Counterpoint

Mutuality, trust and cultural relations

Martin Rose and Nick Wadham-Smith

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The Counterpoint website contains a discussion group which will be devoted to comments on, and debate about, this report. Please contribute: it is very important that you give us your reactions, and that our thinking develops with the support and the critical contributions of British Council staff around the world.

The United Kingdom's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We are registered in England as a charity.

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'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' [1]

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Introduction by the Director-General

The concepts of mutuality, mutual benefit, and mutual understanding run like threads through much of the British Council's recent thinking, and have formed a main theme in the formulation of Strategy 2010.

Dictionary definitions tend to define 'mutual' and 'mutuality' as relationships equally shared by each one. In debates on that rapidly diminishing financial institution, the mutual building society, it carries an important connotation of equal participation and belonging – a sense of no shareholder being of greater importance than any other, of no inner circle and no outsider.

But as an adjective, 'mutual' need not be applied solely to positive attributes. The expressions 'mutual loathing' and 'mutually exclusive' are as commonplace as 'mutual friendship' or 'mutual aid'.

To us, mutuality provides a way of eschewing one-way traffic in cultural relations, of giving equal value to differing cultures, and of ensuring that benefit accrues to all parties in the building up of long-term, sustainable relationships built on trust. We believe that in applying this principle, the sum of human relationships will be strengthened and the international standing of the United Kingdom improved.

As an organisation, we have no intellectual copyright on the term. So in developing mutuality as an underlying principle for our work, it is important we apply an intellectual rigour which will stand examination and enable us to create a solid rationale and a consistent operating framework for the future. Above all, what we mean by the term must be readily understandable by our stakeholders, partners, and those we work with at home and overseas.

When, over a year ago, we established Counterpoint as the British Council's internal think-tank, we envisaged that it would play a significant role in developing thinking about international cultural relations. Our intention was

to provide the space and stimulus for imaginative exploration 'outside the box' and provide fresh perspectives on our work in what is an increasingly complex and fast-changing world.

Assisting us to define mutuality was one of the first areas that I asked Counterpoint to undertake. As the report points out, it is word we use frequently, and to which we all subscribe, but without a common consensus on its meaning or on the implications for our work.

The authors, synthesising streams of thought from within the British Council worldwide, have sought to explore what they describe as the 'bundle of values' that we refer to as mutuality. The thinking of the document ranges far and wide and does not, of course, represent defined British Council policy. But it is an important and stimulating contribution to the debate. Please study it, discuss it with colleagues, and let us have your views.

David Green
Director-General

This paper is an exploration of the idea of mutuality in cultural relations. In it we examine what mutuality means and ways in which it can be implemented in the British Council's work; and we look at its implications for future thinking about the British Council's mission.

Our argument puts trust-building at the centre of that mission, and argues that the building of trust requires independence of government, a long-term perspective, and an approach based on mutuality. This leads us to a clear distinction between two areas of work which the British Council (with equal appropriateness) undertakes: public diplomacy and cultural relations.

Public diplomacy is the work that we do as an agent of government, in close partnership with the FCO and other Departments of State. Cultural relations is the work that is based upon the fact and the perception of our independence. Confusion between the two can have damaging results in terms of perceptions undermined and trust forgone, and we see this as a major issue in the early 21st century. Perceptions of the UK have suffered from the Iraq war, and trust, where it existed, is often threatened.

There is a contradiction between the two voices that we use. As a minimum, clarity about which we are 'doing' – whether at any given time we are 'doing' public diplomacy or cultural relations – is vital. It may not be a sufficient, but it is certainly a necessary, precondition of success at trust-building.

Cultural relations is about building long-term, trust-based relationships. This is the British Council's 'Unique Selling Proposition' (USP), because no government department or agency can achieve the detachment necessary for mutuality. It is our unique contribution to the UK, and it is fragile because in our work cultural relations and public diplomacy are often

inextricably mixed. This is a vulnerability that we examine, clear that in our historic working environment we must find ways of combining the two voices and minimising the damage resulting from perceived conflicts of interest.

It would be quite wrong to suggest that the British Council has objectives that are in the smallest degree different from those of the FCO. What we argue is that our USP allows us to contribute in a unique way to the FCO's objective – 'to work for UK interests in a safe, just and prosperous world', a purpose which we share and support passionately, in both its parts.

It is necessary for the British Council to understand its own strength. The building of international and intercultural trust, expressed as the web of transnational civil society relationships, is the most powerful possible contribution that we can make to that 'safe, just and prosperous world'. It is a strong and tangible contribution to global security in the dangerous environment of the early 21st century; and it is a strong and tangible contribution to European integration as we struggle with accession, migration and instability. There is nothing soft about cultural relations.

Trust is built at an international level, just as at a personal level, through relationships built on integrity, respect, openness and a preparedness constantly to modify one's own understanding. Much of the paper is devoted to exploring what this means: it is the bundle of values that we refer to as mutuality.

We believe that mutuality is the key to a clear and effective future for the British Council; that it lies, absolutely rightly, at the heart of Strategy 2010 (though we do not claim that the entirety of our vision is implicit in the 2010 Strategy). We argue too that it is an indivisible set of values, at the heart of the British Council's self-image,

which has implications just as strong for the way we relate and behave to each other as it does for the way we build partnerships and manage projects externally. We have the chance, now, to realise this idea and to put mutuality and trust-building right at the centre of the British Council.

Martin Rose
Nick Wadham-Smith

Mutuality under the microscope

Mutuality – a prism through which the whole business of cultural relations in the 21st century can be usefully examined

Meanings

Sometimes a word comes from nowhere, out of the sun, and before you know what's happened, it's on everybody's lips. In the British Council's internal discourse, 'mutuality' has done just this – and is steadily leaking out into the wider environment of the cultural relations business, where it is well recognised and understood. It clearly fills a gap in our vocabulary: it represents an idea that expresses powerfully the convictions, objectives and aspirations of many British Council staff. Its usefulness extends to strategic thinking: it has figured large in the drafting and discussion of Strategy 2010, and it has been described as 'a major contribution to the philosophy of cultural relations.'

But what does it mean? There is a danger of its meaning all things to all men – of becoming a 'motherhood-and-apple-pie' word – without adding to the clarity with which we think about cultural relations. Just how diverse its meanings can be, is demonstrated by trying, as Connecting Futures has recently done, to translate it into a range of the world's languages, and then back into English: the 'second-generation' meanings are very diverse. In search of clarity, DDG Robin Baker wrote recently, 'the difficulty is that the British Council has so far not defined what mutuality actually means. The term probably means a multiplicity of – undoubtedly positive – things to different people. This is a weakness.'

