

International Skills Partnerships General Guidelines

These guidelines provide an introduction to British Council International Skills Partnerships. They are designed for organisations looking to establish an international partnership and should be read before preparing an application for a travel grant or a proposal for funding for a partnership project.

All forms and guidelines relating to international skills partnerships can be found in the Essential Partnership Documents section of our website.

What are international skills partnerships?

British Council international skills partnerships bring together UK organisations with leading counterpart organisations around the world in order to deliver innovative skills development projects. Partnership projects are pre-commercial and have at their heart the exchange of knowledge and expertise. International skills partnerships cover a wide range of sectors and a number of themes, including employer engagement, quality assurance, entrepreneurship development, and progression routes. Partnerships are supported financially by British Council, typically for one year with a view to becoming self-sustaining thereafter. In certain cases, strongly performing partnerships may be eligible for further funding beyond that period.

Why British Council partnerships?

The British Council has been managing and facilitating educational partnerships between organisations in the UK and counterparts overseas for over 80 years. Since 2008, we have facilitated over 80 international skills partnerships in more than 30 countries. Our technical knowledge, intercultural awareness, outstanding links with the UK skills sector and unrivalled international network, expertise in impact-led planning, and our understanding of different international skills environments equip us to work with our partnerships to ensure that they can deliver maximum mutual benefit. This means helping partnerships to impact not just on the individuals and institutions involved, but the wider skills community, national skills strategies and, ultimately, the wider society and economy.

What organisations are eligible for partnerships?

International skills partnerships are open to further education institutions, training providers, sector skills organisations, employers, awarding organisations, skills agencies, quality assurance agencies, government ministries and universities.

What benefits do international skills partnerships offer?

British Council international skills partnerships offer a range of benefits including:

- nurturing innovative approaches to skills development, including in the areas of curriculum development, quality assurance and employer engagement, across a range of thematic areas and sectors
- enhancing the culture, profile and reputation of participating organisations
- building relationships with other organisations including employers
- offering unrivalled staff and student development opportunities
- helping participating organisations build a presence in the partner country
- enabling the organisations to identify new business opportunities
- informing the development of national skills strategies in ways that impact positively on the skills and employability of millions of people.

What types of partnerships projects are there?

There are two types of international skills partnerships project:

- *Foundation*

Partnership projects with pre-identified organisations in a partner county, focusing on pre-identified sectors and themes, and sometimes pre-identified deliverables. Such partnership project opportunities are announced on our website and through email notification to our international partnership community.

- *Advanced*

Partnership project opportunities offered by invitation to organisations that have successfully completed foundation projects. These projects will build directly on the work of the preceding foundation project.

What are the goals and expected outcomes of international skills partnerships?

The central goal of all British Council's international skills partnerships is to promote higher quality skills development that meets industry needs and helps young people to prosper. This is tied up with developing closer links between education, employers and policy makers in the UK and worldwide.

Each partnership is expected to deliver against some of the following outcomes:

- An active network of local and global employers, employer representative organisations and other skills stakeholders is established
- Knowledge and understanding of effective approaches to skills development is improved
- Young people are better prepared for the world of work and enterprise
- Understanding and recognition of the benefits of working internationally and how to do this effectively is increased
- New approaches to skills development are implemented at institution/organisation level
- Policy changes and/or new approaches to skills development are implemented at national and/or system level
- Higher quality skills that meet industry needs are developed.

What does a good partnership project look like?

Good international skills partnerships:

- are consortium-based, with more than one partner in each country to ensure a joined-up approach and to maximise the impact of the partnership
- take into account earlier related partnership projects to ensure that their project builds appropriately on previous work and achievements
- are true partnerships, reflecting mutuality, with benefits to all partners
- are focussed on positive change, on delivering and measuring impact
- have strongly committed partners who recognise that profound benefits can result from investing appropriate time and energy in developing the partnership
- have strong project management and good communication both between the partners and between the partnership and the British Council
- take a whole-institution approach to partnership, ensuring that all relevant staff are aware of their partnership and actively support it as appropriate
- are externally focussed from the start, building - with British Council assistance - strong links with relevant external stakeholders such as employers and policy makers, as well as other related international skills partnerships, to identify opportunities and maximise impact
- related to the above, ensure that their project impacts on a wide range of external stakeholders as well as on those organisations in the partnership
- are focussed on sustainability from the start and look to identify business opportunities to underpin that sustainability, again supported as appropriate by the British Council
- effectively promote their partnership and their project from the start to the skills community and the wider community in the UK, the partner country and internationally, again supported as appropriate by the British Council
- effectively disseminate the key learning from the partnership in the UK, the partner country and internationally, again supported as appropriate by the British Council

- deliver value for money.

These attributes should be reflected in the project proposal, which will define the approach and the work of the partnership.

More details on each of these areas are included in the guidelines that accompany the project proposal forms.

What have previous international skills partnerships projects achieved?

