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Written submission to British Council APPG

Inquiry into the value of international experience, skills and connections for young people in the UK

Please find attached the submission of International Newcastle to the inquiry.

I would be happy to provide any further information or clarification of our response, if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Baharini'.

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INTERNATIONAL NEWCASTLE – WRITTEN SUBMISSION

BRITISH COUNCIL APPG INQUIRY INTO THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE, SKILLS AND CONNECTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK

1. What is the impact of international connections on individuals in terms of: i) skills and competencies; ii) qualifications; iii) employability; iv) the personal resilience, aspiration, and confidence; v) and mindset of young people?

We believe that international experiences, skills and connections have a dramatic impact on the lives, outlook, opportunities and future prospects of young people, in particular, they are more likely to have:

- a. greater intercultural awareness at home and abroad and understanding of different perspectives, cultures, attitudes
- b. a broader understanding of and interest in the wider world, making them more active, global citizens
- c. greater levels of confidence and resilience
- d. better communication and social skills
- e. increased capacity and ambition to achieve better qualifications across the board (even more so if they speak other languages)
- f. higher aspirations about what they can do, achieve and become
- g. greater social mobility, especially for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds
- h. more flexibility, adaptability and creativity in how they think, work with other people and approach challenges
- i. valuable employability skills and attributes, as well as preparedness for working in a global economy and businesses that operate within and beyond the UK
- j. greater employment opportunities and career prospects

2. What are the main obstacles to young people in accessing international skills, experience and connections?

- a. **Lack of valuing and prioritizing international skills and experience** – this is not in the mindset or culture of the UK in general for education, skills and employment, but also may not be in the mindset or experience and culture of families, schools, training providers or employers to incorporate international elements into their lives (e.g. outside languages qualifications)
- b. **Socio-economic disadvantages** - lack of funding and resources to participate in international exchanges, as well as barriers around confidence to engage and cultural and social barriers, where this is outside their experience or is unfamiliar to them – in addition, the lack of access to direct international connections for many young people in the UK (who do not live in areas with international transport hubs) means that affordability is a key issue, with the costs of international travel being much higher for the people who can least afford it.

- c. **Lack of knowledge, expertise or capacity within local areas to support young people (via schools, colleges, community organisations or the informal youth sector) to support or signpost to international opportunities** – there is not always the knowledge of opportunities and the capacity or expertise to act on these and support young people to access them, as many local authorities and local organisations do not necessarily have specialisms or staff dedicated to supporting these and an understanding of the range of opportunities available – this may be more pronounced in areas of high multiple disadvantage, where young people and the services that support them may have significant challenges
- d. **Fewer opportunities available due to European programmes no longer being available to the UK** – opportunities across education, skills, civil society and youth sectors have been dramatically reduced in terms of these European programmes and the UK's exit from the EU. The Turing Scheme provides some opportunities for young people engaged with particular sectors (e.g. formal education and vocational training, but not the informal youth sector or community sector) and it does prioritize widening participation for young people from disadvantaged areas. However, as the funding is only for visits from the UK outward and not for exchange (as with Erasmus+), there could be additional barriers to engaging overseas partners who cannot access funding to reciprocate visits into the UK.
- e. **Lack of knowledge of other opportunities supporting international exchange** whether this be for education, business in the informal youth sector, volunteering, skills, training and employment
- f. **Language learning take up and qualifications in general in the UK declining**, especially at secondary level, so they are not exposed to languages and other cultures at school in a consistent way throughout formal education
- g. **Barriers to mobility** – challenges around mobility within the European Union, with 27 different countries having different visa or travel, work and visit requirements

3. How can access to international experience, skills and connections be broadened, particularly for the most disadvantaged in the UK?

- a. **Value and prioritize international skills and experience:** Change the mindset and talk positively and promote internationalism and international experiences. Profile why it is important, the benefits it can have for young people and for the country – this should be done consistently at a local and regional level, but also nationally
- b. **Positively discriminate towards levelling up to overcome socio-economic disadvantages** and target support for levelling up and creating opportunities for those who are disadvantaged and less likely to be able to participate in international exchange and partnerships
- c. **Open up and facilitate opportunities for young people to experience and engage in internationalism and with the diverse communities in their city or area**, as these can be valuable intercultural experiences and these communities also connect internationally
- d. **Value the cultures, languages, perspectives of our new and existing diverse communities** with international backgrounds, heritage and connections and enable young people from these communities to thrive

