

The British Council and the UK City of Culture Programme

Study Report & Thought Piece:

How the British Council works with and adds value to UK Cities of Culture

Report by

Dr Beatriz Garcia, Institute of Cultural Capital

Tamsin Cox, ICC Associate & DHA Head of Policy & Research

With contributions from

Andrew Dixon, Culture Creativity Place



Executive Summary

The Institute of Cultural Capital was appointed in March 2017 to undertake a study reviewing the way in which the British Council has engaged with the UK City of Culture (UKCC) programme, and particularly the Hull 2017 programme. The study has also explored recommendations for how the British Council could engage with future UKCC bidders and winners, and with the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) programme when a UK city is designated.

The study involved a range of approaches to collecting data and feedback, including reviewing operational, partnership and strategic documents, interviewing a range of stakeholders (both internal and external to the British Council) and running a workshop with British Council staff.

The findings and thinking from this study covers:

1. The Value and Purpose of the British Council engaging with the UK City of Culture programme
2. Lessons from Hull 2017
3. Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the headline findings and recommendations under each of these areas.

Value and Purpose of the British Council and the UK City of Culture

UK City of Culture – a special opportunity

Our discussions and reading revealed a range of factors which make the UK City of Culture a particular opportunity for a potential partner, including:

- The concentration and focus of significant investment and partnerships on a particular area (which may not otherwise get such notice) and for a particular period of time. This provides both opportunity and an imperative.
- A step change for a single geographical area, focusing upon the needs and strengths of that area and potentially providing a useful test case for the British Council in exploring the value of international work in domestic regeneration.
- An emphasis on 'raising the game' within a city, with an imperative to do things differently and better, and to build the capacity of the local cultural sector.
- An emphasis on raising the profile of the city providing a way to explore the value of international work in developing profile outside the UK.
- A complex range of partners and ownership, between local authorities, 'culture companies', the wider cultural sector and other agencies/institutions, which provides both opportunities and some challenges.
- A particular focus from other national cultural agencies to invest and work together, providing opportunities for collaboration and maximising impact.

The British Council – the international partner

Those participating in the study provided feedback about the particular role which the British Council is able to play, including:

- The British Council is the only potential UKCC partner whose primary focus is the relationship between Britain and the rest of the world this focus is valuable for an area of work which is complex and may require advocacy.

- The British Council has significant knowledge, contacts and experience of working in and with territories around the world and is able to bring these resources to the table as well as some funding and some significant facilitative support.
- The British Council has the experience of and is able to share lots of good examples of work which connects British institutions and projects with the wider world, helping potential and winning UKCC understand what is possible.
- The British Council has a range of priorities and strategies, some of which connect with wider government and other agendas. This can, sometimes, provide a useful rationale for UKCC's to choose to engage with particular countries or areas.

Opportunities for impact

Building on the lessons from Derry Londonderry 2013 and Hull 2017 (thus far), there are some significant areas of potential impact which the British Council can make in a UKCC context. These fall into two broad categories: tangible opportunities to connect local artists and organisations to international peers and collaborators and the practical benefits of capacity building and meaningful activity; and less tangible opportunities to change the attitudes and perceptions of a city to the wider world, and vice versa.

The study includes an outline theory of change for the relationship between the British Council and the UKCC programme, outlining short-term, mid-term and long-term outcomes. An important thing to note has been the particular experience in Hull 2017, most of the outcomes which can be identified as emerging in 2017 have been about building new relationships between international partners and Hull partners, or the British Council and Hull partners. There have been some experiences and international work which the public has been able to engage, which would not otherwise have happened, also. What this suggests is that with future UKCC's much of the benefit which is achievable for the nominated year itself is about laying the foundations for international work. However, there is value in stating a broader ambition – the British Council might best view its engagement with a UKCC as the start of a long-term relationship, rather than a single time-limited opportunity to create impact.

Lessons from Hull 2017

What worked well

A number of things emerged from interviews, discussions and documents that have worked well in the British Council's engagement with Hull 2017, including:

- The British Council has changed Hull's understanding and engagement with international work.
- Hull has achieved relationships with countries and organisations which would not have happened without the support of the British Council.
- The British Council has helped to build the capacity of parts of Hull's cultural sector, in some cases where practitioners and organisations had little or no experience of international work.
- The British Council has contributed to productive partnerships with other agencies and institutions like the BBC, Arts Council England and the University of Hull.
- Despite some early challenges, both the British Council and the Hull 2017 delivery team worked together towards a meaningful programme of international engagement.

What was a challenge

- There were some significant early issues with the absence of a common understanding between the British Council and Hull 2017 delivery team about the nature of the partnership, and how things like funding would be managed.
- The role that the British Council wished to play was not similar to that of other funders, and the cash funding contribution was relatively modest in the context of a UKCC budget; as such, this combination was not well understood or engaged with by the Hull 2017 delivery team in the early period.
- There were changes of personnel at the British Council during the planning phases, an absence of a senior, strategic lead for some time and some general confusion from Hull 2017 delivery team and others about how best to engage with the British Council and how to navigate the range of personnel involved.
- There were different expectations about how money could best be spent and what the process of allocating funding would be; these were compounded by a sense that the British Council is not very flexible about managing its funding, and that there are significant internal bureaucratic processes to be satisfied in order to release funding. There was also a sense from some stakeholders that the British Council did not really understand the kinds of budget constraints and challenges for the delivery team.
- It took both the British Council and Hull 2017 some time to get to a meaningful shared conversation about possible programme ideas that could be taken forward. This delay was felt by many to have had an impact on the eventual agreed programme.
- There were challenges in attempting to identify shared priorities, particularly in relating to countries or regions. The British Council was also unsure at the beginning about whether it should be seeking to support activities across all the artforms, and whether it should be developing major projects or engaging in a range of smaller interventions and support.
- Finally, the British Council has not communicated its role and activities as widely as might be beneficial.

Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that there is a unique role which the British Council can play in a UKCC programme, and that the UKCC programme offers a special opportunity to the British Council. It is also the view of the study team that this applies to the UK participation in the ECoC programme, and that the following identification of opportunities, challenges and recommendations applies similarly to both the UKCC and the ECoC programmes.

Role of the British Council

The key thing in the future is for the British Council to determine more clearly what its role will be in relation to the UKCC. This study recommends that there are two key strands to the future role which the British Council could take:

- That, whilst the British Council has priorities and existing programmes, these are only meaningful to a UKCC where they coincide with the priorities of that area. A shared programme must be led by the needs and opportunities of that area.
- That what the British Council has which is particularly valuable is its expertise and networks. It knows how to undertake international work, and it knows how to build the capacity of others to do so. The British Council's 'core offer' to the UKCC programme should be a way of working, supported by a menu of tangible examples and possibilities.

