the more important in addressing inequalities between them and their more affluent peers.

*‘International experience helps youngsters to stand out on application forms and at interview. “Tell us about a challenge you have faced and how you overcame it” is an interview question that will often find the student reaching for their international experiences.’*<sup>42</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The APPG recommends: **Offering international skills in the curriculum**

- The APPG recommends that **teacher training and continuous professional development** include modules on building international partnerships across the curriculum
- By 2030 **Ofsted** should consider the quality of international skills acquired by students in school and college ratings. When granting outstanding status, consideration should also be given to the quality of international partnerships. The British Council **International School Award** could be adopted and expanded as a mechanism to support this.

<sup>41</sup> UK Global Learning Association

<sup>42</sup> UK Global Learning Association

<sup>43</sup> Round Table with British Council Interim Chief Executive, Kate Ewart-Biggs (Chatham House), April 2021

# LANGUAGES

A proficiency or confidence in languages is perhaps one of the most concrete and identifiable learning outcomes of international partnerships, and educators were keen to highlight that opportunities to connect with their peers overseas, in particular through an experience in another country, motivates language learning, improves proficiency and, in many cases, ignites the spark to learn one or more foreign languages.<sup>44</sup>

Evidence provided to this inquiry was unanimous in its call for something to be done about foreign language capability in the UK. This has been the subject of many research studies, by the British Council, the British Academy and others, as well as an earlier parliamentary inquiry led by the APPG for Modern Foreign Languages,<sup>45</sup> and many contributors drew on excellent evidence from these sources to make a compelling case for an urgent review of language learning in the UK.

The APPG are concerned about the growing **disparity in language learning** between the independent and state sectors, which increases even further in schools with higher proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>46</sup> This is contributing to a vicious circle of decline in our schools and universities, as fewer graduates in languages leads to eventual closure of university language schools and stems

the flow of language graduates into teaching.

Young people joined educators in stressing the need for a **cultural shift in our approach to languages**. Where languages provision is available, students are often discouraged by what is perceived to be a highly academic subject where qualifications are proven to be harder to achieve.<sup>47</sup> This can be a greater obstacle to pupils already at a disadvantage in accessing further or higher education. This is more disheartening for disadvantaged pupils who may not recognise the value of their **additional languages spoken at home**.

*'The lack of visibility, recognition and support for languages other than English spoken at home and in communities, is damaging for individuals who in reality have an advantage from speaking another language and the cultural awareness and understanding that comes with this. This should be seen as an asset but is rarely treated as such.'*<sup>48</sup>

Contributions from the cultural and non-formal sectors highlighted the importance of **celebrating the UK's rich linguistic diversity** and to promote language learning outside of the formal curriculum. It was noted, for example, that *'short film motivates children and young people to engage with foreign language and foreign language cultures in ways that few other classroom experiences do.'*<sup>49</sup> Similarly, both further

<sup>44</sup> *Born Global* is a British Academy project on language skills for employability, trade and business, see <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/born-global/>

<sup>45</sup> National Recovery Programme for Languages:

A framework proposal from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages, 2019

<https://nationalrecoverylanguages.weebly.com/>

<sup>46</sup> Language Trends, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> *Youth Conversations: How to increase access to international experiences at home and abroad?*, UKYouth, MLMS and British Council, 2021

<sup>48</sup> International Newcastle  
<sup>49</sup> British Film Institute (BFI)

and higher education submissions highlighted the need to encourage extra-curricular language learning that can eventually support **sector specific vocabulary**, and develop life-long skills for graduates who progress into international business or research careers.

*'Vocational learners who undertake work placements overseas [...] would benefit from contextualised language learning e.g. learning the appropriate vocabulary for working in a hair & beauty salon or an engineering workshop provides learners with a compelling reason to learn a language.'*<sup>50</sup>

*'I honestly do think there needs to be a celebration of people who speak their native languages, so people feel comfortable, rather than being made fun of.'*<sup>51</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The APPG recommends **establishing a National Languages Strategy**, which should consider:

- which languages are prioritised in the curriculum;
- how digital connections can support language learning and celebrate linguistic diversity;
- how to prioritise international exchange in language learning from primary school onwards
- Recognition and celebration of linguistic diversity
- The role of languages in technical and vocational training

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<sup>50</sup> Colleges Wales

<sup>51</sup> Young Craft Citizen Alumni, interviewed by the Crafts Council UK



# THE POWER OF DIGITAL

*'When the world shut down, we linked up.'*<sup>52</sup>

*'Nothing beats the power of face to face'* was a consistent message from respondents and experts, however the APPG were impressed by the extensive role of digital in international exchange as a powerful way of sustaining and strengthening engagement in the longer term.

Digital connections have, by necessity, been the only way of sustaining international engagement through the pandemic. However, for many, turning to international was far from an add on. Many experienced the heightened sense of a global community sharing the same crisis through digital, even while face to face engagement was impossible.

