

The British Council and the political economy of cultural value in historical context

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I Overview

The British Council has served as a beacon of British values beyond the shores of the United Kingdom since its creation in 1934, presenting the country as a trading and cultural partner of major importance. By establishing associations of reciprocal significance with governments, industry and civil society around the world it has built a network of relationships that articulate British political, diplomatic, economic and cultural thought and ambitions. Moreover, its work in artistic, scientific, aid and educational fields over eight decades has built strong and enduring partnerships that link the exercise of social and cultural capital with the pursuit of British strategic priorities. English Language Teaching (ELT), for example, has been credited with creating ‘an indispensable reservoir and basis for an appreciation and desire in foreign countries for things British’.¹ Its diverse portfolio has enabled the Council to develop participatory, diplomatic and trust value between itself, the publics it engages with, and its funders.

Through this examination of post-war reviews of the UK’s overseas information services (the collective body of representational agencies funded by government) we can see how the value of the British Council’s activities has been perceived over time. The Drogheda Report in the 1950s increased the Council’s activities in Africa and Asia, stressing the developmental value of ELT in particular. The Hill Report of 1957 encouraged the Council to train language teachers overseas, rather than sending teachers from Britain itself: a far more efficient use of finite resources overseas at a time of economic austerity at home. A decade later, prior to Britain’s eventual entry into the European Economic Community (EEC), the Duncan Report of 1968/69 advocated a focus on “areas of concentration” with particular emphasis on developed regions like Western Europe: preferencing Britain’s commercial relations on the continent, at this critical political and economic juncture, over cultural engagement with developing nations. More recently, reviews have argued for a diversification of funding opportunities within Whitehall, reflecting the wide breadth of activities the Council undertakes, and an ever-greater role for external income to reduce central government spend.² As such, these reviews map Britain’s changing strategic priorities over the last 70 years, their organising principles and the machinery of “soft power” employed to realise them.

The British Council has addressed itself to a variety of different audiences: from influential figures in the worlds of education, business, science and culture abroad, to participating in the formation of ‘the influential few’ of the future’.³ Engagement and exchange programmes to support these activities are predicated on the promise “cultural wraparound”, oiling the gears of trade and political relationships through a softer form of diplomacy. Accordingly, the Council supports British foreign policy with ‘the velvet glove of high culture,’ bridging the gap (as a Non-Departmental Public Body) between politics and culture through meaningful engagement with overseas audiences. The ability to ‘operate at one remove from government enhances the range of the UK’s public diplomacy, particularly for engendering trust and building relationships with groups less likely to respond to conventional diplomacy’.⁴ This is evident in instances where official diplomatic contact has been cut off yet the British Council continues its ELT and cultural work (such as Ghana in the mid-1960s).

¹ The National Archive, Public Record Office, Kew, UK (TNA: PRO), FCO26/591, ‘Draft report: Reductions in Public Expenditure’, R. Fyjis-Walker, September 1970.

² Lord Carter of Coles, *Public Diplomacy Review*, December 2005. Available at: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/home-carter-report>

³ TNA: PRO, FCO26/583, Letter from AM Palliser (British Embassy) to John Peck (Information Research Department), 28 January 1970.

⁴ Lord Carter of Coles, *Public Diplomacy Review*, p.25.

In the past, the Council has seemed in real danger of abolition, as was the case with the 1978 Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) Report which sparked a determined effort to demonstrate both the value of the service and the destructive impact on UK foreign policy of such cuts. The CPRS recommendation was ultimately rejected in recognition of the fact that the effectiveness of the British Council did not rest on specifically targeted short term initiatives, but rather on the long term stable maintenance of a British presence designed to educate and inform overseas. The preservation of the British Council as part of the package of overseas representation, alongside the BBC World Service and the Diplomatic Service of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, demonstrated a belief in the value of communicating British culture as part of embedded and reciprocal relationships with overseas audiences and partners. The means to achieve this were mutable and polyvalent: their value was political, economic and linguistic. Judging the cultural value of institutions like the British Council necessitates recognition of this but also develops our understanding of the audiences who perceived that value. After 80 years, the British Council continues to reflect a commitment to cultural value as a transformative force, and the ambition of British society to learn from meaningful engagements with the world beyond its borders.