Detailed Recommendations

This study makes the following recommendations for the British Council in future UKCC programmes:

1. The British Council needs to make the case for an international element in the UKCC programme, and champion the value of international work
2. The British Council needs to make the case for an international partner, and explain the value of its own role, expertise and experience
3. There must be clear terms of engagement and an articulation of the budget which the British Council can share with bidding and winning cities, so that they can understand what to expect
4. There is value in engaging with the bidding cities, particularly at the shortlisting stage, to encourage bids which reflect international opportunities and thinking, and to ensure that cities understand what the British Council is offering.
5. At the point of delivery, the British Council needs to get to know the winning city and understand its needs, priorities and existing international capacities.
6. Engagement in the UKCC programme should be given greater internal and external profile by the British Council, particularly amongst key stakeholders.
7. The planning needs to begin as early as possible – international work takes time to develop.
8. The planning process must begin with the priorities and capacities of the winning city.
9. The planning process needs then to bring in the priorities and capacity of the British Council where it can best contribute.
10. Both the British Council and the winning city will need to work together to negotiate and explore where collaboration might best take place. Thought needs to be given to how the British Council expects to engage with a city – whether through a ‘culture company’ or more directly with the sector.
11. It is important to recognise that the hosting year is the beginning of a four-year commitment – the British Council will have a greater opportunity to develop meaningful impact if it considers the UKCC as way of beginning a series of place-focused relationships which might continue in the longer-term.
12. The British Council needs to help the winning city navigate the British Council. Thought should be given to supporting a consistency of personnel and senior strategic engagement.
13. The British Council should also think about how it could streamline the bureaucracy and funding approach, to give both flexibility and authority to staff members who are engaging regularly and directly with the area, and to respond better to the opportunities which are available.
14. Finally, there is more that the British Council could do to explore and understand the value of what it is doing, and to tell the story afterwards.

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Value and Purpose of the British Council and the UK City of Culture.....	2
Lessons from Hull 2017	3
Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations	4
1 Introduction	7
1.1 Background	7
1.2 Study Methods.....	7
2 Value and Purpose of the British Council and the UK City of Culture	9
2.1 The UK City of Culture – a special opportunity.....	9
2.2 The British Council – the international partner	11
2.3 Opportunities for Impact	12
3 Lessons from Hull 2017	15
3.1 What worked well?	15
3.2 What was a challenge.....	16
4 Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations.....	19
4.1 Role of the British Council	19
4.2 Detailed recommendations	20

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In March 2017 the Institute of Cultural Capital was appointed by the British Council to undertake a piece of work reviewing the way in which the British Council has engaged with the UK City of Culture (UKCC) programme – and particularly the Hull 2017 programme – and exploring recommendations for future engagement.

The request for proposal from the British Council set five research questions for this study:

- When should the British Council get involved in UKCC's (pre or post-bid)?
- Should the British Council have a 'core UKCC offer', or deal with each year individually?
- How can the British Council ensure impact and added value?
- How can the British Council ensure a strong legacy?
- What are the issues/opportunities, given the UK-focus of the UKCC, for the BC as international partner in the post-EU referendum context?

The study team have worked between April 2017 and October 2017 to explore these questions, and this report is the result of that work. The report includes a note on the methods used for this study, and then is divided into three main sections:

4. The Value and Purpose of the British Council engaging with the UK City of Culture programme
5. Lessons from Hull 2017
6. Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations

1.2 Study Methods

This study has involved a range of different approaches to collecting feedback and information about the British Council's involvement with the UKCC programme. The study has been supported by British Council staff, primarily by Martina Murphy (Arts Partnership Manager, UK Region) but also involving other key staff from the arts, evaluation and UK region areas. Four main activities have been undertaken through this study:

- Reading and reviewing documents from the British Council, Hull 2017 and other special event examples (e.g. ECoC programme)
- Interviewing stakeholders from the British Council, Hull 2017, other partners/stakeholders and cities bidding for UKCC 2021
- Running a workshop with British Council staff
- Developing a theory of change and some practical recommendations

Documents were gathered through a series of requests made predominantly to the British Council for relevant material. Interviewees were identified through discussions with British Council staff and, in some cases, direct contacts or recommendations made by the study team. The British Council identified attendees for the workshop and hosted the event.

The documents reviewed as part of this study included:

- Partnership agreement and other shared documentation between the British Council and Hull 2017
- Papers from the meetings of the British Council's UKCC 2017 steering group and other relevant internal British Council documentation, including relating to Derry 2013 and recent work on evaluation of the arts programme
- Documents from Hull 2017 relating to partnership projects
- Documents from the Hull 2017 evaluation programme
- Material from the ECoC programme

The team undertook 24 interviews using a semi-structured discussion guide. Notes were taken from the interviews, but all interviewees remain anonymous. Where helpful, the 'group' category which an interviewee (or several interviewees) is from is identified. The interviews were undertaken amongst the following groups:

Interviewee Group	No. of interviewees
British Council staff	7
Hull 2017 delivery team	5
Hull city partners	5
Other	7
Total	24

Interviewees amongst the British Council staff included those who had direct responsibility for engaging with Hull 2017, and other members of staff with strategic responsibility for areas in the British Council like the UK Region and the arts. Interviewees at Hull 2017 are employees at the company set up to run Hull's year as UKCC 2017, or those from the city council's arts and culture team involved directly in delivering the UKCC. Interviewees had direct experience of engaging with the British Council. Those interviewees in the group 'Hull partners' include arts organisations in Hull and other Hull-based stakeholders involved in the UKCC programme. The group 'Other' covers national partners/stakeholders who engage with the UKCC programme, and those involved in Derry Londonderry (UKCC in 2013), cities shortlisted and bidding to be UK City of Culture in 2021, and in Hull's bid to be UKCC.

The workshop involved 10 attendees from the British Council. Most had had significant direct involvement in the British Council's work with Hull 2017, but a couple had had less involvement or were relatively new to the British Council. The workshop used early findings (following the structure which this report also uses) and a series of questions/discussion exercises to gain feedback and further material.

2 Value and Purpose of the British Council and the UK City of Culture

In the brief for this study none of the research questions directly ask *why* the British Council should engage with the UKCC programme; however, the requirement for a ‘theory of change’ suggests that the reason for engaging – and the hypothesis for creating meaningful impact as a result of engagement – is something that this study needs to consider. The British Council already has its own programmes and priorities. Some of the learning from Hull suggests that navigating and negotiating between the British Council motivations and those of Hull 2017 was quite complex. So, in order to develop a theory of change and provide some driving principles for the British Council’s future engagement with the UK City of Culture programme, this section of the report considers some of the answers to the question of why the British Council should engage with the UKCC programme in the first place.