Those with established international partners and programmes were grateful for **an immediate digital resource** to animate and enrich remote learning, but also credited experiences in international digital partnerships for their ability to transition swiftly during lockdown. Many saw the intensified digital exchanges over the last year as having accelerated innovation and also raised the profile of international exchanges, and were keen to continue to reap the benefits post pandemic.

*'Personally, school direction and response to the pandemic has been based on international collaboration - from training staff to use blogs as a platform for sharing work tasks, to working alongside a European partner school on the use of Google Classrooms and developing live teaching. International partnership work has always looked to creative approaches to establish platforms to share pupils work, video linking and electronic communication, with distance being no barrier.'*<sup>53</sup>

Digital connections were seen by many as a **cost-effective and environmentally responsible** way of widening participation in international programmes. *'Youngsters are increasingly aware of the toll that long haul travel is taking on our climate and this factor should also be taken into account when future visits are being planned.'*<sup>54</sup> The increased use of digital is therefore driven not only by necessity, but also by its virtues.

However, while digital programmes can benefit much larger numbers of young people and provide more sustained engagement than overseas travel, experts warned that it should not be seen as a quick fix or adequate replacement for in person interaction. The **digital divide**, highlighted by the challenges of the pandemic, will, unless addressed, prevent the most disadvantaged from actively taking part. Educators, youth leaders and parents also need the reassurance of **safe and secure platforms**, as well as access to reliable technology. While a number of digital initiatives were commended, including the British Council/FCDO 'Connecting Classrooms for Global

<sup>52</sup> Link Online Learners, UK

<sup>53</sup> Poplars Farm Primary School, Bradford, England

<sup>54</sup> UK Global Learning Association

Learning' (CCGL)<sup>55</sup> programme and the relatively recent initiative from LinkOnlineLearners,<sup>56</sup> many educators argued that the EU's E-twinning<sup>57</sup> platform was a well-established, adaptable and secure platform, which they were sorry to see the UK withdraw from at the moment when it could have been of maximum use during the recent lockdowns. There was concern that it may not be financially viable for the UK to create similar digital capacity alone.

*'In 2020 we did benefit from our eTwinning projects and our learners commented on how important this contact with their friends in other countries was to their mental health. Just knowing that they were not alone, feeling stranded in their bedrooms at a computer screen, was reassuring. During Lockdown 2 they no longer had easy access to such projects and the international contact was missed by both pupils and staff.'*<sup>58</sup>

The APPG heard many examples of how virtual connections can **support more disadvantaged children and young people** who may face obstacles, or lack the confidence, to travel. Often, virtual connections, alongside connecting to peers or role models returning from an experience abroad, are the key to developing the aspiration and confidence to take part in an overseas visit. Contributors emphasised that these formative experiences should not preclude the opportunity for overseas visits in the future, which could create a 'two tier' system that only exacerbates disadvantage.

Submissions also underlined the value of digital exchange to **sustain and strengthen exchange** beyond the 'one shot' of an overseas visit and facilitate international exchange across youth outreach activities and the school curriculum. *'An Erasmus + project 'Girls into Global STEM' encouraged pupils to work with peers in other countries and come up with experiments related to climate change. Teachers reported that not only did HE and career aspirations change towards science but test results also improved.'*<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> A partnership between the British Council and the FCDO, **Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning** (CCGL) is a completely free and flexible programme open to all schools in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, enabling school partnerships between the UK and more than 30

countries across Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. <https://connecting-classrooms.britishcouncil.org/>

<sup>56</sup> Link Online Learners, UK

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm>

<sup>58</sup> Wellington School, Ayr, Scotland

<sup>59</sup> UK Global Learning Association

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The APPG recommends:

- That the Government set an aspiration for **ensuring all young people have access to international experience and skills before leaving school**. This could include digital elements and virtual classroom connections.
- That the **Government provide a safe and secure digital platform to enable virtual partnerships and programmes** across the curriculum and non-formal settings. British Council programmes like Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning and the International Schools Award could provide a model and support for this.

# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

**Economic disadvantage** remains one of the main obstacles to enabling wider participation, and contributors referred to additional financial support for a range of needs, from the cost of obtaining a first passport through to suitable clothing for the time away from home. Many young people take on caring or part-time work responsibilities that can not be abandoned, often from a young age, and certainly preventing many students from longer-term placements proposed by many funded programmes.

Often the additional travel time and cost for communities **living away from major transport hubs** is not taken into account. *'If one lives on a remote Scottish Island then the costs will be much higher than if one lives in the South East with easy access to the world via Heathrow.'*<sup>60</sup>

Submissions referenced the sometimes insurmountable costs of enabling children and young people with **disabilities or special needs** to take part in international travel. *'A colleague working with SEND pupils commented that for many of her PMLD [profound and multiple learning disability] learners, it was impossible or impractical for them to experience international travel and therefore if they could not experience*

*the wide world, the wider world had to come to them.'*

While an increased focus on grants for the most disadvantaged is to be welcomed, as is the UK's focus on increasing short term outward mobility opportunities (meaning those with caring responsibilities are more likely to be able to participate), many respondents nonetheless were clear that greater support – both in terms of finance and institutional support – will be required if the most disadvantaged communities are to be able to access international skills and opportunities.