We would argue that it is both more and less than a weakness. Divergent understanding of a central idea in our work is dangerous: but over-prescriptive definition may lead to a loss of the motivating vigour that makes 'mutuality' so unexpectedly valuable. We doubt whether it is possible to draft a single, crystalline definition, but we should at least be able to reach the position of the English poet who couldn't easily define poetry, but recognised it while shaving because 'if a line of poetry

strays into my memory, my skin bristles and the razor ceases to act'.[2] But clearly, recognition needs then to be expressed in action.

After several months of consultation, in writing and through two international workshops, it is possible to be much clearer, but not absolutely precise, about what 'mutuality' means. And we see it as a prism through which the whole business of cultural relations in the 21st century can usefully be examined. This paper sets out some of the arguments that seem to us most fruitful; they go beyond the theory and practice of mutuality into the theory and practice of cultural relations. We must be clear at the outset that we are not writing, or even glossing, British Council policy. Counterpoint's job is to think ahead of the British Council itself, and to supply thoughtful inputs to the policy-making and the strategic planning processes. This paper is intended to stimulate debate, and to mark out the ground on which we think that the debate should be contested.

Common ground: starting with mutuality

The word 'mutuality' describes the quality of a two-way relationship, with overtones of benefit distributed between the two parties, of ownership shared. There are implications of equality in the relationship and there is certainly a strong sense of movement in both directions between the parties.

All this is what Robin Baker describes as 'the quintessence of mutuality', going on to explain that 'there is no sense of one party being the provider and the other the recipient. Both perform both roles.'

This is non-controversial, and so is the obvious statement that in this basic sense, mutuality *works*: two-way relationships are more productive of respect and understanding than one-way 'relationships'. Various people used the analogy of marriage during the

The instinctive and effective mutuality of earlier years needs to be made an explicit operating principle: an approach which could once be intermittent, empirical and understated must now move visibly to the heart of our operations

mutuality debate: Paul Smith commented that 'Any relationship will only work if both partners act with integrity and with both ready to trust in, even yield to, the integrity of the other.'[3] There is no earth-shaking novelty here: it is a basic observation in child psychology and in business communication that respect and openness offered earn respect and openness in return. The mutuality thesis proposes that this is the strongest possible basis for cultural relations.

Of course we know this already. It would be quite wrong to imply that mutuality is something entirely new to the British Council: it has shaped significant parts of our work, and many of our most effective and able people, since our beginning in the 1930s. What we are saying now, as we explore mutuality, is that the instinctive and effective mutuality of earlier years needs to be made an explicit operating principle: an approach which could once be intermittent, empirical and understated must – we shall suggest – now move visibly to the heart of our operations.

Mutuality and intercultural communication
Mutuality is a way of looking at cultural relations, and those who 'do' them, which places the building of long-term, trust-based relationships at the centre. Advocating mutuality means understanding that trust arises not from unequal relationships and conversations based on the asymmetrical distribution of power, but from relationships built on respect, openness, and a preparedness, where appropriate, to change one's own mind. It also means understanding that really effective conversation takes place only when *both* parties are sensitive to the distribution of power and prepared to 'compensate' for it. It is easy sometimes to take all the blame ourselves, but this would be a mistake: our non-European interlocutors and partners can be as closed as the most closed of

Trust cannot arise from a situation of unequally distributed power; it is built on respect, openness and a preparedness to change one's own mind

Europeans. There is no monopoly on closure, defensiveness and unwillingness to listen, and mutuality means movement from both sides.

Mutuality is a set of values based on an understanding of intercultural mediation as the British Council's trade – the trade, indeed, of any organisation that works in cultural relations. This is both obvious and, at the same time, a radically new departure: it has profound implications in the medium term for how we recruit and train, how we plan and how we evaluate. It supposes that clear, honest and effective intercultural and international communications are a strategic good which, in the 21st century, the UK cannot manage without.

Values and universality
The two mutuality workshops helped us to reach this conclusion, and agreed two basic principles:

- that mutuality is not a process (though it can and must be translated into processes) but a closely interconnected set of values
- that these values are indivisible, applying equally to all aspects of individual and corporate behaviour inside and outside the British Council.

The first tells us that mutuality is an intelligent business: not rule-driven but formed and re-formed by thinking about the values implicit in our work. Mutuality will work not simply because it is written into corporate, regional or country plans – but also when it is internalised as a way of thinking, feeling and doing, and forms a natural and routine element of our training.

The second tells us that mutuality cannot shape our relationships with external partners unless it also shapes our relationships with each other. This is particularly important in an organisation like the British Council

Mutuality cannot shape our relationships with partners unless it also shapes our relationships with each other

which works across cultural fault-lines and boundaries, often in places where a British imperial past casts long shadows over relationships and behaviours. The fault-lines and the shadows run right through the British Council, as well as through the world in which we work. Our integrity starts at home.

It goes without saying that the respect and openness that form our concept of mutuality extend to relationships within the UK: mutuality is fundamental to the diverse and multicultural UK that we represent. In relations between England and the devolved nations many of the same asymmetries and fault-lines are visible, as they are between racially and religiously defined groups and the still dominant 'English' culture of the UK. All of these fractures are naturally also reflected in the British Council itself. Mutuality could be said to represent the elusive 'British values' that are so often said to lie at the core of our work.

Scottish mutuality

How do you pilot a core value? It's a bit like piloting gravity

The British Council in Scotland is preparing to pilot mutuality through the entire range of its activities. This is a curious idea: 'How', as one colleague asked, quizzically, 'do you pilot a core value? It's a bit like piloting gravity.' But progress is encouraging, and the British Council team in Scotland has drafted a useful series of working statements about mutuality which capture well what it is about, without over-defining it. We reproduce them here as the *Edinburgh Articles*:

- **Mutuality** is fundamental to everything the British Council does, both externally and internally
- **Mutuality** is also integral to the British Council's commitment to individuals, internationalism and integrity

- **Mutuality** requires us to respect and to be relevant to our partners, our audiences and each other, both worldwide and in the UK
- **Mutuality** is about engaging in dialogue with other countries and recognising that enhancing communication is about more than delivering information
- **Mutuality** is about creating opportunities for people both worldwide and in the UK to engage in dialogue and thereby to build trust
- **Mutuality** is about engaging people in the UK with international agendas and thereby creating opportunities to learn from and to value people in other countries
- **Mutuality** is about seeking new and open ways of engaging with the worldwide community.