2.1 The UK City of Culture – a special opportunity

Looking across data from interviews, documents and feedback from the workshop involving arts, national and regional representatives, a range of things have emerged which make the case for the UKCC programme offering a particular and special opportunity in terms of arts and cultural activities and investment in the UK.

1. *Concentration and focus*

The UKCC programme brings together a wide range of potential funders, partners and events – local authorities, trusts, local businesses and sponsors, the arts councils, Heritage Lottery Fund, Crafts Council, RIBA, BBC, Tate via the Turner Prize, etc. – to concentrate their activities on a particular location, and at a particular point in time. This combination of the scale of partnerships and investment focused upon both time and place creates two things:

- An opportunity for significant impact, due to the volume, depth and ambition of activity taking place – particularly because the commitments are to sustaining that impact.
- A useful hook and stimulus to bring in the attention of different partners and funders, an opportunity to coincide different agendas, opportunities, etc. – i.e. an imperative to get involved which might not normally exist.

2. *Step change for a single geographical area*

Several interviewees and attendees at the workshop talked about the way the UKCC programme brings attention to a specific geographical area – and perhaps one which would not normally be on the radar of the British Council, or where the British Council does not currently have many connections (more than one interviewee suggested that the British Council was currently quite ‘London-centric’ in its engagement with the UK). The British Council’s own agenda and experiences of UK cities is developing at present, in this sense, the UKCC programme could provide a useful learning ground and test case for other work which the Council might wish to pursue.

The aspirations laid out in the step changes which bidding and winning cities sought were also seen as demonstrating an exciting prospect and level of ambition – an opportunity for the British Council to explore how an international element might benefit the social, economic and cultural step changes laid out by bidding and winning cities. The focus upon an individual area also means a focus upon the local identity and unique voice of a city, and the specific challenges and opportunities of that area – as such, it has to be shaped to fit the strategic need of that city. By engaging with the UKCC, the British Council can explore the intersection between international work and domestic regeneration. The principle of the award is also that that benefit and change will be long-term, providing an opportunity for the British Council to begin a relationship (or several relationships) which go on beyond the year itself. Some interviewees were particularly keen to point out that the title is held for four years: the first ‘hosting’ year, plus the three after that.

3. Opportunity to ‘raise the game’ inside the city

Bidding cities who were interviewed, as well as other interviewees, emphasized the step up required by the cultural sector and other agencies within a city in order to be a UKCC. The programme provides an area with both a challenge and an opportunity to do things differently and to develop the capacities and experiences of artists, organisations and others. When potential international work was discussed with bidding cities, whilst they were positive about the possibilities of such activity, on the whole they felt that artists and organisations in the city would need encouragement and support in international engagement.

4. Opportunity for the host city to raise its profile

UKCC recipients have, thus far, been what might be called ‘mid-tier’ cities – not necessarily cities with significant international profile. The programme encourages cities to project their identity and their voice more loudly, to make visible their uniqueness and make connections with the rest of the world. Some interviewees particularly described the job a UKCC has in presenting the best of the UK to others – not just being elevated within the UK, but on behalf of the UK to the outside world. Potentially this is one of the areas where international work could help a UKCC to achieve its aims.

5. Navigation between a ‘culture company’, a local authority and the wider sector/other institutions and agencies

As is discussed further in section 3 of this report, there are some complex arrangements concerning who ‘owns’ and ‘runs’ a UKCC. Whilst this can present challenges, there are also opportunities for significant work across a city’s system, both its cultural sector and other public agencies, and to be facilitated and supported by a culture company in navigating these relationships. The range of local partners with an interest in engaging and working together in a UKCC can provide greater coherence to programme opportunities than might be the case in a city not hosting a UKCC title; it can also encourage some partners to go further than they might normally do.

6. Other national partners are committed and involved

This section has already mentioned some of the national partners – arts councils, the BBC, etc. – who get involved in the UKCC. This focus means that the intervention is a national policy moment, bringing together national agencies and institutions in a way which might not otherwise happen. The British Council is experienced in working with other national partners, and can bring to the table an added dimension as well as benefiting from the involvement of those other partners.

2.2 The British Council – the international partner

Interviewees and workshop attendees were encouraged to think about what it is that the British Council can do which other potential partners cannot. The Council is presented as the ‘international partner’ for Hull 2017 (and is the only international partner), though what this means has been a matter of negotiation and some mixed perceptions at times (discussed further in Section 3). However, in our data several things have come up which suggest a possible blueprint or USP for the British Council’s involvement in the UKCC programme.

1. The only UKCC partner focusing on the relationship between Britain and the rest of the world

Whilst other local and national UKCC partners may have international connections, and be positive about the potential for international work, a strong international element is not a key part of their responsibility to or requirement of a UKCC. International work can be complex: it takes time to build relationships, find contacts, understand how to work with people and organisations who have a different local and national context and language, and navigate practical challenges like resources and visas. The development of work in this area requires significant commitment. The British Council has the advantage of having international work as its sole focus, which should enable the Council to be a strong champion for and supporter of international work.

2. Significant knowledge, contacts and experience working in and with territories around the world – and some funding

At the most basic level, the British Council is the only partner available to the UKCC with the experience, expertise and the infrastructure of networks, offices, staff and connections in this area. Any potential UKCC should expect that international work requires significant development time and effort – the British Council is the only partner really able to operate in this way to support this development. The value of this infrastructure suggests that the British Council is not like other potential funders, but actually closer to a facilitating partner, able to bring to bear knowledge and access resources and connections that cities are unlikely to be able to do on their own.

In addition the British Council has previously brought funding to the UKCC. The investment made for Derry Londonderry 2013 was the largest ever by the British Council in Northern Ireland. The investment for Hull has been important too. However, particularly for those interviewees from within the British Council, it is clear that the funding is only one element of a menu of wider support, and not the leading part of the offer to a UKCC.

3. Good examples of work connecting British institutions and projects with the wider world

One of the challenges for cities bidding to be UKCC is understanding what might be possible. If local cultural organisations and other city institutions are not familiar with undertaking international work, it may be difficult to see the value of such work, to understand what kind of development is required to achieve it or to simply ‘get’ what kinds of activities are possible. The British Council runs projects and programmes around the world, and connects British cultural organisations with partners around the world every day. It also works alongside other agencies in the UK regularly – the arts councils, the BBC and others.

The British Council has lots of concrete, tangible examples of how capacity for international work can be developed, how relationships can be built, how trust can be established, what kinds of exchange are meaningful and so forth. These examples are a potential treasure trove for bidding cities in understanding what might be possible. It is also the case that the

British Council sometimes has existing models and programmes in place which could be of interest to a UKCC – not every element of UKCC international work may require development from a blank page.

4. The British Council has a series of priorities and agendas which connect with government policy and geo-political areas of interest.