In addition to financial poverty, **'poverty of aspiration and ambition'**<sup>61</sup> was also identified as a significant barrier for children and young people. Like many investigations into tackling the consequences of poverty,<sup>62</sup> educators brought compelling narratives to the importance of introducing young people early to a global outlook. Alumni referred to experiences from as early as primary school shaping their study and career decisions.

*'I owe a lot of my future adventures to this one experience [...]. The Link [a primary school partnership with Sub Saharan Africa] really inspired me to get out there and see the world. My university dissertation focused on perspectives of female education in rural Kenya, [...] and I must say the opportunities I had with the Link really gave me the confidence and desire to do this.'*<sup>63</sup>

Educators spoke of the need to overcome the **psychological barriers**

<sup>60</sup> Doreen Scotland, Teacher

<sup>61</sup> Durham County Council, England

<sup>62</sup> OECD reports that children have fixed their aspirations by as young as 7, often limiting those with fewer role models or wider experiences. *Envisioning the Future of Education and Jobs: Trends, data and*

*drawings*, OECD, 2019,

<https://www.oecd.org/education/Envisioning-the-future-of-education-and-jobs.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Former pupil, Plymouth Teaching School Alliance and The Plymouth Ghana Link, England

of pursuing international opportunities through interventions as early as possible in both communities and schools. *‘Even where opportunities to travel are fully funded [...], schools often find it difficult to encourage parents and carers from disadvantaged households to put their children forward for reasons not necessarily related to affordability. Reluctance to participate may stem from parents’ own lack of confidence or aspirations, a fear of the unknown, not recognising the value of international connections, or concerns their child is not independent enough to travel without close family.’*<sup>64</sup>

*‘It can be difficult to break the family tradition and convince my parents that that this experience can impact the rest of my life.’*<sup>65</sup>

Despite considerable effort to target funding and resources to widening participation in study abroad programmes, universities spoke of the **lack of preparedness** of university entrants, by which time it is often too late to overcome the psychological barriers to taking part. In fact, many psychological barriers are similar across sectors, from primary to post-16 education.

*‘40% of our students at Glasgow Caledonian University are from widening participation (disadvantaged) backgrounds. Most have part time jobs or caring responsibilities, some have never been out of their own country, lack the self-confidence to spend an extended period of time abroad, do not have family members as international travel role models etc. Yet when you provide a group experience, led by academic staff, it’s like handing a key to our students to open up their own capabilities and develop their self-confidence. We offer 5-day short-term European study trips and find a much larger proportion of students wishing to go for longer study periods abroad.’*<sup>66</sup>

Higher and further education leaders also highlighted a prevailing attitude amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds to focus on the course curriculum to the detriment of valuable international experiences. *‘The strong focus on gaining success in assessments often precludes students from less affluent and privileged backgrounds from recognising the benefits of what they perceive as ‘extra-curricular’ opportunities.’*<sup>67</sup>

*‘Young people who have been involved in our projects talk about not being limited by [...] socio economic status. They report being free to encounter and respond to situations which some people consider beyond their reach.’*<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Cardiff Council, Wales

<sup>65</sup> Young person contributing to British Council’s *Youth Conversations: How to increase access to*

*international experiences at home and abroad*, UKYouth, MyLifeMySay and British Council, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland

<sup>67</sup> Newcastle University, England

<sup>68</sup> Durham County Council



**Under-represented communities** were identified in different ways across the UK. Many reflected on a consistent trend for girls to be more interested in foreign languages and studying abroad than their male counterparts. *‘For pupils in a monocultural, white rural setting they are at a disadvantage by not being exposed to diversity.’*<sup>69</sup> In more diverse, often urban centres, **‘there is a perception amongst large portions of black and Asian student communities that accessing international experience is not for them, so challenging and overcoming that perception in a supportive manner is key.’**<sup>70</sup>

**Professional and institutional barriers** were also highlighted, with the most frequent being the lack of resources to develop and sustain international partnerships. Many long-term international programmes are rooted in **reciprocal professional exchange** and knowledge sharing. Many contributors had accessed funding for professional exchange through the Erasmus+ programme, and there was anxiety about how to sustain this without support from Central, Devolved and Local Government.

In **formal education**, teachers highlighted the need to re-think curriculum and school structures to enable international exchange to take place and – more importantly – recognise the impact it has pedagogically across the whole curriculum.