II British Council under Review

Examining how the cultural value of the British Council has been conceived of in the past, ascribed and applied, this study takes as its archival focus the regular, though far from systematic, reviews of British overseas information services. As a Public Corporation (and now Charity) with its core funding for all but the first of its 80 years coming through government Grant-in-Aid the British Council had historically occupied an unusual place in British public service: partly paid for out of direct taxation, administered primarily by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with a quasi-independent governance regime. Consequently, any discussion on the value of its work requires a consideration of the triangular interrelationship between itself, those who engage with its services, and the British government.

The reviews, beginning with the Independent Committee of Inquiry into the Overseas Information Services (Drogheda Report) in 1954, reflect an episodic and sporadic history of institutional attitudes towards the exercise of influence abroad. They also, in light of the current preoccupation with the “soft-power” capacities of the nation state, offer a richer and deeper understanding of British traditions of overseas influence than is often acknowledged in recent studies of the “new” public diplomacy (global, multi-polar, social and digital) of the Twenty-First Century. In this respect, the battle for the attention and trust of audiences abroad is evolutionary, rather than epochal, despite the radical technological, behavioural and conceptual shifts of the last two decades. As Robin Brown suggests: ‘the scope and visibility of the new public diplomacy is novel, the mechanisms that it employs are not. Persuasion, framing and agenda setting are basic tools of political influence’.⁵ While it is true that contemporary international communications are multi-directional, multi-platform and embedded in everyday culture in ways that would have seemed unimaginable a generation ago, many of the principle motivations and objectives of organisations and governments engaged in these practices reflect long-term strategies of

⁵ Quoted in, James Pamment, *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A comparative study of policy and practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.9.

engagement that are perpetually revised to reflect contemporary interests, concerns and anxieties. In this respect, the shifts and continuities in the conduct of public and cultural diplomacy sit alongside each other in a dynamic relationship that constantly presents new challenges.

Rapid recent changes in strategic and technological environments have, however, presented new categories of challenge and opportunity for those engaged in cultural relations and the wider landscape of strategic communications. This has accelerated changes in the conceptual approach to public diplomacy which adds to the sense of unfamiliarity felt by many practitioners. As Foreign Secretary in 1998, Robin Cook's attempts to harness the image of "Cool Britannia" through his *Panel 2000* initiative may well have been thematically forward-thinking, but the instrumental approach taken, 'the projection and promotion of the UK's image, values and policies overseas',⁶ was closer in style to the methods of the 1940s and 1950s than the strategies employed just a few years later to manage the emerging realities of global social and digital communications. By the 2002 Wilton Review, the "projection of Britain", that Twentieth-Century mainstay of overseas representational services, had been superseded. Public diplomacy was now 'work which aims at influencing in a positive way the perceptions of individuals and organisations overseas about the UK, and their engagement with the UK'.⁷ Three years later, this was further nuanced, as part of Lord Carter of Coles' Public Diplomacy Review, to 'work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and influence for the United Kingdom in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long terms goals'.⁸ This shift in governing rhetoric from instrumental tactics of persuasion to models of engagement and influence is a better fit for the British Council; encompassing many of the principles of relationship building that have underwritten its work over many decades. Engaged dialogic and reciprocal practices reflect the modern world of global, digital and social media and communication, and the convening power of the British Council can be made to work in both physical and virtual dimensions, widening access to the cultural capacities of the Council.

III Valuing British Council: cultural value by any other name

The reputation, reach and penetration achieved by the British Council was of major significance to the British government as it considered the shape and purpose of its information services after the Second World War. This it did in primarily in terms of the political and economic value to be extracted from continued funding of overseas activities, an outlook reflected in many subsequent government and government-commissioned reviews of UK cultural and public diplomacy efforts. As the Drogheda Committee put it in 1954, 'the aim of the Information Services must always be to achieve in the long run some definite political or commercial result'.⁹ While representing the "national interest" in these terms was an acknowledged part of the job the British Council was required to do – the *quid pro quo* of government funding – the political and diplomatic

⁶ Quoted in, James Pamment, 'Western European Public Diplomacy', in Mai'a Davis Cross & Jan Melissen (ed.) *European Public Diplomacy: Soft Power at Work* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.27.