The British Council has an arts strategy, and strategies for other areas of its activities. It also has priority areas and countries which reflect things like government policy and other key geo-political drivers. Whilst it is not always the case that a UKCC will share all of those priorities (this is an issue discussed further in Sections 3 and 4), a UKCC may have potential international priorities which coincide with those of the British Council and work would therefore support both partners' agendas. Some potential UKCC may be looking for a rationale to engage with particular countries or areas.

2.3 Opportunities for Impact

Interviewees and attendees at the workshop were asked to consider what the potential impacts of British Council involvement in the UKCC might be. At the most basic level, most respondents talked about bringing a significant 'international' angle or element to a UKCC – many referred to the benefits of this in two different areas:

- In more abstract terms, as an opportunity to open hearts and minds to the rest of the world, and to win hearts and minds to the location of the UKCC. The opportunity for dialogue across countries and cultures was felt to be important, and several interviewees talked about the value of this very particularly in the wake of the EU referendum.
- In more practical terms, enabling meaningful exchange between artists and organisations in the UK and elsewhere, supporting UKCC's to develop cultural products which could be exported, developing the capacity of the local artists, organisations and others to be able to engage with international partners, raising the profile of a city area and its cultural sector internationally, enabling citizens of that city area to experience international work and engage internationally themselves.

At this stage, it is perhaps also worth noting that when the study team went searching for meaningful examples of engagement from agencies similar to the British Council within the ECoC process (e.g. Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, Instituto Cervantes in the context of other European event host cities), it found relatively little evidence of such work. It is possible that this reflects the absence of profile that this kind of work tends to receive; and it might be valuable in the future for the British Council to consider engaging directly with similar counterparts and exploring directly what involvement they have had with programmes like the ECoC. However, it is also the case that the 'European' and 'international' dimensions of the ECoC programme are under-developed, with cities continually finding them difficult to interpret and action; the regular ex-post evaluations and other studies (eg Garcia & Cox 2013)¹ have noted this ongoing problem. As such, there is an opportunity for the British Council to lead the way in establishing meaningful activities and ways of working in this area.

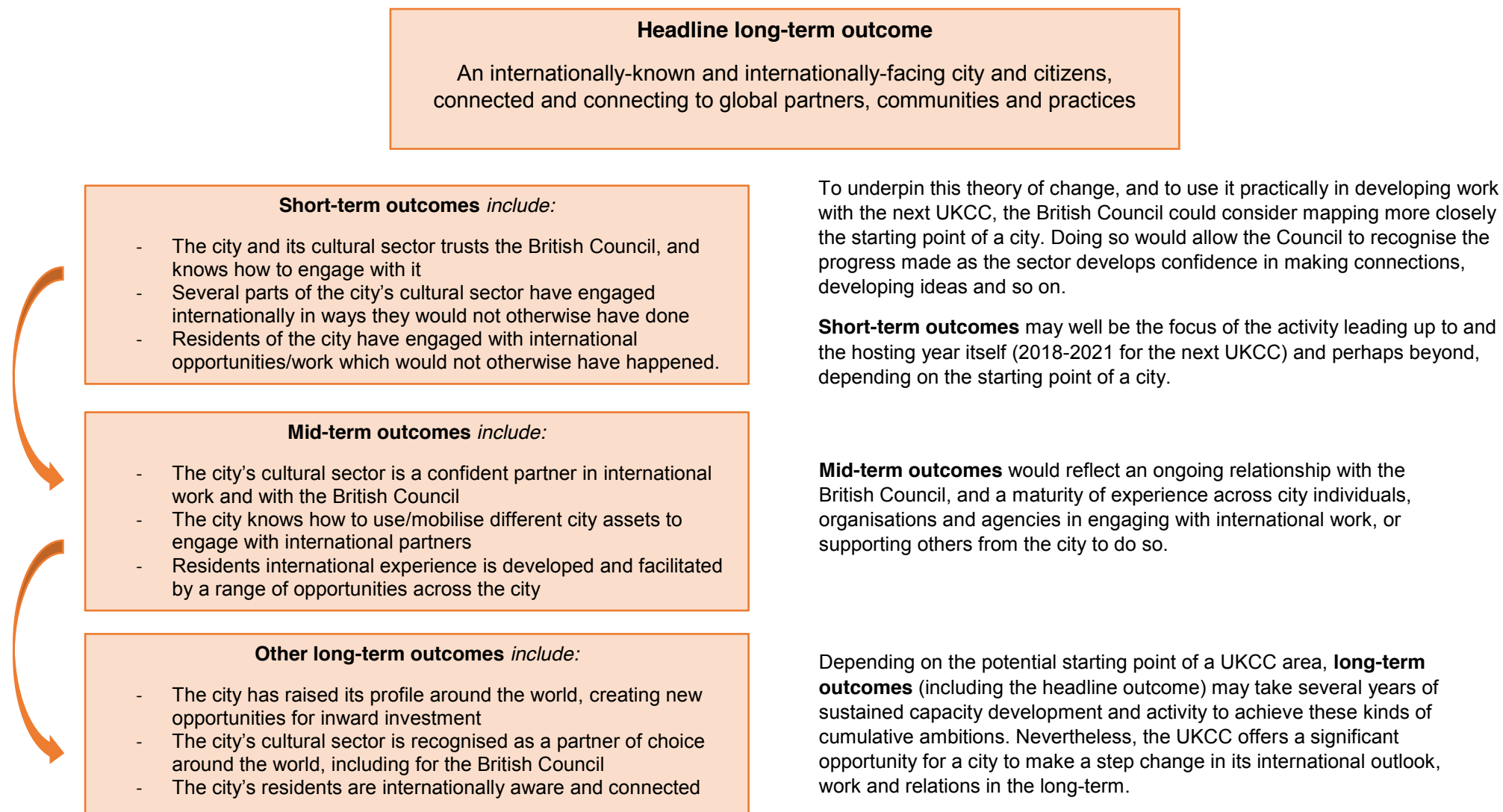
¹ Garcia, B. & Cox, T. (2013) *European Capitals of Culture: Success Factors and Long Term Effects*. Brussels: European Parliament

The following page offers an outline 'theory of change' for the British Council's involvement with a UKCC. Key to this study has been to try and explore what the outcomes of this involvement might be, which are particular to engagement with the UKCC programme rather than other activities which the British Council might engage with. The range of potential activities which could take place under the umbrella of the British Council contributing to a UKCC is very broad. It would be impractical to attempt to map all the possible outputs and outcomes from this range of activities; and individually they would not necessarily be specific to the context of a UKCC. This theory of change provides an 'umbrella', under which individual projects – and their specific outputs and outcomes – could be plotted.