The values that will emerge below map very well onto the *Edinburgh Articles*, as they do onto similar work done by the Connecting Futures team. But before looking at mutuality's constituent values, we want to highlight a number of important aspects of mutuality – what it is and what it isn't.

Communicating clearly and honestly

We often talk pure partnership but what we do can seem to be subverted by unspoken agendas beneath the surface

There is a structural issue, which has its origin in the British Council's two equally valid, but different, agendas. We'll return to this below, in discussing the interplay of public diplomacy and cultural relations; but for now we note simply the serious communication problems that lack of clarity can cause partners and interlocutors who do not *really* understand that the British Council has official and unofficial roles.

Counterpoint was recently at the annual meeting of a major European network, many of whose members have longstanding relationships with the British Council.

There was some discussion of mutuality, and it was said quite explicitly by several partner organisations that the British Council 'doesn't really know what mutuality is', in the sort of relationship that they have with 'us'. One speaker described an exercise at a recent workshop, at which participants were asked to rank all their existing partners in order of their preparedness to *listen*: the British Council was ranked as the second worst listener and was 'beaten' only by another European national cultural organisation.

We aren't suggesting that this is a general truth; but we are increasingly clear that our role and our position are frequently not understood by our partners. Often this is a case of Nelson's putting the telescope to his blind eye: partners *don't* always want to hear what we have to say about our role. But, in our business, perceptions are always important. In discussion it became clear that much of this sense of the British Council's impenetrability comes from failure to get across clearly the different agendas to which we work: we often *talk* pure partnership but what we *do* can seem to be subverted by unspoken (but often perhaps just unheard) national and political agendas beneath the surface.

It is significant that our closest competitor in this anecdotal black list was one of our analogues: we argue that the problem lies in the nature of national cultural institutions (though of course each is slightly different). These big beasts, like the British Council, the Goethe Institut or the Cervantes have to dance to two tunes at once: on the one hand they must be message-orientated, focusing on national profile and export promotion; on the other, dedicated to dialogue and to eliciting partners' needs. Handling both tasks at once, with integrity, is at best difficult, and can probably only be managed, in the early 21st century, with much more explicit honesty than we are used to allowing ourselves. Interestingly, much of

the criticism of the British Council at the meeting mentioned above focused on communication – not purely (or even primarily) on the decisions made, but on the way they are communicated to partners. It is, arguably, possible to be mutual even in the way we explain decisions that are not in themselves very mutual at all.

Cynicism and altruism

Early in our discussions we tried out a clean distinction between mutuality used cynically as a marketing technique, and mutuality as a way of building more open, more constructive, more equal relationships as an end in themselves. We tested this model, and found it unsatisfactory, because it suggests a clear-cut distinction where none is possible. There is of course some truth in it (mutuality, like almost everything else in life, can be used cynically or with integrity), but it oversimplifies the question for two reasons.

The first is that in the world of a national cultural agency like the British Council every relationship based in mutuality must ultimately be instrumental. We are not philanthropists: the British Council has its ultimate purpose in the national good. This is fundamental to our charter and our grant-in-aid. *How* we work best for the UK's benefit is a matter for much debate, but *that* we do so is beyond argument, and in this sense everything we do is instrumental.

The second reason is that, tempting as it may be, a clear distinction between instrumentality and altruism doesn't always make sense in practice: one of the most striking interventions at the second mutuality workshop was Paul Johnson's[4] powerful explanation of the interplay of genuinely altruistic mutuality and equally genuine marketing advantage, in projects like *Up Front and Personal* (a recent exhibition in South Africa of British

We are not philanthropists: our ultimate purpose is the national good. The question is *how* we achieve it

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political cartoonists). Paul described the effect on local partners and target-groups of the mutuality-based approach that explicitly informs most of the British Council's work in South Africa: it makes us a preferred partner vis-à-vis our 'competitors'. The moral is clear: in South Africa at least (and this may be an unusual environment) you probably can't be 'purely' altruistic, because if you succeed in running your partnerships and project relationships on open, mutual lines, you will reap *practical* as well as *moral* advantages. Altruism pays, in this case, by delivering a competitive advantage, and this is something that we must learn not to be uncomfortable with when it happens: indeed, it helps to square the circle, if we think that the circle needs squaring.

It is, though, important to be aware of the danger of using mutuality as a vehicle for objectives, political or otherwise, which themselves actually contradict the Edinburgh approach. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas makes a distinction which is less emotive than, but approximates interestingly to, an instrumental/altruistic polarity. He distinguishes, famously, between strategic and communicative action. Strategic action is designed to manipulate others to further one's own self-interest; communicative action is designed to search for an understanding of the truth. Habermas sees strategic (or 'success-orientated') language and action as parasitic on communicative: he calls it 'stimulating a communicative orientation in order to achieve an ulterior purpose'. We need to ensure that communicative action is the predominant ingredient in our mix, because a sense of being manipulated leads to disenchantment rather than trust; and because a common search for an understanding of the truth is the only sound foundation for long-term, trust-based, relationships.

The trick in making this reverse aspect of mutuality work is to upgrade the *receptive involvement* of the UK without moving our work to the UK

Where does mutuality happen?
Mutuality is a pervasive set of values, and it 'happens' – if it happens at all – everywhere. But how is it to shape operations? Taken over-literally, mutuality-based operations might be about balancing a one-way, outward, flow of ideas, cultural goods, information and people from the UK with a corresponding inward flow, into the UK. This is what the United States Information Agency (USIA) called, with splendid inelegance, the 'reverse mandate', and it is clearly *part* of what mutuality is about. But if this was what we actually meant, the implications would be enormous. Big shifts of budget from overseas to the UK would change the British Council's whole nature and structure, and would, arguably, impair our ability to deliver on-the-ground 'impact' abroad.

This is not what we are suggesting. The balance that needs shifting is not a material balance, but an ethical one. Mutuality certainly means paying much greater attention to the UK – but not in the simplistic sense of shifting spending from overseas to home budgets. The trick here is to *connect* what we do in our overseas operations much more closely and creatively to UK partners and audiences, and to make sure that participation from the UK is built around multipliers.

Our aim here is better knowledge, in the UK, of the world in which we work and the partners with whom we work. This is what the *Edinburgh Articles* describe as 'engaging people in the UK with international agendas and thereby creating opportunities to learn from and value people in other countries.' It will mean greater participation, but the change will be, for the most part, qualitative rather than quantitative. Participation by and from the UK isn't necessarily on the same terms as participation by and from overseas: the most important trick in making this aspect of mutuality work in practice is to design ways of upgrading the *receptive involvement* of

the UK without moving our work *to* the UK.