⁷ Lord Carter of Coles, *Public Diplomacy Review*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ BBC Written Archive Centre (WAC), Caversham, Berkshire, UK. R20/53, 'Report of the Independent Committee of Enquiry into the Overseas Information Services', 27 July 1953, p. 3.

dividend drawn from cultural relations was not hard to see. Writing in the middle of the Cold War, and in response to the 1967 Beeley Report on Overseas Information Services, officials at the Foreign Office argued that the 'effective presentation of information is now, and will become to a much greater extent, as vital an element of foreign and defence policy as, say, infantry battalions or naval escort vehicles.'¹⁰ The ability of the arts, sciences, training and education to cross cultural, linguistic, psychological and geographical borders and penetrate where other parts of the military and diplomatic machine could not was a great advantage for the British Council: one born out of a long-term engagement with the interests, ambitions and tolerances of service users. But what made cultural relations such a versatile commodity was the trust and prestige it accrued for the UK. In this sense, the credibility of the British Council worked as a cultural transmission-belt drawing associations between British values, propensities and attributes, and overseas understanding for and perception of British national interests, whether it be foreign, defence, social or economic. As such, the political and diplomatic advantages of the Council to the British government relied on its ability to act as a quasi-independent source of cultural output and engagement around the world.

The strategic significance of those audiences engaged in British Council initiatives was always of critical value to its institutional funders. This, though, was a moveable feast. In acknowledging the historical and political context in which the geographical focus of its cultural relations operations had evolved, the Executive Committee of the British Council agreed with the Beeley Report's recommendations that these should "be kept under constant review as circumstances changed."¹¹ An example of this was the declining attention paid in cultural and information work to Western Europe in the 1950s, which was reversed a decade later when Britain's re-engagement with European integration and attempts to enter the European Economic Community (EEC), initially rebuffed by the French, became a central concern for the British government. Likewise, the Council diverted resources towards newly independent African countries after 1960, and as involvement with Western Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa increased, the British Council increasingly reduced its involvement in South-East Asia and The Gulf.¹² This demonstrates the intimate nature of the relationship between political and cultural priorities in the work of the British Council, but it also evinces the stop/start characteristic of frequent reviews which respond to tactical rather than strategic interests. Within the British Council Executive Committee, it was felt that representations should be made to the FCO to stress

the contribution the Council can make to direct British interests and influence. In particular [...] its main purpose in developed and developing countries is to be a long-term means to dispose politicians, consumers, etc., etc., to think and buy British, and to resist the blandishments of our competitors - the United States, France, Germany, and Japan, as well as the countries of the Communist Bloc.¹³

In this bold statement of intent, the political, economic and competitive advantages of the British Council – to engender audiences to 'think and buy British' – reflected a renewed confidence in the mid to late 1960s, after two decades of post-war reconstruction, in Britain's the cultural and technological capacities and influence.

¹⁰ TNA:PRO, FCO164/720.

¹¹ Cosmo Stewart, 'Notes for British Council Executive Committee' 23 January, 1968. FCO 13/134.

¹² Cosmo Stewart, 'Notes for British Council Executive Committee' 23 January, 1968. FCO 13/134.

¹³ C H D Everett, 'Memo on Executive Committee Minutes', 10 June 1968. FCO 13/135.

The Beeley report of 1967 coincided with a period in which The Who and Mary Quant supplanted Morris Dancing and Thomas Hardy as accessible icons of British identity. In the mid-1950s to early 1960s, the focus of British exports overseas had shifted away from heavy industrial and consumer goods, toward luxury products that traded on a perception of British 'tradition'.¹⁴ "It was in this context that the images, and realities, of British industry could increasingly be viewed as a weakness and not as a strength, however mythical that strength might have been."¹⁵ As the 1960s progressed, there was a desire to alter this trend and create a more sustainable future for British overseas exports, as outlined by A. R. Glen, the Chairman of the Export Council for Europe in 1965, who took important lessons from recent exhibitions in Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Milan:

One is to temper the British image still required by local shopkeepers (made up of Guards, London buses, royalty and pageantry of all kinds) by a growing emphasis on Britain's fashion and technological development.¹⁶

As a 'representational' agency, the British Council reflected these shifting realities which meant that their cultural value was often difficult to define. In the words of Art Historian, Lisa Tickner:

The formation of the British Council and the Arts Council as institutions encouraging and promoting British art meant that for the first time the establishment and the avant-garde drew closer together in the post-war period.¹⁷

A collection of 'British Week' events sponsored by the British Council (in Brussels, Dallas and Montreal in 1967)¹⁸, marked a turning point in which the identity of Britain began to be presented differently:

As the more coercive, military or colonial aspects of British identity faded, so national status was increasingly defined in cultural terms. The 'projection of Britain' required an identity forged or confirmed in displays of cultural heritage, scientific achievement, manufactured goods and contemporary art, architecture and design. Britain had long been associated with tradition and heritage values in overseas markets, but it was a new creativity 'manifested by the modernity of

¹⁴ This can be seen in the changing priorities of Exhibitions organised by the Board of Trade overseas, and also the funding provided for export promotion. This increased by a factor of 20 between 1952/53 to 1960/61.
Source?