The earlier discussions in sections 2.1 and 2.2 suggest that there is the possibility not just for meaningful individual projects, but also for a series of interventions and support by the British Council which could cumulatively alter the capacity of a city area to engage internationally – i.e. that a city could make a step change in its international outlook and work. The following theory of change provides an outline hypothesis for this step change, and seeks to recognise that cities may begin from a limited experience of international work, and that different areas may begin from different levels of experience. Thus, the theory of change could be used with any UKCC to plot the distance travelled, rather than anticipating the same type or level of impact for each UKCC.

Theory of Change

Figure 1: Theory of change as a result of the British Council Engagement with UKCC host cities



3 Lessons from Hull 2017

The brief for this study asked for some reflections and evaluation of the British Council's engagement with Hull 2017. The year is not yet over and the British Council has, in any case, already undertaken some work to support activity in Hull beyond 2017. It is not the job of this study to compile a comprehensive account of all the activities which the British Council has invested in or supported in Hull 2017, but rather to examine feedback and evidence about the process of engagement and draw some useful lessons for the future. In providing this account the study team has not sought to provide a blow by blow account of the process, but to take an overview and draw out what might be useful for the future.

By way of context and background, the British Council has, to date, committed a little over £330k of cash resource to Hull 2017 across two financial years (2016/17 and 2017/18) and 18 budget lines/projects as well as identifying and contributing significant staff time, expertise and connections via a substantial portion of the Arts Partnerships Manager role, direct on-the-ground engagement from members of the arts team and other teams (e.g. education), the UK Region team and specific in-country teams (e.g. Sierra Leone).

3.1 What worked well?

Interviewees and workshop attendees were asked to reflect upon what they thought had worked well in the British Council's engagement with Hull 2017. Both those who were part of the event delivery team and the city wider stakeholders noted that a fundamental benefit of having British Council involvement was to bring an international outlook to the UKCC. Some talked about the way that the British Council work had changed views within the delivery team or showed people how 'internationalism' might work. For others the sense that Hull might raise its profile, and place itself in a global context via the British Council was attractive.

Overall, there was an acknowledgement that, without British Council involvement, the international agenda for Hull 2017 and the UKCC at large may have been far less ambitious, and that this is a key issue for major UK events to address in a post-EU referendum context. National stakeholders noted that internationalism had not been defined explicitly as a UKCC priority area and they indicated that the British Council could be a catalyst to make this more central and meaningful in future.

More specifically there was a sense that the British Council had enabled relationships with countries (such as Sierra Leone) that Hull 2017 would not have been able to build in the same way – i.e. one interviewee talked about the 'credibility' and 'legitimacy' which the British Council is able to lend in making introductions, as well as about the value of contacts in areas that would not otherwise have been reached. In addition, some UKCC stakeholders also talked about the plans for some of the relationships which had been established to continue, and the possibility of long-term collaborations and benefits.

The role of the British Council in developing the capacity of the cultural sector in Hull to engage with international opportunities was noted by several interviewees, and has been a key part of the approach of several of the British Council staff. Whilst this work is 'quiet' and sometimes without fanfare, it has been noticed by stakeholders and the need for it confirmed.

Whilst this section is focusing on Hull 2017, it is perhaps also worth noting some of the learning from the Derry/Londonderry 2013 evaluation which noted the importance of the British Council in helping the team there to solve problems without interfering significantly. Despite some of the challenges which arose from the concept of co-creating and co-producing, the facilitative role and value of the British Council has been recognised by stakeholders.

From the British Council's perspective there have been opportunities to develop new partnerships and renew older relationships, with partners like the BBC, Arts Council England and the University of Hull. The general goodwill across these different partners – and with Hull 2017 and the main delivery team – has been noted by many interviewees. This shared working has had several benefits, in some cases with partners like the BBC helping the British Council to advocate for the value of certain approaches, and in others with the British Council helping other partners engage better with Hull 2017.

Where the British Council has succeeded in supporting new international connections for some city stakeholders, there has been a value back to the organisation in the shape of a strengthened belief in the value which the British Council can add through 'internationalising' a programme. In some cases projects have begun from a very low base of previous experience. The Informal European Theatre Meeting project has emerged as a strong potential legacy, but has come from a sub-sector in Hull where there was no prior experience of this kind of work. Potentially there are ongoing relationships there, not just for Hull organisations but also for the British Council.

At a very practical level, both British Council staff and Hull 2017 delivery staff were able to reflect upon an improving relationship, and the value of some very honest discussions and compromises which had to take place in 2016. Several individual staff on each side were named by other interviewees as very committed and engaged to making things work, and there has been a welcoming of the improved strategic focus and interest which the British Council has brought to bear on its engagement with Hull 2017.

3.2 What was a challenge

Overall, the most significant thing which emerged from interviews was the absence of a common understanding between the British Council and the Hull 2017 delivery team about the nature of the relationship. One interviewee described the British Council as being between two common partner roles: one the one hand, the typical funders like arts councils who give grants within broad parameters; and on the other hand partners who take a significant lead in developing content or who may even 'own' elements of content (e.g. the BBC). The British Council's view of themselves as a 'co-creation' partner sits somewhere between these options, bringing some funding (though not as a single grant to the Hull 2017 budget) but primarily a range of expertise and support for developing international content.

As such, some stakeholders from the Hull 2017 delivery team very frankly expressed concerns about the relationship between the effort required to engage with the British Council, and the level of funding which comes with the relationship. This was compounded by personnel related issues, another of the primary points raised by both British Council staff and the Hull 2017 delivery team. This included changes in personnel (both in terms of the senior individual leading for the British Council, and in other areas like country lead changes); and confusion about how to navigate different personnel, given the need to engage with multiple personnel across the British Council as opposed to having a single contact point for UKCC matters. The perceived absence of a senior lead from the British Council until quite late in the process was seen as a particular issue by some interviewees

who felt that more senior involvement might have served to cut through some of the difficulties in decision-making and strategic thinking. In addition, there was a perception that the bureaucratic processes behind the British Council are similarly difficult to understand and cumbersome, with Council staff managing budgets individually or needing to bid internally to confirm resources.

The question of money came up in several interviews. The actual funding level offered by the British Council is relatively modest in the context of a UK City of Culture budget. At least one interviewee from a city bidding to be UKCC in 2021 was under the impression that a significantly larger level of funding might be available from the British Council, and so it is worth noting the need for clarity around the overall level. Some interviewees (both internal and external to the British Council) felt that the Council was not necessarily as aware as it needed to be about how modest the funding was, and that perhaps the expectations of the British Council to be treated as a significant partner in programme development was not realistic. In addition, respondents from the Hull 2017 delivery team or the wider Hull stakeholders were keen to stress the pressure of establishing budgets in order to support early planning for a UKCC, a situation common to all special-event hosting cycles.