Examples of successful previous partnerships include:

- A partnership that has informed the national strategy on quality assurance in skills in the partner country, leading to quality assurance processes being rolled out to technical training institutions across the country, improving the quality training of hundreds of thousands of young people
- A partnership that has led to an innovative new entrepreneurship curriculum being implemented in the UK and the partner country across a range of subjects, building on students' natural creativity to help them develop a strong, practical, enterprising outlook and enhance their employability
- A partnership that has led to ground-breaking taster courses being introduced in the partner country, allowing students to experience different courses before selecting the most appropriate one for them, helping to ensure that students embark on the right training path first time
- A partnership that has led to the partners developing a successful joint enterprise company, winning contracts valued at £1m to date, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the partnership.

How can organisations apply for a partnership project?

The process for applying for a partnership project is dependent on the type of project:

- *Foundation*
Typically, when foundation partnership project opportunities are announced, UK organisations are invited to apply for a travel grant to visit the partner

country, meet the candidate organisations for partnership in-country, and develop with one or more of them one or more project proposals.

- *Advanced*

Organisations that have successfully completed foundation projects are invited by the British Council to apply for funding for an advanced partnership project. Together, the organisations develop a proposal that builds directly on the work of the preceding foundation project.

Proposals for each type of partnership project include a detailed workplan listing the activities and deliverables. The approved project proposal will form the basis of the contractual agreement between the partnership and the British Council.

Please note that this is a competitive process at all stages.

What is the evaluation process for travel grant applications and project proposals?

Travel grant applications and project proposals are evaluated by an expert assessment panel that includes British Council skills specialists from the UK and the partner country and, as appropriate, representatives from relevant stakeholder bodies, including government ministries in the partner country and other experts external to British Council.

Detailed feedback on both successful and unsuccessful applications/proposals is provided to the submitting organisations. Where appropriate the panel may ask for revisions to be made to applications/proposals before confirming approval.

How are the partnerships funded?

Partnerships usually receive a grant of around £15,000 per year (typically divided into a £2,000 travel grant and £13,000 to implement the project) from the British Council. This grant is paid to the lead UK partner who then distributes funding to other partners in accordance with the partnership contract. Funding is released in instalments at the beginning of the project, after six months, and at the end of the project. Release of payments is contingent on satisfactory performance against the work plan. For further information, please see 'How are partnerships projects monitored and evaluated?' below.

Participating organisations are required to contribute matching funding towards the project, including all staff time, which needs to be quantified. Matching funding should be equivalent to (or exceed) the grant payment.

What can the grant be spent on?

Eligible costs

- Economy class flight travel for UK and overseas partner organisations' staff to/from the country where each organisation is based. As noted above, the maximum number of staff travelling on any visit covered by the grant is three.
- Local travel in the UK and overseas (public transport to and from the airport and for meetings/visits is encouraged where possible)
- Reasonable accommodation and subsistence costs for staff for visits to their partner organisation in the UK or overseas
- Reasonable hospitality costs
- Reasonable production costs (e.g. for materials development, not including staff time)
- Translation/interpretation costs (where procured externally)
- Visa costs for the UK and overseas organisations' staff to/from the country where each organisation is based
- Costs relating to resources of a specific nature to the project. This is by negotiation with the British Council and is not likely to include purchase of equipment. Software may be eligible but only when approved in advance by the British Council and will depend on the rationale and clear written justification.

All of the above activities must be directly related to the development and delivery of the agreed project. Partners will be asked to complete expenditure information and provide evidence with receipts to British Council for monitoring and auditing purposes.

*The following items of expenditure will **not** be covered by the grant award:*

- **Participating organisations' staff costs.** The funds are not intended to contribute towards the direct costs of staff time associated with the project.
- Participation in trade fairs, exhibitions or conferences
- Promotional activities which are solely concerned with the recruitment of overseas students
- Participating organisations' administration or overhead costs
- Costs relating to activities which have already taken place at the outset of the project
- Costs relating to capital spend (e.g. hardware, software – see note above re possible software expenditure)
- Exchange rate costs/loss and other banking related costs
- Consultancy fees
- No profit or fees to be charged during the period of this grant funding.

How are partnership projects monitored and evaluated?

The British Council monitors and evaluates partnerships projects to quality assure performance, help support partnerships to maximise the benefits and impact of the project, and help deal with any challenges. Monitoring and evaluation includes:

- A start-up video- or tele-conference for all participating organisations at the beginning of the project, facilitated by the British Council.
- A virtual project platform (established by the lead partner) will provide an area that can be accessed by all partners and the British Council anywhere and at any time. The platform will be used to report, store, communicate and present information linked to the project.
- An online interim self-assessment progress report is required after six months. The British Council will receive the results of the self-assessment report and will communicate with partners if required.

- A final report, an impact study and a finance report is required at the end of the partnership project. The British Council will provide detailed feedback to the partnership upon completion.

The monitoring and evaluation process has been shaped in close consultation with the skills sector internationally and is designed to be light-touch, supportive, solution-focussed and effective.

For more information

Our website contains further information regarding our partnership work.

If you have specific queries, please email our Project Coordinator, Samantha French: Samantha.French@britishcouncil.org

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