¹⁵ Paddy Maguire, 'Craft Capitalism and the Projection of British Industry in the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of Design History* (1993) 6 (2): 97-113 (113).

¹⁶ 'British Week In Milan Brings Big Buying Boost. From Our Special Correspondent.', *The Times (London)*, 18 Oct, 1965. p. 17.

¹⁷ Lisa Tickner, 'Export Britain': Pop Art, Mass Culture and the Export Drive' *Art History*, 35/2 (April 2012), pp.394-419. (p.418 n.124.)

¹⁸ Tickner summarises: "A British Week was a trade promotion, addressed to the host country but also targeting British manufacturers by urging them into overseas markets." For further information, her note points towards BT 279/228, Mrs Ruth Wright, Finance Division, Board of Trade, 'Note of a Meeting at the Treasury on 16 July 1963'; and BT 333/172, 'British Weeks', unsigned, 14 October 1969. Tickner 'Export Britain', p.415. n.53.

contemporary art forms', that emerged as a 'crucial indicator of national survival and continuing vitality' in the post-war period.¹⁹

Echoes of this can be found in the subsequent exploitation of cultural marques such as 'Brit-Art' and 'Brit-Pop', 'Cool Britannia' and, most recently, the 'GREAT Britain' campaign. As such, notions of cultural value were increasingly placed at the forefront of national policy in the 1960s, a period which witnessed a profound revision of Britain's role in the world.

Between the Drogheda Report and the Beeley Report, increases in the financial resources of the British Council had enabled the maintenance of activities rather than an expansion. Yet, now the Council faced increasing pressure to rationalise, and cut, its expenditure. One of the most expeditious means of achieving this was to reduce the extent to which the British Council was "spread thinly". Six countries were agreed for withdrawal in 1967/68, and the Council proposed complete withdrawal from a further fifteen in order to realise the mandated cuts. In total, this meant pulling-out from a quarter of the countries in which the British Council was operating in 1966/67.²⁰ Once again, the cultural value of the British Council has to be restated in fiscal terms, as was the case in the early 1970s during a funding review ordered by the incoming Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, which was designed to achieve yet further savings:

The British Council provides a form of British presence which the Duncan Committee for instance regarded as being "an increasingly important medium through which Britain will project her interests and her new approach to international relations", and as enabling Britain to present herself as a trading and cultural partner of major importance. Cultural exchanges deriving from Council work provide links with this country which have far-reaching commercial implications. Teaching of English provides an indispensable reservoir and basis for an appreciation and desire in foreign countries for things British.²¹

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the British Council's "intense cultivation of ELT" was tied to the training of teaching staff overseas rather than sending staff from London (as recommended in the Hill Report).²² This, in turn, favoured the development of curricula that focussed on the Council's role in Commonwealth countries.²³ The resulting programme was championed by the Council's Controller of Education Division, Arthur King, and represented an emphasis on the developmental value of ELT, and its ability to cultivate partnerships with developing nations. This was identified as part of the mission of the Council by the Executive Committee, who stated the key priorities to be: '(a) education; (b) the image of Britain, e.g. the arts and (c) laying foundations.'²⁴ ELT also offered an alternative (and increasing) source of income at a difficult time in the nation's finances. The mixed economy of the British Council – Foreign Office of other Whitehall Grant-in-Aid and income from external partners alongside teaching and exams – meant that unlike other parts of the public

¹⁹ Lisa Tickner, 'Export Britain': Pop Art, Mass Culture and the Export Drive' *Art History*, 35/2 (April 2012), pp.394-419. (pp.400-401.)

²⁰ 'Review of Overseas Information Activities: Memorandum by British Council', January 1967. FCO 13/280

²¹ R Fyvis-Walker, 'Reductions in Public Expenditure – Overseas Information Services'. FCO 26/591

²² R. Smith, 'ELT and The British Council, 1934-2014: Research notes' retrieved from 'http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collect/elt_archive/', (Accessed: 27/04/14).