e. Create, resource and promote international opportunities

- Encourage cities and regions to develop and implement a strategy and partnerships around internationalization, which incorporate education, culture, business, skills and employment, civil society and also nurtures and widens existing international links to open up more opportunities for young people (complementing a national strategy to promote internationalism)
- Create new pathways for young people, different ways of generating exchange and connections – engage partners across public, private and the voluntary and community sector to open up existing and new opportunities for young people through their international connections and collaborations (locally, regionally, nationally)
- Find new ways of facilitating international connections - digital/virtual (e.g. schools links and joint projects and partnerships, training across different international partnerships, apprenticeships incorporating international elements and training, internships, work experience with international companies or companies trading internationally) - starting with the virtual opportunities as a gateway and to deepen relationships and leading to physical exchange
- Revise the Turing programme to include reciprocity, so that exchanges can be supported into the UK, as well as outward visits, so more likely to strengthen international links and collaboration which can in turn support young people's involvement and give them a more valuable experience
- Resource and promote international opportunities for the informal youth sector to enable young people from diverse backgrounds and who may be outside formal education and training to engage and benefit from international opportunities
- Identify and promote existing international opportunities available to young people and programmes and funding that they can take advantage of (e.g. British Council programmes, national cultural institutions of Embassies in the UK, wider international programmes supporting mobility, exchange, participation and collaborative opportunities)
- Adapt UK policy and funding of skills, training and employment to incorporate and fund international experiences and elements in mainstream activity as an essential activity

f. Support and promote language learning take up and qualifications from Early Years to Higher Education with Government backing and a national commitment, policies and resourcing to reverse the decline in language learning and support language teaching as a key skills area for Global Britain and support for multi-agency approaches in cities and regions to support promote and support language learning

g. Make mobility simpler and provide guidance, support and funding around different visa or travel, work and visit requirements

4. How does the UK benefit from young people having international experience and connections? Please use examples where possible and consider benefits to i) the national and local economy; ii) social and culture life in the UK.

- a. Having a workforce with international experience will enable businesses and employers to benefit from a broader skillset nationally, help attract and retain talent in key areas of the economy and also attract inward investment in both local and regional economies as well as UK wide, providing an economic stimulus, growth and a more robust economic future
- b. Young people with international experiences and connections have a better understanding of different cultures and communities at home and abroad, which will help support and promote social cohesion in the UK, greater tolerance and positive attitudes towards diversity, difference and multi-culturalism

5. What are the benefits for employers and businesses of a workforce that has international experience, connections and/or skills?

- a. A workforce with the right skills for the future for employers and businesses to operate internationally and across borders and cultures and help the local, UK and global economy
- b. Young people who have a level of intercultural awareness and international experience which enables them to be better qualified, more confident, more effective in working transnationally both within organisations and businesses and externally with other partners
- c. Young people in work who are able to share ideas and bring in new perspectives and ways of doing things - flexible and creative - in turn benefiting the local and national economy and society

6. To what extent is the UKs languages deficit a challenge for Global Britain; and how could this challenge be met?

Although English is often perceived as a lingua franca, we should be under no illusion that it is not. The persistent and ongoing decline in modern foreign language learning in the UK and the lack of recognition and support for the learning and accreditation of home or community languages, is detrimental to the ambitions for Global Britain, to the population and to the young people who are the future of the country.

The decline in MFL take up is disproportionately affecting the state education sector, socio-economically and regionally disadvantaged groups, with a North-South divide and subsequent widening gulf in social mobility. 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.

We are part of a global society and economy with global challenges. Climate Change, the Covid-19 pandemic and movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter are just some examples of issues and challenges that affect us all and that need to be addressed by concerted, international collaboration.

The ability to communicate and collaborate across borders and in different languages, with a good level of linguistic and intercultural competencies (or cultural agility) is essential for the future of our social, political, cultural and economic development. This is essential for our society as a whole, as well as for business and trade, employment, education, research and international development. It will be key to promote international cohesion and mutual understanding, as well as international co-operation across the governmental sphere, diplomacy and for the future peace of our country and across the world.

There should be a renewed focus and policies to support language education, linguistic and intercultural competencies. In December 2020, the British Academy made an unprecedented [joint statement](#) with organisations from the USA, Canada and Australia, calling on governments, policy makers, educators and industry to take “concerted, systematic and coordinated” action to increase capacity for easily accessible education in a broad range of languages.

In addition, in 2020, the British Academy, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Association of School and College Leaders, British Council and Universities UK, presented proposals for the education and skills component of a UK-wide national languages strategy ([Languages in the UK: A call for action](#)). This articulated the scale of the problem and impact of not supporting language learning, intercultural awareness and skills and proposed ways of addressing this. We support the call for a national strategy, which would cut across and be co-ordinated across different policy areas and Government departments and support language and cultural competencies at all life stages.

We believe that a national framework and approach, would be complemented by action at regional and local level, with partnership approaches to supporting language learning and teaching at all levels of education and life stages, as well as promoting intercultural awareness and celebrating different cultures and languages across our communities. We also believe that supporting international collaboration and exchange across all sectors would complement and strengthen language learning.

