History Page

1940s

Film Collection

During the 1940s, the British Council was a very different organisation operating in a very different political and social climate. As part of its programme then it was concerned to promote an idea of ‘Britain and Britishness’ – and did so by becoming an enthusiastic commissioner of documentary films. Over 120 films were produced as 'cultural propaganda' to counteract anything the Nazis might throw out and to refute the idea that ours was a country stuck in the past. These films were designed to showcase Britain to the rest of the world, at a time when Britain itself was under attack.

Seen by millions of people in over 100 countries worldwide from the 1940's to 1960's, they present an historic snapshot of Britain, portraying its industry, its landscapes, and its people.

Columbia

Since 1940, British Council has been working in Colombia to promote educational and cultural relations to enhance the reputation of the UK in Colombia, running programmes in the arts, education, governance and English language.

Schools

Professor Walter Starkie founded the British Council in Madrid and opened a school for 25 pupils. It was known as The British Institute or 'El British' and offered concerts, lectures, film screenings and exhibitions, as well as classes. It was the centre of British cultural relations in Madrid during the Second World War. By 1943, pupil numbers had risen to 1500.

1950s

Arts

Following the success of Henry Moore and J.M.W. Turner’s exhibition in [1948](https://venicebiennale.britishcouncil.org/history/1940s), the format of juxtaposing the work of artists from the 19th and 20th century was repeated. So in 1950, the work of Romantic painter John Constable (1776–1837) was presented alongside that of contemporary sculptor [Barbara Hepworth](http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/collection/artists/hepworth-dame-barbara-1903) and painter [Matthew Smith](http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/collection/artists/smith-sir-matthew-1879).

The Biennale in 1950 was less popular than in 1948, only welcoming half the number of visitors. Hepworth was not satisfied with the works that were chosen to be shown, feeling that their selection was ''discreet" and "ladylike'' when she had wanted something bolder.

1960s

Policy

Throughout the 1960s 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).13 Likewise this favoured the development of curricula that focussed on the Council's role in Commonwealth countries.14 This programme was championed by the Council's Controller of the Education Division, Arthur King, and represented an emphasis on the developmental value of ELT, and its ability to cultivate partnerships with developing nations.

1970s

Policy

The changing nature of the Council's audiences reflected the value that its work had for Britain, as recognised explicitly in 1970, during a funding review initiated by the incoming Prime Minister Edward Heath and designed to achieve savings. The Council was lauded as an essential asset, giving good insight into how its activities were valued: "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."

2000s

Work

In 2000-01 we worked in 229 towns and cities in 111 countries Albania Algeria Argentina Australia Austria Azerbaijan Bahrain Bangladesh Belgium Bolivia Bosnia and Herzegovina Botswana Brazil Brunei Bulgaria Burma Cameroon Canada Chile China Colombia Croatia Cuba Cyprus Czech Republic Denmark East Jerusalem (West Bank and Gaza) Ecuador Egypt Eritrea Estonia Ethiopia Finland France Georgia Germany Ghana Greece Hungary India Indonesia Iran Irish Republic Israël Italy Jamaica Japan Jordan Kazakhstan Kenya Korea Kuwait Latvia Lebanon Lesotho Libya Lithuania Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of) Malawi Malaysia Malta Mauritius Mexico Morocco Mozambique Namibia Népal Netherlands New Zealand Nigeria Norway Oman Pakistan Peru Philippines Poland Portugal Qatar Romania Russia Saudi Arabia Sénégal Sierra Leone Singapore Slovakia Slovenia South Africa Spain Sri Lanka Sudan Swaziland Sweden Switzerland Syria Taipei Tanzania Thailand Trinidad and Tobago Tunisia Turkey Uganda Ukraine United Arab Emirates USA Uzbekistan Venezuela Vietnam Yemen Yugoslavia Zambia Zimbabwe