*‘The more narrow the curriculum in state schools focusing on basic skills such as numeracy and literacy, the less opportunity to have a wider holistic approach in the curriculum that connects real learning experience to the World as a normal part of everyday learning. [...] This is especially problematic in academy chains where one individual, the CEO or even the PA, can block news of an initiative from reaching dozens of academies, hundreds of staff and thousands of young people.’*<sup>71</sup>

This was also seen to have a wider impact in the state education sector, and in particular **schools in areas of multiple deprivation**. *‘Too often, socio-economic factors define the curriculum offer, with access to international skills limited to a smaller number of school leaders and education professionals across the country.’*<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, in **vocational education**, institutions do not have the same scale of international networks, partnerships and funding as their higher education counterparts that allow them to create these opportunities for their learners. The partnerships strand of Erasmus+ was used disproportionately more by further education, also a sector with higher proportions of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to higher education.<sup>72</sup>

The impact of reduced funding for **youth services** in recent years, exacerbated by the pandemic, means that most non-formal and volunteering organisations are reliant on short-term and voluntary staff. This makes it particularly challenging to foster the relationships and institutional knowledge

<sup>69</sup> Marion Mills, Teacher

<sup>70</sup> Middlesex University, England

<sup>71</sup> Heritage International School, Moldova

<sup>72</sup> GLF Schools, South East England

that are critical to sustaining international partnerships. Respondents acknowledged the value of not-for-profit organisations, including the British Council, in providing expertise in funding, international contexts, and best practice.

**Some of the recommendations for improving individual, institution or community engagement in international work were consistent across sectors and highlighted where co-ordination and engagement can make all the difference. These included:**

**Professional and institutional development:** many successful collaborations are initiated through professional exchange, and this secures sustainable partnerships that benefit more young people over time. There was concern that discontinuing professional exchange opportunities previously available will erode international engagement in the coming years. Teachers praised the approach of the British Council/FCDO Connecting Classrooms programme for enabling professional development, but it was highlighted that fewer opportunities exist in other sectors. Some suggested that the Connecting Classrooms model could be applied to more countries. Improving professional development in vocational education is a key ambition of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill and international partnerships offer a cost-effective and impactful way to achieve this.

**Access to both local and national expertise:** the ability to access pedagogical and practical expertise, as well as opportunities for public and

private funding, is essential for over-stretched professionals and under-resourced institutions. Celebrating success stories is an excellent way to encourage participation and raise awareness amongst communities, employers and funders.

Some submissions demonstrated how **cross-community engagement** that enable educators, youth leaders, and the creative community to come together with local businesses and policymakers can lead to initiatives that are directly relevant to local context or need. For example, Durham County Council have been able to create strong links between educators, employers and the local university and to highlight local business need for international skills and prepare young people with real world employment experience.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, International Newcastle has been able to bring many community interests together and celebrate the importance of Newcastle as a global city and the joy of language diversity through its excellent cultural institutions.<sup>74</sup> In all cases, local or regional initiatives that convene educators around international programmes are achieving more impact, funding and efficiency, particularly in accessing national resources, including programmes offered by the British Council. This facilitates cross sector engagement with local priorities that can drive local prosperity and support cross-government objectives beyond education, including MHCLG and BEIS. **The APPG highlight this as an untapped opportunity to widen access and increase innovation, with networks across the UK - be that town twinning initiatives, Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEP),<sup>75</sup> or**

<sup>73</sup> Durham County Council, England

<sup>74</sup> International Newcastle, England

<sup>75</sup> Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEP) are an Arts Council/DfE initiative to support children and young people to access cultural education and

experiences, and have proved a fruitful collaborative space for international and intercultural initiatives too, often as part of the British Council's Internationalism Alliance. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/working-partnership>

**major cultural and sporting initiatives like the Commonwealth Games – often providing an existing platform to work with.**

**Communicating with and for young people:** *'It's like hidden and they don't want you to know that it's there.'*<sup>76</sup> Young people stressed the need for relatable and trusted role models, whether a teacher, youth leader, or fellow student, that can encourage them to think international opportunities are for them.<sup>77</sup> Increasing the role of advisory services and relatable role models, including through careers advisory services,<sup>78</sup> in communicating the value and possibility of international opportunities for everyone is critical for those who may not be exposed to this at home.

*'At Middlesex, we have found it valuable to promote international experiences through authentic accounts related by those who have been on mobility themselves, including black and Asian students. Some students have made their own presentations and videos on their experiences, the authenticity of which augments the messaging significantly.'*<sup>79</sup>

**Opportunities for shorter-term exchanges:** particularly in higher, further and non-formal education supporting young people to overcome barriers such as caring responsibilities or loss of part time work.

**Policy and curriculum reform:** teachers in particular highlighted the need for a review of the curriculum and

schools policy in order to enable international exchange to take place. *'The more narrow the curriculum in state schools focusing on basic skills such as numeracy and literacy, the less opportunity to have a wider holistic approach in the curriculum that connects real learning experience to [...] bring the world into classrooms as a normal part of everyday learning.'*<sup>80</sup>

**More co-ordinated approaches to language learning and language policy.** *'The British Council's investment and work in Arabic and Mandarin are two examples of where this successful but it requires clear investment, leadership and a strategy.'*<sup>81</sup> Experts pointed to successful national languages strategies from former Soviet Union countries right through to the bilingual education in Wales as examples of best practice. Even more localised were initiatives like Hackney Borough Council's initiative to focus on Spanish across both primary and secondary schools, improving transition and enabling wider community initiatives celebrating success.