²³ R. Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*. (Oxford: OUP, 1992), pp.145-52.

²⁴ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the British Council Executive Committee', 18 June 1968. FCO 13/136.

diplomatic machine, notably the BBC World Service, it could target an expanding portfolio of commercial services. Reviewing the economic challenges facing the British government in 1969, in light of the devaluation of sterling two years earlier, The Report of the Review Committee on Overseas Representation, chaired by Sir Val Duncan, went even further than Beeley in articulating the function of overseas services in supporting Britain's commercial activities abroad. The United Kingdom's relative economic decline and image as 'the sick man of Europe' in this period, enhanced the pertinence of this argument, reaching its peak in the late 1970s and coinciding with the 1978 review by the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS), led by Sir Kenneth Berrill, into Overseas Representation. The Berrill Report argued for severe cuts in overseas services except where their work explicitly supported economic development, thereby linking Britain's influence in the world to the country's economic performance.

The CPRS review recommended the abolition of the British Council on the grounds that for the money spent on its activities, cultural relations did not represent value for money at a time of considerable and acute economic strain on the country. What it failed to recognise, however, was the long and intimate link between cultural attraction and commercial opportunity, and the diplomatic strength accrued as a result. While this is not an instrumental relationship, and not one that necessarily delivers result in the immediate term, it was essential to setting the "tone" of strategic partnerships and articulating their relational advantages. In a passionate speech to the House of Lords, the former head of the British Council, Lord Ballantrae, laid out how he felt the CPRS review had failed to capture the vital role that the Council played in British interests. Naming the report a "hideous progeny" permeated by a "defeatist motif", he cited a letter

which appeared in The Times on 4th November, three weeks ago, signed by five distinguished Germans, one of them the son of Chancellor Adenauer: "We, as friends of your country, would find it deplorable if the long-term benefits flowing from lively cultural and educational relations were to be sacrificed for the sake of short-term political assessments, arrived at from a standpoint of current self-belittlement".²⁵

The developmental value of ELT, alongside the political and commercial value of trade exhibitions and science teaching ensured that whilst Britain sought to compete with its neighbours, it also sought to court them. The CPRS review, it was argued, had not fully comprehended the balance between long-term strategic (as opposed to tactical) commercial imperatives and the value to this of cultural relations. Lord Ballantrae continued, relating the personal view of a French diplomat:

a former ambassador in Addis Ababa, Brazil and Greece, who wrote: "As an alien I cannot take part in a debate on the Foreign Office, but as a member of the European Community I sincerely hope that the BBC will still rule the wave-lengths, and that the British Council will, like the Greek Phoenix, acquire a new life thanks to a report advocating its sudden death". Then I suppose such was his emotion that he broke into French and finished by saying: "J'espère que les Communes

²⁵ Hansard, House of Lords Debates, fifth series, vol. 387, cols. 860-861.

réagiront, et que les Lords rugiront!” Which translated means: I hope that the Commons will react, and that the Lords will roar!²⁶

The ultimate rejection of the CPRS review by the Cabinet, after prolonged public debate over its conclusions, hinged on the belief that British overseas ambitions need not be compromised by a gloomy forecast. Rather, the enduring belief in the value of the activities of the British Council, and other agents of public diplomacy on whom the wider reputation of the UK also rested, rendered it an important and enduring means by which to maintain Britain's role in the world.

This reprieve for the British Council was followed by a significant reduction in its core budget by the incoming Conservative administration and, perhaps not surprisingly, by another review.²⁷ Focusing solely on the British Council, as opposed to the wider architecture of British representational services, the review led by Lord Seebohm was, according to the biographer of the British Council, Frances Donaldson, ‘undoubtedly the most important review of the structure, financial control and administration of the British Council ever undertaken’.²⁸ In particular, the Seebohm Report was disparaging about the Foreign Office, one of the two sponsoring Whitehall departments:²⁹

FCO do not appear to have any clear established set of policies for the Council’s work, or any clear-cut policy on the contribution to be expected from cultural diplomacy to the government’s overseas representation. The guidance which the Council receives from the FCO appears generally to be short-term and reactive rather than long-term, at the expense of a global cultural policy.³⁰