Success here will come with cleverly designed asymmetry, and innovative strategic criteria in choosing UK participants and UK partners. Azza Hammoudi[5] commented, of partner-selection for development contracts in Jordan, that a significant criterion is the fact that for a prospective partner 'work in Jordan was not merely an enterprise for generating income . . . but more a mutual process of two-way benefit. Such partnerships usually proved sustainable and continued beyond the project lifetime . . . thus providing us with the required long-term impact.' In other projects it will be the readiness and the ability of UK participants to publicise and replicate overseas experience that carry the burden of the 'reverse mandate' – and not escalating domestic spending. It is no coincidence that the Scotland directorate, when chosen as the British Council's mutuality 'laboratory', began its task with an examination of existing and potential partners, in search of this domestic multiplier.

The *What* and the *How* of mutuality
It would be easy enough to work out a whole handbook of examples of what constitutes mutuality-based activity, to try to build a diagnostic test which says that doing such-and-such an activity is mutual, and that working with such-and-such a type of partner is mutual. We return below to look at criteria, but resist being too specific.

Certain kinds of activity are clearly more likely to evoke mutuality than others. But mutuality lies not just in the form and content of a project or a programme: it lies at least as much as in the way it is implemented. If mutuality represents a set of values which focus on how we conduct ourselves in relationships, then almost any activity can be more – or less – mutual according not just

If mutuality is a set of values which focus on how we conduct ourselves in relationships, then almost any activity can be more – or less – mutual according not just to *what* it is but to *how* it is done

to what it is, but to how it is done.

One country director wrote to us that, in his country, 'attitudes to the UK haven't changed since colonial times – we are recognised to be good at all sorts of things, but arrogant, cold and racist. How do we address this? As much by the way we go about our work as what we do.'

The medium is in this sense the message. There is no great difficulty in establishing what sort of work, project or programme most easily carries the mutuality message – but ultimately it is *how* we behave in delivering anything, at least as much *what* we deliver, that will provide the most potent messages about us and our country. It is important, as Matt Knowles pointed out, not to become dogmatically either/or about *What* and *How*. Problems really only arise when – to use Habermas's terms again – the British Council's 'communicative' action is evaluated against the government's 'instrumental' criteria. Since *How* and *What* are inextricably linked, it may in the end be pragmatically simplest to describe the quest for mutuality in terms of different kinds of *What* – distinct types of activity. He argues that the British Council can provide a different kind of *What* 'that is not in competition with the political agenda. If done well, cultural goods and political interests can be compatible and will foster each other.' This is a useful reminder of the creative interaction that public diplomacy and cultural relations can have if handled with finesse and clarity. There is even, in Matt's comment that 'there may even be mileage for the British Council to regard political interests as a way of pursuing cultural good', a hint of communicative action as potentially parasitic on strategic action, that might surprise Habermas.[6]

At various points the 'how/what' question has led to discussion of the contractual environment, in which the British Council apparently has much less freedom of action for mutual, or communicative, action. Azza

Hammoudi's comment gives us one clue: we can work within the contractual parameters (in her example, of a Development Services – DS – contract) to maximise the mutual element. This can, and in many cases does, read across into much Enterprises and DS work, where we have specified deliverables but also some latitude as to resources and methodologies.

We should see this as retaining substantial control of the *How*, while tying ourselves to a largely externally defined *What*. And since we maintain that mutuality lies as much in the *How* as in the *What*, we retain control of key areas in which mutuality can be expressed. DS has always been clear that we bid only for contracts that serve corporate, regional or country plan objectives. With mutuality at the heart of Strategy 2010, these objectives must incorporate mutuality and its outcomes.

Going one stage further, we discussed an absurd example: how could we express mutuality through a stationery-supply contract, hedged about as it is bound to be by value-for-money, price-competition, delivery requirements, tendering rules and so on. But is this example actually absurd? In the UK, and perhaps in many developed countries, such supply relationships may be fairly bloodless, and cleanly interchangeable. But in much of the world this will not necessarily be so: how we treat our suppliers of pencils and coffee, hand-towels and office-cleaning, is an important part of how we project ourselves on to a local society, and may well be an important part of how we – and the UK – are read as a whole. Mutuality is expressed in a human and intercultural understanding of matters like credit-control to small suppliers, handling of local as against international tenders, interpretation of labour law and the employment of family members.

'Those who cannot be trusted to speak reliably and sincerely to the world may not belong to one community . . . It is not just that we do not agree with them: it is that we have withdrawn the possibility of disagreeing with them'

There is no reason to think that mutuality doesn't work in contractual situations. It is often more difficult because it requires an imaginative analysis of the tools at our disposal, but certainly not impossible. One area of British Council work frequently cited as very difficult to mutualise is educational promotion – seen as a sales effort for British education that is focused on increasing student numbers and revenue from overseas markets. But this is to ignore the most obvious feature of educational promotion: that it results in a steady flow of students from overseas into the UK. The mutuality of this part of our work must be judged by what we do with students when they are in the UK; and the unrealised potential for mutuality by all that we don't – yet – do.

Seeing power clearly

Though there are shining exceptions, inside and outside the British Council, most human beings assume a neutrality in themselves that is entirely unreal. An accent, for example, is something that someone *else* has – we define ourselves by the absence of an accent, and chuckle indulgently at the American notion of 'a British accent'. In the same way we tend to make assumptions about our impact and our intentions in other cultures, assuming that our intentions are transparent and that we arrive without baggage, able to start with a blank sheet of paper. They aren't, and we don't.

Wherever we work, we work in relationships that express power, but the distribution of power is not usually easily visible – at least when the imbalance is in our favour. Seeing it is something that we must train ourselves to do. It's particularly important in countries and cultures where the British once ruled, where ingrained habits of deference and self-censorship, fear and respect shape even the most benign and warm relationships. Hugh Brody, writing of a Canadian Inuit

language, expresses this very well: 'the word *ilira* goes to the heart of colonial relationships', he writes, 'and it helps to explain the many times Inuit, and so many other peoples, say yes when they want to say no, or say yes and then reveal, later, that they never meant it at all. *Ilira* is a word that speaks to the subtle but pervasive results of inequality. Through the inequality it reveals, the word shapes the whole tenor of interpersonal behaviour, creating many forms of misunderstanding, mistrust and bad faith.'[7]

The quality which Brody calls *ilira* isn't of course restricted to post-colonial situations: it, or something akin to it, exists in different ways in different societies, marking the accommodations to power that men and women have to make in oppressively governed societies, and the accommodations to power that the powerless make even in the democracies of Europe. Each has its own *ilira*.