There were also some more specific issues about what money could be used for and who would receive it which proved problematic. British Council staff expected that Council funding would be used as an 'addition' to other things, to add value. Indeed, the partnership agreement anticipated significant match funding from Hull 2017 budgets and from other sources, seeking to go from a cash contribution of £200k plus £200k in-kind support to an overall budgetary value of £1.6m when all contributions were included. However, the Hull 2017 delivery team had anticipated receiving the British Council funding as a single grant, albeit against specific projects. In practice, the British Council expected to make a series of grants to agreed projects and priorities, including paying directly for artists or making grants directly to organisations. This is quite different from the way in which an event 'culture company' tends to expect to work, i.e. as the central repository for all funds, and both the allocator of those funds and the arbiter of what qualifies as part of the UKCC programme.

There were also some different perceptions about what an appropriate use of funds might be. British Council staff reported being asked to help pay for travel costs for artists to make international trips, and felt that this demonstrated a misunderstanding of the principle of the funding (and particularly the proposed in-kind support from the British Council). On the other side there was a sense that perhaps the British Council did not understand that there was no international research and development funding available from the Hull 2017 budget nor the Hull City Council budgets, and that in the current climate this kind of activity would become harder as budgets get tighter.

In relation to a co-creating or co-producing role, the issue of timing also caused some concern. It took both the British Council and Hull 2017 some time to get going with meaningful programme discussions; at this stage some interviewees thought it was late to begin attempt a shared development approach. Almost all the interviewees who were directly involved in developing elements of the shared programme felt that starting earlier would have enabled more and better programme ideas to be explored, and would potentially have enable more capacity-building work to have taken place in the early stages. Not all the interviewees were sure if the British Council had the requisite skills and experience to be a co-creator, or if it was clear about exactly what kind of expertise it could bring. One interviewee expressed a view about whether the British Council was confusing its activities in cultural relations with wishing to be a cultural organisation itself.

The gap between the initial areas identified in the partnership agreement and the emerging priorities from the Hull 2017 delivery team proved another challenge in developing a shared approach. Inevitably in a UKCC programme there will be a gap of both time and some

shifting of focus and ownership between bidding and delivery. This coincided with some of the British Council's own personnel issues and combined together these two issues mean that there was an extended period of no real activity at a time when crucial planning and connecting could have been taking place.

Interviewees from both sides of the experience reported challenges in identifying shared priorities. Part of this related to different country or region priorities – Hull's were specific either to the history of the area, its twinning links, politics relationships and its current and potential economic and industrial relations, and the British Council's are established with a different agenda. Hull 2017 delivery team members and stakeholders close to the Hull experience felt very strongly that partners like the British Council need to begin from the needs and priorities of the UKCC area, otherwise any programme risks not having integrity in the context of the wider intervention.

There were also some tensions within the British Council concerning what kinds of activities, and what kind of a spread of activities, should have been included: for example, should activity been sought in every artform area? Should there be big shiny activities, or were smaller, capacity-building activities (which is largely what happened) suitable. Was the British Council seeking a large impact in a single area, or content with a cumulative effect across multiple small activities? At the workshop attendees made a good case for value and integrity of these smaller activities, but the absence of strategic clarity caused some problems in the planning phases.

Finally, a problem raised from many perspectives has been the external communications by and about the British Council. Some interviewees who were involved with or had visited Hull, but were not part of the Hull 2017 delivery team, were unsure about what the British Council might have been involved with. Stakeholders involved in individual projects with the British Council through the UKCC were often unsure what other kinds of projects and activities the British Council was supporting. The range of small activities taking place potentially limits the degree to which public-facing communications may have an impact, but the absence of visibility to those who are more 'in the know' is considered by some stakeholder unfortunate, because it was felt to be downplaying the potential for international work in a UKCC context. The British Council's personnel challenges are partly responsible for some of these issues, with a dedicated communications resource only coming into place part-way through 2017. Several stakeholders felt that there was an important and valuable story to tell about the British Council involvement with and contribution to the UKCC programme in Hull 2017, and that appropriate resources should be in place so that this contribution is better known.

4 Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations

This study is charged with answering some practical questions and making recommendations about the way that the British Council could engage with the UKCC programme in the future. The following section outlines the recommendations which the study team is making. In some cases we are able to identify quite specific suggestions; in other cases we have identified areas of challenge or opportunity which the British Council should do some further thinking about in order to formulate the best possible response. At this stage, it is also important to state that the study team believes the following analysis and recommendations apply equally to the way in which the British Council could engage with future UK hosts of the ECoC title.

Before dealing with the process of engagement, it is worth first stating that this study suggests that there is a unique value which the British Council can bring to a UKCC, and that the UKCC offers a unique set of opportunities to the British Council. These are explored further in section 2 and through the Theory of Change, but it is important to bear this overarching opportunity in mind particularly in the context of new posts at the British Council (e.g. the Director of England and Cities role). It is also worth noting that most interviewees felt that the circumstances of post-EU referendum in the UK make it more necessary that a partner like the British Council is involved in the UKCC, where previously cities might have expected to build relationships via European networks and funding routes which may not be available in the future.

The key challenge, however, is for the British Council to determine more clearly what its role will be in relation to the UKCC.

4.1 Role of the British Council

Earlier in this report, and particularly in Section 3, different perceptions about the role of the British Council and function of its funding contribution have been discussed, as well as different priorities between the hosting city and the British Council. In this section, we consider this issue in relation to one of the study's core research questions: *whether the British Council should make a core UKCC offer – some kind of standardised programme – or respond individually to each UKCC.*

The feedback from Hull 2017, the Derry Londonderry 2013 evaluation, current bidding cities and from the study team's experience of both the UKCC and the ECoC programmes suggest that the integrity of such programmes lies in the intersection between a city identifying its unique needs and strengths, and working across the city and with external partners to raise the way stakeholders respond to those challenges and opportunities. From a British Council perspective, therefore, it may be worth thinking about its role as follows:

- Whilst the British Council has country and region priorities, and may have existing models or programmes, these are only meaningful to a UKCC host where they coincide with need and opportunity within that city. Similarly, whilst the British Council has capacity and experience across all the art forms, and across other areas like education and science, this is only meaningful to a UKCC where it coincides with potential partners, areas for development or possibility within that city.

- What the British Council has which is particularly valuable is its expertise and networks in developing international work, and in supporting and developing the capacity of partners who have less experience in engaging internationally. It knows how to do this better than others, it does it more often than anyone else, and its contacts and connections are more substantial.

Based on this, we would recommend that the British Council consider framing its role with a strong emphasis on the expertise and support which it can offer. Its role is not really that of a funder; nor is it, in the sense that the BBC is, necessarily a co-creator of content. What the British Council can really excel at is advocating for, encouraging and facilitating the international ambitions of a city. It knows how to do this well, with integrity and aspiration. Thus, the 'core offer' from the British Council could be described as a *way of working*, supported by a 'menu' of examples of different kinds of activities and opportunities, rather than a set programme.