**Encouraging reciprocity and connecting communities 'at home':** experts that have developed equitable partnerships highlighted that reciprocal visits in to the UK widens engagement amongst the most disadvantaged by enabling international engagement to happen 'at home', leading to more confidence and raising aspirations for overseas travel. It also raises a sense of pride in local communities and support amongst local businesses and employers as they experience direct benefit of hosting overseas visitors. For institutions, reciprocal exchange is the basis for sustainable partnerships: on a

<sup>76</sup> Young Craft Citizen, interviewed by the Crafts Council, UK

<sup>77</sup> *Youth Conversations: How to increase access to international experiences at home and abroad?*, UKYouth, MLMS and British Council, 2021

<sup>78</sup> Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, Session 21-22, <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2868/publications>

<sup>79</sup> Middlesex University, England

<sup>80</sup> Heritage International School, Moldova

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

practical note, overseas institutions are less likely to support visiting UK groups if that opportunity cannot be reciprocated.

**Safe and secure digital platforms:** The provision of an efficient, accessible and safe digital platform for educators through eTwinning is exemplary. While there were excellent examples of digital engagement through other channels, from the relatively recent LinkOnlineLearners<sup>82</sup> programme through to the British Council/FDCO CCGL, few contributors could recommend an alternative approach that can easily connect practitioners from across Europe and beyond.

**Multilateral initiatives:** Many respondents highlighted challenges arising from the UK's absence from a number of European programmes, particularly Erasmus+, and the expertise built up over more than 40 years of international exchange. Respondents valued the adaptability of programmes, enabling activities across every stage of formal and non-formal education. In particular, they pointed to the continual development of best practice and sustainable partnerships through reciprocity and professional exchange opportunities, and there was concern that this will impact negatively on government priorities for the Turing programme, currently in its first year.

*'It is important [to understand] that the solution to many [...] these questions lie within the current Erasmus+ programme [...]. The challenges identified in this survey would be met by joining elements of*

*Erasmus+ without necessarily committing to the whole programme.'*<sup>83</sup>

In addition to the benefit to exchange programmes, Erasmus+ has also developed a significant body of academic and practitioner research that provides a useful resource as we build international programmes post Brexit.<sup>84</sup> Other multilateral fora were also highlighted, including the World Economic Foundation's 4.0 programme<sup>85</sup> and UNESCO's Education 2030 framework.<sup>86</sup>

Respondents consistently highlighted the **importance of building in reciprocity** for outward mobility schemes, with overseas institutions both more likely to and better able to accommodate UK outbound mobilities if UK institutions will accept an inbound mobility.

**The APPG encourages the Government to seek to replicate the benefits of these programmes, particularly funded reciprocity and professional exchange, either in new UK programmes such as the Turing Scheme or through association or membership of established programmes.**

**National policy and strategy:** Eastern European countries were praised for their successful languages strategies as well as Spain's success introducing bilingual education from primary school and upwards.

Several countries have developed successful strategies to encourage

<sup>83</sup> UK Global Learning Association

<sup>84</sup> A directory of Erasmus+ project results is available at [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects_en), studies from Youth In Action projects

are also available at

<https://www.researchyouth.net/reports/>.

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/projects/learning-4-0>

<sup>86</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4>

mobility for further- and higher education students, including Scandinavia, France, The Netherlands, Iceland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.<sup>87</sup> Bilateral agreements forged by the German Government have led to almost €40m investment in youth work exchanges.<sup>88</sup> The European Youth Work Agenda, prepared during the period of the UK's membership of the EU, provides a helpful framework in developing future provision in the non-formal sector, but examples of good practice were also drawn from as far afield as Russia and Hong Kong. Although driven by different contexts and policy needs, all of these examples are useful routes to collaboration and best practice. Closer to home, both Wales's successful national languages policy, as well as clear policy statements supporting international engagement in Wales and Scotland have motivated the education and youth sector.

Across the board, institutions pointed to the need for **increased government recognition** of the value of internationalism in education.

*'One stand-out ingredient in the achievement of high-quality international experience and connections for young people is having high-level buy-in from government at all levels – national, regional and local - and clear and consistent policy messages supporting international working in schools. [...] The UK needs clearer messaging on the value of developing international connections, and back this up with long-term funding.'*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> British Council (2018) *Study Abroad*

<sup>88</sup> Education Northern Ireland

<sup>89</sup> Cardiff Council, Wales



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The APPG calls for:

***UK outward mobility schemes should be expanded and include funded reciprocal arrangements.***

- *The APPG recommends that the Government build on the platform of the Turing Scheme, expanding **grant allocation** for the most disadvantaged students*
- *The next stage of mobility schemes could see **funded reciprocal arrangements** which will ensure the viability of schemes in new, particularly less mature, markets.*
- *The next stage of mobility schemes could also allow the **inclusion of youth projects and other non-formal educational** organisations.*
- *Further investment should also be made in programmes to allow for **reciprocal professional exchange**, as well as expanding provision for those engaged in technical education.*