Understanding this hidden topography of power wherever it occurs, and taking continuous account of what it means, requires self-awareness. It is a core skill in cultural relations, and one which we must learn to recognise and to train ourselves in. We must learn to 'aim off' as marksmen do to compensate for the in-built deviation in their rifles. Without this constant process of reflection and analysis, enabling us to see beneath the surface and 'aim off', mutuality is meaningless.

Often we find ourselves having to choose between ignoring and addressing 'difficult' issues in shared histories. It's usually easier to ignore them, but this tends simply to reinforce the hidden topographies. This apparent reconciling of conflicts often makes communication more, not less difficult, merely removing difficult issues from the *visible* agenda. We must remember that time-scales are elastic: it is all too easy to dismiss as 'ancient history' moments like the Balfour

Declaration or Indian Partition that exist in the tangible present of other cultures. We don't look necessarily for a single shared understanding – but for knowledge of each others' understandings.

Our objective is the building of trust, and one recent writer explains usefully that the building of communities of trust, which he calls 'the great civility', is fundamental to any kind of communication: 'Those who cannot be trusted to speak reliably and sincerely about the world may not belong to one community . . . It is not just that we do not agree with them; it is that we have withdrawn the possibility of disagreeing with them.'[8] Disagreement based on trust is a good, not a bad, thing. Agreement without it is worthless.

Mutual benefit and mutuality
There is a tendency in talking about mutuality in the British Council, to use the phrase 'mutual benefit' as though it were either synonymous with mutuality, or a good approximation to it. The sense of all the discussions that we have had is that this is not so – that mutual benefit is only a pale shadow of mutuality. Mutual benefit is a fine thing, but it is essentially a trading relationship in which both parties bargain to extract something that they want from the other, and if the trade is fair, they are both reasonably, or – better – very, happy with the outcome. At its best this is valuable – and an important component of the British Council's work. But at the lower end of the scale it can mirror la Rochefoucauld's maxim on friendship, 'a mutual adjustment of interests, an interchange of services given and received; it is, in sum, simply a business from which those involved propose to derive a steady profit.'

Mutuality is fundamentally different because it is an unconditional offer. Mutual benefit says, 'I'll behave in the following way if you'll do your part as agreed'. Mutuality

Mutuality says, 'I'll behave in this way regardless of how you respond in the short-to-medium term, because I have confidence that implementing these values with no strings attached is the only way to build trust in the long-term'

says, 'I'll behave in the following way regardless of how you respond in the short-to-medium term, because I have confidence that implementing these values with no strings attached is the only way to build long-term, trust-based relationships.'

Mutual benefit is therefore both a lesser form of mutuality – a trade that requires only transactional trust – and an outcome of mutuality, in the sense that in a balanced, trust-based relationship mutual benefit is an almost unavoidable result. Substituting the phrase 'mutual benefit' for the word 'mutuality', strips virtually all meaning from the discussion of mutuality.

Mutuality and the new world order

In a world where trust is in short supply, made more dangerous by globalisation, the British Council can extend trust to people for whom trust has been largely a mirage

Having looked in general terms at mutuality, we turn to the world in which we propose to deploy it (and where, of course, we have been deploying it for quite some time). The discussions that underlie this paper brought out a strong consensus that the early 21st-century world, post-9/11 and post-Iraq, is more needful than ever before of the sort of approach that mutuality represents – that the lack of trust, particularly, but not only, between 'the West' and 'the Islamic World', requires massive attention to trust-building; and that the British Council and organisations like it are perhaps the only national players with the status, mandate and background to begin repairing damage to trust at a popular level across the world.

It is a cliché to say that the world has changed, but it needs constant repetition because any organisation that exists by interacting with the world must constantly reflect and anticipate change. The last 25 years have seen the end of the Cold War, and the upsurge of nationalism in what was the Soviet empire, just as Western Europe began to sublimate its own nationalism in what Robert Cooper has called its 'post-

modern zone of safety'.[9] The nest of revolutionary changes which we glibly label globalisation has changed the nature of communication, finance, trade, entertainment, travel, labour migration, war and crime (as most other public human activities), creating vast, relatively uncompartmentalised markets, instant responses and an unprecedented potential for activism by private individuals and non-state organisations.

Beneath this 'actively globalising' layer there is a thick layer of poverty and deprivation which is only passively globalised. Half the people of the world may never have used a telephone, but they are buffeted by commodity prices, labour markets, wars and international investment flows. And they are constantly aware, however distorted the glass in which they see, of Western lifestyles, morals, behaviours – and of Western interventions, military, political and economic, in the wider world.

The two layers connect, bubbling upwards like the water in a percolator, and down again like the coffee. What the West often likes to see as neutral tools in managing this fantastically complex world, tools like investment, trade, targeted information, peace-keeping, development aid, migration and security policy, do not look so neutral when they are seen from below. The equally powerful reactions from those who feel the weight of globalisation and the legacy of empire – fundamentalisms and secular anti-Westernism – don't seem quite so neutral in Washington, Paris and London as perhaps they do in Cairo, Qom, Mumbai and Bingol. Perceptions in each direction are distorted by what we have called the hidden topography of power – the IMF, Nike and NATO are one sort of unself-aware power; and al-Qa'ida, Aum and the destructive virus-writer are another.

One outstanding feature of this globalised world is a desperate shortage of trust. This is partly the result of

trust being destroyed by readings of the West's actions in the international sphere; but we need also to recognise that there has never been as much trust about as we have assumed. What is being revealed is not so much a loss, as an absence, of trust. An absence that surfaces now as globalisation offers the possibility of expression and even action to people for whom trust is a mirage at every level of life – people whose voices are being heard for the first time. Trust, the possibility of confidence in a relationship beyond the most immediate, is a quality that organisations like the British Council can help to deliver – and it is immensely powerful.

The shortage of trust is visible at every level, from national politics to policing, from schools to religious hierarchies, in West, East, North and South. It may be, in part, an inevitable result of the e-world in which we live, with its endless and growing potential for deception. As Onora O'Neill asks, 'Has the very idea of a free and open encounter been undermined in the transparent world of the new information order?'[10] It is at any rate badly damaged, and there is a fabric of trust to weave, in difficult circumstances: for, whatever the structural features of our age that undermine trust, there are also specific global events and public utterances that tend to do the same. World politics since the turn of the century have brought many of these: 9/11, *jihads* and crusades, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the erosion of civil liberties in the course of what has famously been described as the 'war declared against an abstract noun.'