We are seeking to do this through our own international city strategy, [Our Newcastle Our World](#) and our priority of *Newcastle as an city for our children and young people (0-30) as confident, global citizens*. This is supported by our [work programme 2020-22](#), which brings partners and stakeholders together to promote international connections and opportunities, language learning and intercultural awareness and to celebrate cultural diversity and (e.g. [Newcastle City of Languages](#) and our recent [Express Yourself NE Festival of Languages](#)).

7. Are there examples from around the world that the UK can learn from to ensure access to international experience and connections for young people?

There are a range of training activities that are part of national programmes that we can learn from. Continental European countries tend to incorporate international experiences into training in a way that has not been done in the UK, or only in a limited number of cases.

One example is the French apprenticeship programme, [Compagnons du Devoir](#), which incorporates an international placement or training activity in another country as part of the programme. This provides young people with valuable experience of living and training in another country. It would be advantageous if apprenticeships in the UK incorporated international elements (virtual and physical placements and training) to broaden the experience of young people as they work towards future careers.

The [European Solidarity Corps](#) is an excellent initiative, which supports young people wishing to engage in volunteering, from health and environmental activities, to community projects and interventions, but also promotes inclusion and diversity and supports the participation of young people in democratic processes and civic engagement.

[i-Portunus](#) is a scheme which supports artists, creators and other cultural professionals looking for international collaborations, to go abroad for your professional development, to find new audiences, to present their work and co-produce or co-create with others. It provides mobility opportunities and financial support for projects which directly impact in cultural fields.

8. What has been the impact of Covid-19 and related safety restrictions on the quality and accessibility of international experience for young people; and are there lessons from the pandemic which can enhance and expand access to international experience and skills for young people?

The pandemic has impacted significantly on young people's ability to travel and experience other countries, due to restrictions and safety concerns. At the same time, the reduction of opportunities to access European programmes which support international mobility and collaboration, means that young people in the UK have significantly less access to experiences which could both enhance their lives and careers.

The key lessons relate to the ability to move online and access international experiences and opportunities (see response to question 9 below).

9. What role should digital connections (both globally and within the UK) play in broadening and enhancing access to international experiences for young people in the UK?

There is a significant opportunity for digital connections to broaden access to international experiences for young people in the UK – if they have access to these, in terms of digital inclusion. The opening up of digital platforms and virtual connections and the increasing openness to using these, has meant that there are more opportunities for young people to access a wider range of international experiences, either independently or via schools, colleges, universities, training providers and employers.

There seems to be a greater willingness for connecting online, as well as training and working online or virtually, supported by advances in video conferencing and other remote technologies. This could be a gateway for young people to access international experiences, and develop intercultural awareness, as well as practical skills and build deeper relationships and connections with people across the world. In particular, the virtual route could be a positive first step for those who may be from more disadvantaged backgrounds and who may not have the confidence, opportunity or resources to be able to travel to access such experiences. Over time they may build their ability and confidence to travel and secure training, work or volunteering opportunities in other countries.

There have been opportunities for young people to access more events, activities and resources, with organisations and networks being compelled to move things online and willing to share these or enable more people to attend than would have been possible in the pre-pandemic world. If this continues, it could give people valuable opportunities to engage in things they otherwise would not have been able to.

The need to reduce the environmental impact of international travel is another consideration, where a blended mix of online activity, relationship building and collaboration can be complemented by physical travel and experiences in other countries, which would then be able to be maintained and enhanced before and after such visits. The international experience could be more valuable with the development and maintenance of these relationships through digital means.

For young people in areas such as Newcastle, which although has some connectivity, tends to require a greater outlay to travel internationally to reach the transport hubs and reach destinations on the continent and across the world, the digital element could be crucial in opening up opportunities, which may otherwise not be considered due to the lack of affordability.

There is the likelihood that the world of work may also be permanently changed significantly, with more flexibility in how people train and work. Training remotely with access to training in other countries would enable young people to develop both their technical/practical skills as well as boost their cultural agility. Training and working remotely from anywhere, which will enable young people to access more opportunities for work, which is more affordable and manageable, due to there being less compulsion to live where the employer is or to have to commute. The caveat is that this will only be possible, if they are able to connect digitally and have the knowledge and resources to do so.

There also more potential for young people to engage in advocacy and global citizenship or activist movements and to get involved in activities remotely, but still make valuable contributions, e.g. through virtual volunteering, speaking or participating in events and being able to be part of campaigns. There is real potential to use digital technologies to support language learning and intercultural awareness at all ages and in all settings, providing opportunities to access resources, human interaction and multilayered experiences, which make language learning fun and opens up an exploration and awareness of other cultures.

All of these potential opportunities, rely on the affordability of and access to digital technologies and data, which for many young people in more disadvantaged areas, is not a given. In addition, being able to communicate opportunities through the sea of information and online activity is also going to be a challenge. It also requires (to some extent) the trainers, employers, educators to be able to facilitate international connections that are genuine, authentic and which will add value to the skills and experience of young people.