## ***Better cross-Government and sectoral coordination***

- *The cross-sectoral **UK Internationalism Alliance**, supported by the British Council, could see increased financial support to facilitate the sharing of expertise, and to allow collaboration between local, regional, national and overseas practitioners. These fora could also prioritise advisory services and relatable role models – including through international alumni - for young people.*
- *A **unit should be established in the Cabinet Office** to support cross-Government coordination on the provision of International skills, helping to connect the priorities of business, the arts and cultural sectors with schools, FE and HE providers, ensuring young people have the skills the UK needs and avoiding siloed policymaking.*



## CONCLUSION

The UK has a rich and complex history of international collaboration and influence, be that in education, research, innovation, creativity or development assistance. Many of our current leaders in diplomacy, research, trade or the arts cite early international connections - whether through school or sports, youth clubs or music groups - as the key influence in their future careers.

But whether in school, vocational training or in non-formal learning programmes, opportunities for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged or isolated parts of the UK, are scarce. This is not only holding many children and young people back from their full potential, but it stifles creativity and growth for the UK as a whole. Furthermore, we are at a time when it is even more important that we increase equity of opportunity across the UK if we are to achieve our ambition for all of the UK to share the benefits of increased wellbeing and prosperity we can build through the networks, partnership, reciprocal investment, trade and the enrichment of our cultural life on the world stage.

International and intercultural connections should be part of every young person's development, and it is particularly important for those who are unable to access those opportunities because of their background or where they live. In consulting the wide range of respondents to this inquiry, the APPG found that there is no single solution to achieving this, but that Government investment and recognition is required for systemic support to the institutions and communities that support children and young people.

The APPG's recommendations provide the foundations upon which we can build a truly internationally connected UK. The ultimate ambition should be that every young person in the UK has the opportunity to develop international skills and make international connections before they leave school, that they can pursue in non-formal learning and further or higher education. The APPG believes organisations like the British Council should focus on enabling these opportunities for the most disadvantaged communities, using its expertise, networks and knowledge to develop best practice.

A key part of meeting this ambition is through the curriculum and teacher training. If teachers are supported and recognised for fostering international connections, and the kind of international skills that young people will need in the modern economy of a truly Global Britain, we will be able to not only unlock their potential, but also that of the country.

That means we must ensure our languages strategy is focused on the languages young people will need in the twenty-first century, and that it makes the most of the potential in international connections.

This is why the Government should provide all schools with a safe and secure digital platform, allowing them to forge connections around the world and just as the APPG calls for an expansion in virtual connectivity, so we encourage the Government to build on the platform of the Turing Scheme, replicating what worked in Erasmus and other historic programmes, and building out to the wider world. Future mobility programmes could continue the focus on grants for the least advantaged, and could be expanded to include funded reciprocal arrangements, something all the more important as the next stage of UK mobility schemes seeks to build

connections with new markets around the world.

And to aid in this task, the APPG calls for support for bodies like the British Council Internationalism Alliance, which can share expertise, utilise existing networks and identify opportunities for further collaboration. In addition to this, the APPG also recommends that the Government create a discrete Whitehall unit, potentially based in the Cabinet Office, to ensure a unified cross-government approach, bringing together education, arts, cultural and business stakeholders so that we ensure international connections deliver both for our young people as well as the country as a whole.

In the modern world, national perceptions matter. The UK is a “soft power superpower”, and goodwill towards and trust in the UK is a key driver in engagement with the UK (including FDI) and our ability to influence others. Perceptions matter and they will determine a large part of our national future. Will we be able to strike the global deals which will determine Global Britain? Will our values continue to serve as a moral beacon? Will our voice still be listened to on the world stage?

Viewed through this lens, we simply must see young people as among the UK’s most important global ambassadors. It is the connections they forge, the businesses they create and the change they will make that will be the key to the UK’s long-term future. To build that successful future we must equip the coming generation with the skills that they need to create those global opportunities and secure the UK’s future international position of leadership.

## Annex: Views from young people

In the evidence submitted for this report, young people consistently emphasised the central role international connections and experiences play in their personal and professional growth. All young people highlighted the transformative effect these connections and experiences had on their confidence, resilience, motivation, understanding, and empathy, with many of the opinion that such transformation cannot be achieved ‘at home’. Young people pointed out the need for local and national governments, and formal and non-formal educational establishments, to step up and support young people into opportunities. They said this is needed now more than ever due to the detrimental impacts of Covid-19 on young people’s futures,<sup>90</sup> and the impending climate crisis.

Young people spoke of the many unique skills and competencies they acquired while travelling or studying abroad, such as language learning and communication, networking, team working, and even specialist ceramic-making in China<sup>91</sup>. Many young people said that the lack of a ‘safety net’ when travelling to, and spending time in, a new country meant they were able to learn a language at a much higher speed than at home, and became better communicators as a result<sup>92</sup>. They also expressed that the new networks they developed and the experiences they had of working abroad were hugely beneficial for future employment opportunities.