The most hopeful role of cultural relations practitioners is to move fast and effectively with the purposeful building of trust. We can only afford to answer O'Neill's question about the impossibility of free and open encounters with the assertion that whatever the new information order has done, it is our business to undo, by constantly asserting the primacy of face-to-face

contact in our work, of creating what another writer called 'the contact zone'[11]. That we are also constantly experimenting with new ways of creating electronic civility and extending our reach to where face-to-face 'free and open encounters' cannot reach, doesn't detract from our understanding that the one is no substitute for the other.

Stability and security as cultural issues
Trust is fundamental to security in the world. There is a vocabulary of 'trust' that is intergovernmental – treaties, security commitments and so on. But states don't have friends. Internationally, trust exists, where it exists at all, between people and between peoples, where *raison d'état* doesn't hold sway. Trust is built through relationships between people and peoples, not between governments.

In what Robert Cooper calls the post-modern world, a different international political economy is, by his account, being built. This world is made up of the Western powers (including, intermittently, the US), which are prepared to give up the absoluteness of their sovereignty, whether to the EU or to other international institutions and agreements. Their relations are now based not on ruthlessly pursued national interests but on mutual constraint, interpenetration, mutual dependence, mutual verification, mutual vulnerability, transparency and openness. Cooper contrasts this world with two other 'worlds', the modern 'zone of danger'; and the pre-modern 'zone of chaos'. Here, he argues, other methods and other standards of behaviour are necessary, and the post-modern political system (in which '*raison d'état* and the amorality of Machiavelli have been replaced by a moral consciousness that applies to international relations as well as domestic affairs') cannot function.

We don't propose to explore Cooper's thesis in detail, but his description of the post-modern world of

Cultural relations can be a medium for speaking 'the language of moral consciousness' and so exporting the invitation to trust beyond where it can be deployed by politicians and diplomats

Europe and its allies echoes many of the characteristics that we have attributed in this paper to mutuality. If these are virtues which, as Cooper maintains, we cannot afford to deploy *politically* outside the post-modern world, they are also characteristics which we see, in the British Council, as applicable to a different sort of relationship in the world as a whole. It is perhaps useful to think of cultural relations as a medium which allows us to speak the language of Cooper's post-modernism, of 'moral consciousness' in places where our governmental colleagues cannot; and in doing so to export trust beyond where it can be deployed by politicians and diplomats.

There are at least two very important, and highly political, reasons why cultural relations – trust-building – is vital not just at a micro-level, but at the level of international statecraft. Both illustrate the long-term instrumentality of cultural relations, and the hard-nosed importance of mutuality to the FCO's 'safe, just and prosperous world'. The first links cultural relations and social stability; the second links cultural relations and security. Both revolve about the ability of cultural relations to re-weave the fabric of trust – by which in this context we mean helping to construct a transnational, transcultural civil society.

Social stability in the UK and in Europe is fundamental to our future. It is threatened by change: transcontinental and transglobal migration which dramatically changes ethnic make-up and evokes racialist responses, communal isolation, hostility and disorder; and EU integration, which is bringing new and very different fellow-citizens, tensions and competitions into our European lives. What underpins our democratic societies, asserts the common values, builds the personal and the institutional links without which a shared democracy can't work? Culture – in its broadest

'We have something unique to offer to meet the UK's foreign policy goals, particularly in creating a safer world. We offer dialogue between cultures in place of violence and conflict'

sense, as a mediator between the way different people live, think and believe. Building, linking the cultures of Europe in this transcultural, transnational civil society, should be the British Council's business: helping to create the mutual trust and the mutual knowledge that enables institutions and relationships to work.

Security, in the age of al-Qa'ida, and after New York, Bali, Mombasa and Istanbul, is the other vital area in which cultural relations play a real part. Very few of the problems that preoccupy security specialists are purely military (and many are not primarily military at all): most of them have strong elements of cultural conflict, cultural breakdown and cultural antagonism which are precursors of insecurity and the results of conflict. Cultural relations organisations cannot of course step between the car-bomber and his target: but they can contribute to the conservation and the patient rebuilding of trust, both by working across fractures in zones of conflict like Cyprus, Palestine/Israel and elsewhere, and by the building of mutual trust through ordinary, workaday activities like language-teaching, exams, youth exchanges, co-productions, library and e-information provision. In doing so, like the esparto grass planted on shifting sand-dunes, they can help to anchor large parts of a dangerous environment.

James Kennedy,[12] writing about cultural relations and security, writes that we must 'take the high ground by making big claims about the role of cultural diplomacy. We need to argue that we have something unique to offer to meet the UK's foreign policy goals, particularly in creating a safer world. We offer dialogue between cultures in place of violence and conflict. Our unique selling point derives from this vision, our independence from government, our understanding of cultural relations, our ways of working, and our long-term commitment to the countries in which we work.' He

illustrates this assertion by modelling what success might look like. In 2014, the 100th anniversary of 'Europe's descent into mass slaughter and barbarism', he imagines a letter from a Central Asian called Shamil, to the recently arrived British Council Director in his country:

Ten years ago I was a terrorist in the making: young, ill-educated, deeply religious and unemployed. My country was in ruins, the economy wrecked by a corrupt and selfish dictator who thought only of the enrichment of his close family. My co-religionists were tortured and jailed for speaking out against injustice. So when a young man came one evening to our village, asking for volunteers to fight the infidel who was oppressing us, I had no hesitation in signing up. It was easy to blame all my woes on the Great Satan of American and British imperial power, who provided international support and credibility to our local despot, while at the same time (I was told) persecuted my fellow-religionists around the world.

I rapidly became a leader, and had already attracted the attention of the local police, when I received an invitation to participate in a youth leadership conference organised by something called the British Council. Against the advice of some of my comrades, I decided to go along, on the basis that if I knew the opposition I would understand how better to attack them. And, who knows, I might find a way of infiltrating into the heart of the enemy. What happened at that conference changed my life. I met there co-religionists from the UK and other countries, as devout as I am, who debated a different, non-violent, future. They offered hope, where I had experienced only fear and despair.