Doing this would enable the shared programme to be led by respective UKCC hosts – by their needs and opportunities – but informed properly by the experiences, examples, expertise and possibilities which the British Council is able to bring. Looking back on the work delivered for and with Hull 2017, the quality and value of some of the specific projects facilitated by the British Council in Hull is clear. It is also important to note that there was significant value to having a post on the ground, particularly in the final two year period. This post, however, needs to be supported by a more strategic commitment on the part of the organisation. It would also need to have a much stronger networking/communications role and work strategically to identify the organisations (NPOs, Universities, local government, third sector and culture company) for which a more sustained legacy arrangement with the British Council would be valuable.

4.2 Detailed recommendations

Profile, awareness and knowledge

Overall feedback on the British Council's engagement with Hull has revealed issues concerning communications and expectations. The following recommendations seek to address these issues.

1. Making the case for an international element

Currently the guidance for the UKCC programme only refers to international work – collaborations or other kinds of work – very much in passing, and sometimes more in the context of bringing in a programme with artists and organisations of an 'international standing'.

The British Council should consider how it can make a stronger case for the UKCC programme *requiring* an international element. It could encourage stronger guidance through the application process, and support the application process with some additional guidance (or useful responses to questions) about what international work might look like. The British Council should also consider ensuring that other key partners for the UKCC programme, including DCMS and the arts councils, are aware and advocating for international work.

In addition the British Council needs to help cities who bid understand what international work might look like, and what the benefits of it might be. There is a job to do to raise the awareness amongst bidding cities of this kind of work. One interviewee wondered whether part of the guidance issued at the bidding stage by the British Council could include a suggestion or toolkit to encourage cities to audit their international connections and capacities. Others suggested a clear route map of who to talk to in the British Council. This might usefully explain the roles of national UK staff, the artform team and in country directors.

Inviting bidding cities to the Edinburgh showcase and an accompanying workshop with some good show-and-tell examples might be an option, depending on timing. The British Council needs to consider developing a clear statement on its role for potential bidding cities, and that could include also links and connections to examples of the British Council's work including Education, international artform projects and special initiatives such as India 2017.

2. Making the case for an international partner

This study has already suggested that the British Council would benefit from positioning its role more clearly. Misconceptions about funding expectations could be avoided by developing a clear statement on the way in which the British Council wishes to work, which should be made available to all bidding cities (in a similar way to the statement which the Heritage Lottery Fund supplies bidding cities with).

However, there is also a job to do to advocate to bidding cities (and winning cities) for the value of the *approach* which the British Council wishes to take. If it is less a funder, more a facilitator, it needs to be clear about why and how this brings benefits. Again, considering a combination of a clear statement, directing cities to tangible examples of work and finding opportunities to present or engage directly with cities provides several routes to influence and encourage cities, whilst setting out clear expectations.

At a more practical level, cities need to understand how the British Council operates: how do they get 'into' the Council, find the right people to talk to and navigate staff, departments, etc. Where possible, the British Council needs to recognise that bidding cities are very busy – and that winning cities are perhaps even busier. The absence of a continuous and senior interest in Hull 2017 was problematic early on and gave some mixed messages about the priority which the British Council was or was not placing on the UKCC programme. Identifying some clear approaches to single points of contact, strategic commitment of senior staff and so forth both at the bidding and in the delivery phases would be beneficial.

3. Clear Terms of Engagement and clarity over budgets

This recommendation has already been reflected above in the suggestion of clear, written guidance for bidding cities. The British Council needs to be more explicit both at the bidding phase and in delivery about what it is offering, and the terms under which it makes that offer. Where possible, it would be helpful to bidding cities to illustrate principles with tangible examples, given that much of what the British Council does which is different from other potential partners is about the *process*, the *ways of working*.

Whilst UKCC cities might prefer a clear single grant arrangement with the British Council in order to aid budgeting and planning, staff members have made persuasive arguments for an approach which is more hands-on and developmental, rather than behaving as a funder. This approach can be defended, but must be made very clear and its reasoning must be articulated. Key things for the British Council to consider are:

- Does it wish to name a sum of funding?
- If that funding is not a grant for the budget of the UKCC delivery team, what are the likely arrangements for defraying it?
- Does the British Council anticipate working directly with the cultural sector and other partners, rather than predominantly through a 'culture company'?
- Is the British Council setting any firm match requirements for individual elements of its funding/support?

4. Get interested in the bidding cities

In answer to one of the key research questions – *when should the British Council get involved in the UKCC process* – the answer is that there should definitely be a British Council presence in the bidding stage. Involvement at the bidding stage provides an opportunity for the British Council to advocate strongly for bidding cities to think about international work, and clarity about the way the British Council wants to work.

It is worth noting that bidding cities are very busy; further, engaging across local and national stakeholders can be very challenging, and some cities may have little experience of international work and no experience of the British Council. The organisation can be quite opaque and complex to understand for those coming from outside. In this context, the British Council needs to consider how it might make engagement easy for bidding cities, and manageable within the British Council own resources. Providing clear written guidance, navigating cities to written case studies and examples and presenting via a workshop or shared arena are all relatively low resource ways of engaging and giving a bidding city several clear routes to understand the Council.

It seems sensible to avoid bidding cities seeking individual conversations in the initial bid stage (e.g. 11 cities submitted initial bids for 2021); indeed, the guidance which the British Council should issue at the start of the bidding process could state that cities do not need to engage prior to shortlisting. However, once cities are shortlisted, the British Council might consider two issues:

- i) The first is whether nominating a member of staff with the capacity to have individual conversations (if asked for), on the basis that the British Council wishes to encourage cities to think about international elements seriously, and help cities understand its potential role as a partner. If this were the case, it is recommended that any advice provided on a one-to-one basis is also reported in writing and shared online via a webpage accessible to all candidates.
- ii) The second is how it might deal with cities who want to connect with the British Council about possible projects outwith the bidding process. For example, one interviewee from a bidding city reported some confusion following a request for engagement with the British Council about a possible project, and being told that they could not receive a response because they were bidding.

5. Get to know the winning city, build a presence in the city, understand the local challenges

At the point of delivery, the British Council needs to get to know the winning city. There are some practical questions about how the Council might find out the potential needs and priorities of an area, particularly if it intends to work with the culture company and directly with the sector and other institutions. There is potentially an important first job to do in supporting the area to map its international connections, and to convene all the partners in the city who may have interest and capacity in this area.