*‘I found that whilst the lessons of Mandarin were both interesting and*

*useful, it was the street food vendors, the shop assistants, and the movie theatres that promoted the best growth of my Mandarin skills.’<sup>93</sup>*

Young people spoke further about the interpersonal skills they developed whilst travelling overseas and explained that they felt a greater sense of solidarity on their return. They pointed out that having the opportunity to be introduced to new cultures and meet new people meant they adopted a global mindset and became more conscious of helping others and having active roles as members of society.<sup>94</sup>

Alongside better communication and problem-solving skills, enhanced industry-relevant skills in real-life settings, and a stronger CV for future employment, young people also said they felt more independent as a result of being pushed out of their comfort zones. One young person said their time abroad helped them to ‘find their own voice’.

*‘As someone who’s been abroad, I would say the impact is massive. I only went to work in Germany for six months and it did more for me than my entire degree.’<sup>95</sup>*

However, young people also expressed a deep concern about the lack of funding and resources being dedicated to ensuring equal access to international connections and experiences, especially with regard to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. They spoke of international opportunities as being highly competitive and hard to come by; almost always limited to prestigious universities<sup>96</sup>. This, in turn, makes it almost impossible for young people

<sup>90</sup> The Prince’s Trust Tesco Youth Index, 2021, <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/youth-index-2021>

<sup>91</sup> Young Craft Citizen alumni, interviewed by the Crafts Council, UK

<sup>92</sup> Klaudia Kirkpatrick, Student, Lancaster University

<sup>93</sup> Liam Lambert, Student, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

<sup>94</sup> Glesni Haf Owen, Student, Cardiff University

<sup>95</sup> Young Craft Citizen, Crafts Council, UK

<sup>96</sup> Liam Lambert, Student, Shanghai Jiao Tong University



from disadvantaged backgrounds to have access to what they view as 'elitist and selective' opportunities<sup>97</sup>. They emphasised the importance of making sure that non-formal educational opportunities, such as international apprenticeships, are developed and made available for young people who may be unlikely to go into higher education.

Complex and bureaucratic application processes and a lack of support for young people with access needs were listed alongside poor communication as additional barriers to taking part in opportunities<sup>98</sup>. Poor communication was described by young people in two ways: firstly, that opportunities are not shared widely enough on communication channels and often don't reach people living outside large cities; secondly, that the benefits of international experiences and language learning are not communicated well enough.

*'Many young people across Wales don't understand how languages, and therefore international skills, experience and connections, fit into their everyday life. Many struggle to understand how even Welsh is important for them.'*<sup>99</sup>

Young people were worried that Brexit, and the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus, has, and will continue to, contribute to reduced opportunities for international experiences and language learning. They also expressed concerns that the UK is going through a 'language crisis,' and that language learning opportunities are plummeting. They believe language skills are key to developing more cohesive societies and would also benefit businesses and the economy. They think it's important to introduce

creative methods of language learning at a much younger age and celebrate the many languages already being spoken across the UK.

*'I think there needs to be a celebration of people who speak their native languages, so people feel comfortable, rather than made fun of.'*<sup>100</sup>

As a response to reducing numbers of opportunities and limited access to international connections and experiences, young people emphasised the need for substantial funding and resources to be allocated to creating new opportunities and widening access. They listed free language classes, scholarships for student exchanges, and mentorship schemes to direct young people to existing opportunities as examples of where funding could be channelled to. Again, there was the same concern that while young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds have access to opportunities through education and/or leisure, the most disadvantaged young people across the country rely on institutional infrastructure to support them.<sup>101</sup>

Young people suggested integrating intercultural elements into national educational curricula and exposing young people to international experiences at a much earlier age e.g. primary and secondary school level. They believe this would lead to young people valuing internationalism, interculturalism and language learning much more than they currently do.

Covid-19 has undoubtedly affected the quality and number of international opportunities available to young people, with many made to postpone or cancel

<sup>97</sup> Charlotte Foley, Student, Cardiff University

<sup>98</sup> Young Craft Citizen, Crafts Council, UK

<sup>99</sup> 32 – Glesni Haf Owen

<sup>100</sup> Young Craft Citizen, Crafts Council, UK

<sup>101</sup> Laila-Grace Gane, Student, Manchester University

international study trips over the last year. Young people highlighted the success of many digital opportunities that have created unique learning environments, including opportunities for them to connect with people internationally. However, they are also worried that digital poverty across the country has been exacerbated, exposing a huge learning gap that urgently needs to be addressed by politicians. Young people believe that the government should seize this opportunity to enhance internationalism in learning.