So where am I now, ten years later? Still in Central Asia, though I have travelled the world, and studied for a time in the UK. Older, and I hope a bit

wiser, and guided more than ever by my religious beliefs. I am the director of a vocational training school that combines religious instruction with practical skills training, so that today's young people can look forward to the peace and prosperity that seemed impossible for me as a youngster. Our country is now ruled by the old dictator's daughter. She has at least stopped arbitrary arrests and torture, and is even talking about democratic reforms. I am not sure that I will ever understand the British, and the moral degradation into which you have let your country slide, but I am eternally grateful for the life-changing opportunity the British Council gave me. As a token of thanks, I hope that you, like your predecessors, will accept my offer to teach you about our culture, our language, and our traditions, so that we can continue for generations to come the dialogue of peace.

Whether we like it or not, distrust – of the West, of the US, of the UK, of globalisation, of secularism, of consumerism, of modernity – shapes the attitude of much of the world to us; and this attitude is played out in ever more dangerous ways. Cooper writes, 'We may not be interested in chaos, but chaos is interested in us'. In a world where distrust is focused on governments, one way forward is patient, non-governmental, relationship-building, the extension of post-modern mutuality at a cultural level. There are other and equally necessary ways forward too, but the British Council, and many of our analogue organisations, are uniquely well qualified to deal in mutuality.

Independence and trust
The British Council has always seen its independence – the status conferred by its Royal Charter – as essential to its ability to operate effectively. Our Director-General,

David Green, reaffirmed at the 2003 Advisory Board that 'it is critical at a time when perceptions of the UK's strategic alignment with the US threaten the British Council's reputation for political independence that we continually emphasise our separation from government.' Why is this suddenly a great deal more important than it has been in the past?

The answer lies in the changing geometry of international relations. Globalisation and mass communication (as well as some extension to democracy across the world) have made possible a new sort of leverage. By influencing people without the mediation of their governments, influence and pressure can be brought indirectly to bear on those governments. This business of influencing government through its own population has come to be called public diplomacy: an art defined, in Joseph Nye's formulation, as Soft Power, or 'making others want what you want them to want'.

For all the British Council's institutional life it has worked both for government and with non-governmental partners. On the whole these have overlaid comfortably on each other without undue tension between them: diplomacy has provided the framework within which cultural relations have been deployed, and there has been little or no need to analyse the distinction between the two. This has worked well in a traditional matrix of bilateral relations between states, where embassies kept the gateway to international relations, and in many cases international cultural relations centred on intergovernmental Cultural Agreements administered by Mixed Commissions.

Public diplomacy
But public diplomacy, the direct contact of governments with other peoples, creates a different dynamic, because it is an explicitly governmental activity – and because of

'It is critical at a time when perceptions of the UK's strategic alignment with the US threaten the British Council's reputation for political independence that we continually emphasise our separation from government'

its claims to subsume cultural relations into itself. In the course of 2003 an FCO speaker called public diplomacy 'governments looking over other governments' heads for their foreign interactions' and a French diplomat, 'any diplomatic exchange which is not strictly political nor confidential in content.'[13] A couple of years ago, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, most baldly of all, wrote: 'Call it public diplomacy, call it public affairs, psychological warfare, if you really want to be blunt, propaganda.'[14]

What is important about these definitions is not the value, positive or negative, placed on public diplomacy, but the undisputed fact that it is a governmental activity. When the British Council does public diplomacy, it is acting as an agent of government, because one party to public diplomacy is, by definition, the 'transmitting' government.

But this isn't all the British Council – and our analogue organisations – do. We also build relationships between non-governmental parties in the UK and abroad – universities, dancers, web-surfers, language-learners, physicists, film-makers and film-goers, theatres, NGOs, intellectuals, singers, soldiers and television-viewers. This is not public diplomacy, though it can have a huge impact on public diplomacy, for which it is in a sense a precondition of success. It is useful to reserve the term 'cultural relations' for this non-governmental voice – one of the two tunes to which we dance.

Our ability to build long-term, trust-based, mutuality-inspired relationships depends on our independence – and on our preparedness to stress it and to exploit it. And it goes without saying that stressing and exploiting both independence and mutuality require living them, in the confidence (as we saw in the case of South Africa's *Up Front and Personal* exhibition) that virtue has its reward. There is scope for confusion, as we noted, about which agenda the British Council is following. It would be

Our ability to build long-term, trust-based, mutuality-inspired relationships depends on our independence – and on our preparedness to stress it and exploit it

difficult enough if we were always following either one or the other: it is doubly so in that we are usually following both, and are often not clear even in our own minds where the exact balance lies at any particular moment.

This is not in any way to suggest that the British Council doesn't, or shouldn't, do public diplomacy. On the contrary, we are a natural public diplomacy agent, and the natural partner for the FCO in large parts of its public diplomacy work. But we believe that it is very important indeed that we be as clear as possible at any time, and in any activity, which tune we are dancing to, because only in this way can we be seriously effective in the work which we do best for the UK.

Genetically modified cultural relations?
Why is this important? It is important because, unless well demarcated, the two activities cross-pollinate, like crops in adjoining fields. There is a fundamental contrast between the two activities: 'The British Council exists in a large part to build trust', said the British Council's Chair, Helena Kennedy, in April 2003.[15] Trust is built only, or at least most effectively, by consistent commitment over the long term, and by the open deployment of what we are calling mutuality. This is very different from the business of diplomacy which is – for perfectly honourable and professional reasons – not primarily about building trust, but about achieving specific, policy-driven, transactional objectives. Trust is often a by-product of diplomacy, but tends to be in the shorter rather than the longer term. Nations don't have permanent friends, as Palmerston put it: they have only permanent interests. Our interest is in friends, because peoples, unlike nations, need them.

Public diplomacy, diplomacy's younger sister, covers a wide field of activity and there is much (but by no means all) in it that British Council can do, and do supremely well.

If our cultural relations work is indistinguishable in motivation from our public diplomacy work, it, and we, will not be trusted

But the risk is always there that, if we lose clarity in understanding and demonstrating the difference between it and our non-governmental work in cultural relations, the two fields will cross-pollinate, the crops hybridise.

What this cross-pollination means in practical terms is simply that if our cultural relations work is seen as indistinguishable in motivation from our public diplomacy work, it will not – and we will not – be trusted, because we risk being seen as a 'front' for political interests. This damages not only our ability to do cultural relations; but also our ability to do public diplomacy.