This was a new beginning in the overall administration of the Council providing, in a recognisably modern form, a regime of accountability and tasking whose legacy is felt today. Pot-marked by reviews and reports, the institutional history of the British Council inevitably reflects prevailing governmental fixations: from concerns about Britain’s great power status in the 1950s, to the economic near-capitulation of the 1970s and our present preoccupation with the exercise and limits of influence in a multipolar and digital world. Traditionally, agencies like the British Council have been required to account for their activities in political, diplomatic, and economic terms while, on a day-to-day basis, building and nourishing partnerships and programmes that in the first instance have to function and succeed in terms of the cultural value of the work being done. As with the rise of ‘developmental aid’ as an organisational focus over the last half century, these need not be mutually exclusive indicators of success, though it has often felt like that. Indeed, the co-habitation of government priorities with Council activities is itself a part of a strategic and long-term partnership on the home front.

IV Reflections

²⁶ Hansard, House of Lords Debates, fifth series, vol. 387, cols. 860-861.

²⁷ Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: the first fifty years* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1984), p.319.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.320.

²⁹ The other was the Overseas Development Agency (ODA).

³⁰ Donaldson, *The British Council*, p.324.

The day-to-day oversight of government funded overseas information and representational services rested with the Whitehall departments most concerned with specific aspects of their activities (primarily the Foreign Office), but the frequency and degree to which their strategic rationale became defined by these *ad hoc* and appointed teams of reviewers is rather unusual in the conduct of government business. From the historian's perspective, they usefully bring the various actors to account, demanding they justify in policy terms the money spent on them and the intentions that framed their activities at particular moments in time. They also help to demonstrate the amorphous, multi-agency and contingent nature of British public diplomacy over the last 70 years. While the provision of 'mutually beneficial relationships between people in the United Kingdom and in other countries ... to increase appreciation of the United Kingdom's creative ideas and achievements' has been a hallmark of British Council activity since the outset, cultural relations remain a multi-dimensional enterprise.³¹ For example, the experience of the Second World War and the Cold War underscored its significance to British strategic priorities and national interests, whether in cold or hot war conditions. In the transition from Empire to Commonwealth the Council brokered new relationships of mutuality out of old imperial dependencies through training and education programmes. Meanwhile, austerity Britain's post-war appetite to remain at the top table of world politics, without the resources to match, has been served by the British Council's international reputation and leverage, and the reflected prestige this bestows on the United Kingdom. All of these attributes matter, especially to the British government, but ultimately they rely on the ability of the British Council to engage with individuals and partner organisations on a cultural level.

Changes in the external environment – i.e. war, decolonisation, terrorism, economic fluctuations, technological advances – were matched by (and often shaped) shifts in governmental priorities. As such, in any given time-frame, the rationale laid down to guide overseas information services reflected contemporary anxieties and opportunities just as much as the long-term capacities of the British Council and the underlying strategic interests of the British government. This was evident in the Drogheda Report which argued for a shift away from Western European investments, whereas a decade later – after the humiliation of the Suez crisis, relative economic decline, and with the process of decolonisation well underway – the Beeley Report turned attention to what a refocus on Europe (and entry to the European Economic Community) could do for Britain. This was also true for Edward Heath's Conservative government as they conducted negotiations with their European counterparts, but by the time of the CPRS review in 1978 and with entry secured, relations with continental Europe were no longer such a priority. However, while the significance of Europe waned, so that of the developing world gathered pace as a focus for educational partnerships and cultural exchange. Nevertheless, despite changes, and reversals, in direction over the decades the British Council has played an influential part in delivering what the 2005 Carter review characterised as 'three key outcomes: i) improved perceptions of the UK in other countries, ii) greater mutual understanding between the UK and other countries, and iii) stronger ties between the UK and other countries'.³²

³¹ Lord Carter of Coles, *Public Diplomacy Review*, p.20.

³² *Ibid.*

For all the changes and reversals in direction and fortune, after 80 years of activity the essential proposition behind the creation of the British Council remains remarkably familiar. As was noted in 1935, on the occasion of the Inaugural Meeting at St. James' Palace, its aims were

To promote abroad a wider appreciation of British culture and civilisation, by encouraging the study and use of the English language, and thereby, to extend knowledge of British literature and of the British contributions to music and the fine arts, the sciences, philosophic thought and political practice.³³

As the British Council looks over the precipice of a new digital communications age, will the guiding principles of the Council in 2094 rhyme just as easily with those of today?

³³ Frances Donaldson, *The British Council*, p.1.