The British Council might also consider how it positions the international agenda in the strategic thinking of the winning city. Would a place on the Board of a culture company be a useful way to ensure that 'internationalising' the programme is part of the strategic approach? It may be the case that this needs to be negotiated on a city by city basis, depending on the chosen delivery vehicle, but a presence in the winning city which is a mixture of senior, strategic engagement and on-the-ground 'getting to know you' would be vital in the first few months.

6. Give the British Council intervention profile, in the British Council, across the host city, within the UK and for future bidders: tell the bigger story

As has already been noted, there is a job to do to explain to everyone, including internally in the British Council, what it is that the British Council is doing with the UKCC. A communications plan and supporting resources, and senior engagement from the British Council in person in the winning city should help to provide profile and tell the story. Several stakeholders who had visited Hull or who were not part of the Hull 2017 delivery team were unsure of what the British Council had been involved in. Even where activity is a series of small things, rather than large things, sharing this with key stakeholders (organisations, local and national partners, future bidding cities) is important.

Planning

7. Start as early as possible

The kind of developmental work which the British Council has undertaken with Hull 2017 takes significant time. Several workshop attendees lamented the relatively late start to meaningful conversations and development. In terms of ensuring meaningful impact and added value, time is a very crucial component. Laying out its stall in advance of the winning city, and then commencing the relationship with some clarity about the offer and the process should help both the British Council and the winning city get started earlier. Further, a partnership agreement is valuable as long as it is able to acknowledge the kinds of changes that take place over time in the event hosting process. This includes the transition from a bidding team to a delivery team in the winning city.

8. Begin with the priorities and capacities of the winning city

Getting to know the winning city has already been strongly advocated for above, but there is a further requirement to be clear about how a strategic approach could emerge for collaboration between a UKCC and the British Council. The UKCC will have undertaken significant work at the bidding phase to assess and articulate need and opportunity in the area. The best collaboration needs to begin from this thinking.

9. Bring in the priorities and capacity of the British Council where they best contribute

Once discussions have begun and the British Council knows the winning city better, it can then encourage local stakeholders to explore and understand the possibilities of international work. The British Council has a wealth of good examples of such work, and staff with very significant experience in this area. Sharing this is crucial.

Some bidding cities talked about whether the British Council might be able to direct them to where the Council states its priority areas and regions, in case synergies at the bidding stage emerge. The Council should consider how it can let cities – both at the

bidding and the winning stage – know about this in case opportunities for shared priorities arise; there may also be existing programmes or models at the Council which could be extended into a winning city or provide useful templates. This mutual process of mapping both the city and the Council must be a planning priority.

10. Negotiate and explore where collaboration might best take place

This process of mapping will then lead on to shared planning. This study has not recommended a core offer from the British Council in terms of a set number of projects, balance of art forms or type of outputs – the principle of working together to determine where opportunities might emerge and impact might best be made is a sound one. However, this process can require significant involvement from a UKCC delivery team who may be very busy trying to secure budgets and manage events and programme elements which require multi-year lead-in.

Much of the value which has emerged from Hull 2017 has taken place where the British Council has engaged directly with organisations and individuals in the city. This has also opened up opportunities for significant legacy – and avoided some of the issues which UKCC's face when the party finishes and a delivery vehicle is disbanded. The British Council should give thought to how it might manage an approach like this, whilst also engaging strategically with a 'culture company', and to how it might articulate this approach very clearly from the beginning.

11. The host year is the beginning of a four-year commitment

The return on investment in terms of developing international capacity does not need to take place in the first year of deliver; it can take longer than this, and if it is done well it probably will have longer-term impacts. The UKCC programme requires cities to think about legacy, but in reality much of the associated funding and the effort of a UKCC goes into activity within the hosting year. The British Council, with its different approach to partnership, could also consider explicitly taking a different approach to the way in which it frames the timescales of its relationship: it might consider formally agreeing a multi-year partnership which goes beyond the hosting year, and which recognises the potential for the year to be the start of, rather than the completion of, significant new international work for that city. Framing it this way also helps to make a stronger argument for the British Council's role as facilitator as well as funder, and its desire to engage directly with organisations and individuals rather than always through a culture company.

Making things happen

12. Help the winning city to navigate the British Council

This recommendation has been touched upon elsewhere, but it is worth setting out clearly the need for the British Council to establish clear routes in for the UKCC, and clear lines of internal responsibility. Part of what is possible will depend on internal resources: i.e. how much 'on the ground' time is the British Council able to give? Consistency of personnel has clearly been a challenge in Hull 2017, and may not necessarily be avoidable as an issue in the future. However, the British Council could make some positive decisions about senior strategic engagement and oversight, and about being seen to make engaging with the UKCC programme a priority.

13. Streamline bureaucracy and funding approaches

Whether the British Council wishes to alter its grant approach in the future, or maintain the principle of funding a range of small things and recipients directly, there is a need to ensure that the Council does not put more barriers in the way of activity which is likely in any case to be reliant on significant research and development input from a UKCC. Several practical issues – e.g. money not rolling across from one year to the next, staff needing to bid internally for money – limited the capacity of Hull 2017 staff aiming at a developmental and facilitative role on the ground, from having the authority to make positive and informed investments. The arrangements to date have not always enabled strategic investment; to avoid this situation in the future, the British Council needs to be clearer about the processes for internal decision-making.

Early planning discussions also need to take into account when money is most likely to be useful. If the British Council is intending, amongst other things, to support some developmental work towards bigger activities that might take place in the hosting year, it needs to be able to make budget available accordingly. It must also make clear any expectations which it has of other parties' budgets. Whilst cities may be keen to engage in international work, they are also under significant pressure to engage with other, larger funders and to deliver against public and press expectation.

14. Collect data, tell the story, ensure feedback

Finally, there is more that the British Council could do to explore and understand the value of what it is doing, and to tell the story afterwards. The Council has been involved in the main evaluation for Hull 2017, via the established monitoring and evaluation steering group. However, it is worth noting that other evaluation partners have made more out of their involvement: the Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, has asked the University of Hull to undertake some work using some of the existing data sets and building on them to provide data which is specific and useful for HLF. This has not been the case with the British Council.

It would be useful to follow the work of this report by taking a look at the impact of the actual programme supported by the British Council in Hull and in some cases in other countries eg Sierra Leone. This report has concentrated primarily on UK relationships but behind the work are a set of outcomes and partnerships in other countries which are central to the British Council's mission. The NOVA studios film work in Sierra Leone or the collaborations with Aarhus may be good case study examples.

The variety of activities which the British Council is supporting and the relatively small scale of them means that it may be tricky to create arrangements for standardised output data (and possibly not very meaningful); however, making use of the theory of change, clearly mapping the starting point of a city and then setting out defined expectations for the value of individual interventions should enable a detailed baseline to be developed from which British Council staff, participating artists and organisations and a delivery team can help to judge the distance travelled.