*'Vaccine development has been contingent upon cross-border communications, and the rapid spread of the virus itself showcased just how small the world has become. The government should be seeking to make amends for those who have missed out on the opportunity to spend time abroad.'*<sup>102</sup>

To conclude this section, it is important to note some further recommendations that young people have provided in their responses. While they are in favour of increasing the quality and quantity of digital opportunities, and the potential of digital opportunities to inspire more take up of in-person international opportunities, young people are wary of digital experiences replacing in-person ones. They believe that digital resources can be an excellent means of sparking an individual's interest in a foreign language or country, but should only be a stepping stone to real life international experiences.

Young people highlighted the need for more schemes to be developed to enhance the quality and quantity of international experiences. They said that if the UK seriously wants to increase its competitiveness on the international

stage, it needs to invest more in its young people.

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<sup>102</sup> Imogen Helena Thompson, Student, University of Warwick

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## **Institution or Organisation Submissions:**

Association of Colleges, UK  
<https://www.aoc.co.uk/>

Bili Languages Ltd, UK  
<https://bili.uk.com/>

British Film Institute, UK  
<https://www.bfi.org.uk/>

Bryson Charitable Group, Northern Ireland  
<https://www.brysongroup.org/>

Burton and South Derbyshire College, Burton-on-Trent, England  
<https://www.bsdc.ac.uk/>

Bytes, Northern Ireland Regional Voluntary Organisations, Northern Ireland  
<https://www.bytes.org/>

Cardiff Council, Wales  
<https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Home/Pages/default.aspx>

Centre for International Learning and Leadership, UK  
<https://cill-uk.com/>

College Development Network, Scotland  
<https://www.cdn.ac.uk/>

Colleges Wales, Wales  
<https://www.colleges.wales/>

Connected Citizens, Northern Ireland

Crafts Council, UK  
<https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/>

Crook Primary School, County Durham, England  
<https://www.crookprimary.org.uk/>

Durham County Council, England  
<https://www.durham.gov.uk/>

Education Authority Northern Ireland  
<https://www.eani.org.uk/>

European Centre for Training and Regional Co-operation (ECTARC), UK  
<https://www.ectarc.com/>

Experiment in Living UK  
<http://eiluk.org/>

Generation UK Programme, British Council, UK and China  
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/generation-uk>

Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland  
<https://www.gcu.ac.uk/>

GLF Schools, South East England  
<http://www.glfschools.org/>

Gower College, Swansea, Wales  
<https://www.gcs.ac.uk/>

Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, UK  
<http://www.gbsf.org.uk/>

Greenway Primary School, Cardiff, Wales  
<https://www.greenwayprimary.com/>

Grimsby Institute, England  
<https://grimsby.ac.uk/>

Hackney Local Authority Spanish Language Project  
<https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet/spanish>

Heritage International School, Moldova  
<https://www.heritage.md/>

The Inside Out Programme, Northern Ireland

International Newcastle, England  
<https://internationalnewcastle.org.uk/>

Link Online Learners  
<https://www.linkonlinelearners.org/>

Middlesex University, England  
<https://www.mdx.ac.uk/>

The National Archives, UK  
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Newcastle University, England  
<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/>

Routes into Languages Cymru, Wales

<https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/activities/cymru>

Plymouth Teaching School Alliance and The Plymouth Ghana Link, England

<https://www.ptsa.uk/>

Poplars Farm Primary School, Bradford, England

<https://www.poplarsfarm.bradford.sch.uk/bradford/primary/poplarsfarm>

South Eastern Regional College, Northern Ireland

<https://www.serc.ac.uk/>

St Mary's Primary Academy, Folkestone, England

<https://www.stmarysfolkestone.com/>

St Marys RCVA Primary School, South Moor, England

<https://www.stmarysrcprimary.org.uk/>

True Education Partners, UK

<https://www.trueeducationpartnerships.com/>

UK Global Learning Association

<https://globallearningassociation.org/>

University of Edinburgh, Scotland

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/>

University of York, England

<https://www.york.ac.uk/>

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)

<https://www.vsointernational.org/>

Wellington School, Ayr, Scotland

<https://www.wellingtonschool.org/>

Wicked Wales International Film Festival, Wales

<https://www.wickedwales.com/>

Wirral Grammar School for Boys, England

<http://www.wirralgrammarboys.com/>

Wrexham Glyndwr University, Wales

<https://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/>



**Individual Submissions:**

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Becca Kirkby, Student  
Caitlyn Horrocks, Student  
Chester Heath Cook, Student  
Chris Williams, Teacher, Lincolnshire, England  
David Smith, Teacher, Northern Ireland  
Demee Elliot, Student  
Doreen Scotland, Teacher, Scotland  
Edmund Smith, Student  
Esther Fenwick, Student  
Ian Baird, Teacher, England  
Imogen Helena Thompson, Student, University of Warwick  
James Whitely, Student  
Klaudia Kirkpatrick, Student, Lancaster University  
Laila-Grace Gane, Student, Manchester University  
Liam Lambert, Student, Shanghai Jiao Tong University  
Lily Wednesday Rumsay, Student  
Lynda McKee, Teacher, Northern Ireland  
Marion Mills, Teacher, England  
Rodrigo Leitao Costa, Student  
Ryan O'Sullivan, Student

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