This is all an argument about means, not ends. The British Council exists to promote the UK's interests to the best of its ability, in the area where it can most usefully be deployed. It is instructive to look at the purpose statement of the FCO, 'Our purpose will be to work for UK interests in a safe, just and prosperous world'.[16] Success of course depends on all sorts of tools that are not the British Council's, but it is strikingly obvious that trust-building is near the core of this safe, just and prosperous world; and that the FCO's purpose is seamlessly our own.

Trust-building is, we would argue, the British Council's 'Unique Selling Proposition'. Many agencies, including the FCO itself, can and do deliver public diplomacy. We are very good at it, and well placed because of our geographical spread and our intimacy with the FCO, but we are not uniquely qualified. For mutuality-based trust-building, however, we are uniquely qualified, through our independent status, our global presence and long history as a specialist in cultural relations in their broadest sense. In this role we represent not the government of the UK, but the people of the UK.

Even here, though, we would not wish to present a complete dichotomy. A recent FCO document, *Faith &*

Foreign Policy, asserted that 'The distinction between the pursuit of national interests and the pursuit of more "altruistic" international goals is becoming blurred. Increasingly these are seen as short-term and long-term contributions to the same goal: UK security and prosperity within the necessary context of global security and prosperity.'[17] With this we should be able to agree comfortably enough, as long as the blurring does not lead to the oxymoronic suggestion that governments can operate successfully in the business of long-term trust-building. Certainly we contribute to the same goal as government: but we do so as an independent organisation, with a unique and very distinct contribution in our ability to build trust on mutuality.

The big question is whether, as the 21st century progresses, clarity will be enough: can mutuality and public diplomacy coexist in adjoining fields, or is the governmental gene simply stronger than the non-governmental? As with crop trials, all depends on understanding the importance of the distance kept between the two.

Lack of equivalence between the words for central concepts in English and other languages is not a barrier: it is a clue to developing self-awareness and understanding how others see us

Negotiations and values

As a worldwide organisation operating in 110 countries, with most of its staff recruited locally outside the UK, the British Council has a great advantage over most other international organisations. That advantage is the knowledge capital which comes from cultural diversity. But we cannot exploit that advantage unless we are actively aware of the cultural factors influencing communication, decision-making, relationship-formation and responsibility-taking. All the central assumptions about how we work will be subject to cultural variation, and mutuality itself is no exception.

To take a few examples, some cultures (and we aren't talking here simply about countries) will put personal relationships before rules, or vice versa; others will differentiate between 'work' and 'home' relationships, seeing their own home lives as completely separate from the demands of the office. In some cultures a professional approach needs to be very individually focused and personal; in others, professionalism gives centre stage to the business in hand, and second place to the personal. A detached, impassive style of communication in a meeting can be very unsettling in a culture where it is usual to display emotion with gestures and raised voice – just as the opposite is also true. In some cultures people are judged by who they are, in terms of external markers like age, family or social position; while in others the judgement is based exclusively on their own individual achievements. All of these divergences can lead to misunderstanding between – but also within – cultures.

A national cultural relations organisation needs to test the waters carefully when thinking about a new approach to cultural dialogue. It is likely to run into trouble at the start unless it understands that mutuality itself means different things to each culture. It is not simply that the concepts of reciprocity, obligation,

symbiosis, co-operation, exchange, honesty and trust don't translate one-to-one in different languages, though they don't. In Arabic, for example, the sense is split between at least two terms: *manfaa*, 'exchange between two people' and *maslaha*, 'doing a favour' – though *tabadul*, 'exchange' and *manfaa mushtaraka*, 'mutual benefit' also contain parts of the meaning. In Turkish *karşılıklık* combines both 'mutuality' and 'reciprocity'. The way words attach to concepts signals different approaches to personal and social relationships, depending on the cultural system you inhabit.

We should not see the lack of equivalence of English words in another language as a barrier to communication but rather as the gateway to a world of negotiation, where it is vital to understand how one's own behaviour is perceived in the conversation of cultures. Being transparent, creating or discharging obligation, inspiring or receiving trust, creating and deriving benefit, are all behaviours which need the empathy of the other party in order to succeed. But to succeed at what? A business deal, the co-existence of two organisms or the financial benefits of a 'mutual society' are all in a mechanical sense mutual – but they are not open-ended.

In cultural relations, we are not driven by contractual outcomes. The goals are discovery, changed ideas and, eventually, trust. In the mutual understanding of cultures everything, ultimately, is process and change, experienced at a personal level. The distinguishing feature of cultural relations is the role played by individuals. The British Council creates 'opportunity for people worldwide' and the opportunity most eagerly sought is for personal change, a rethinking of life's goals. This is the basis of a fully mutual dialogue.

The 40 British Council staff from the UK and around the world who attended Counterpoint's September 2003 mutuality workshops reached a broad consensus on the

Mutuality relates to personal and institutional integrity: a number of values have to be lived consistently through the internal and external relationships of any cultural relations organisation

ingredients needed for this kind of exchange. The elements they picked out, listed below, have already in many cases been touched on, so we gloss them only briefly here:

Integrity. A clear insistence that mutuality relates closely to personal and institutional integrity: a number of values have to be stated and be lived consistently through the internal and external relationships of cultural relations organisations.

Cultural awareness. Mutuality is built on a consciously sought awareness of differing value systems, communicative styles, preconceptions and ways of working. This can, and should, form part of our training.

Intercultural skills. Sharpened cultural awareness is a starting point. In order to learn and become effective we need to develop the skills with which we can work successfully and mutually between cultures. Without both awareness and skills – in team-building, training, language, project design, communication and a dozen other areas – mutuality is an unrealistic aspiration.

Multilateralism. There was a widely held feeling that working more mutually has implications for the 19th-century pattern of bilateral inter-state relationships on which cultural relations organisations are largely structured. Planning and delivery on a regional, multilateral basis seem much more adapted to the early 21st-century world, where transnational cultural and political continuities are becoming increasingly important at the expense of two-handed relationship models.

Dialogue. The central expression of mutuality lies in genuine dialogue – a conversation of equals in which each party is equally interested in understanding the other, and equally prepared to

change its positions as a result of the dialogue. This is as true at an interpersonal level as it is at an institutional or an international level.

Equity. Mutuality is about recognising the balance of power in relationships and acting in that knowledge. All relationships are asymmetrical, and we operate in many contexts where imperial or colonial experience ensure an unbalanced – sometimes extremely asymmetrical – power relationship. Mutuality recognises this disequilibrium and understands that it may often mean 'going more than halfway': relationships in which power is unevenly distributed are seldom productive of trust. The goal is equity in relationships – an equity that is ungrudging recognised by both parties. Out of this comes a respect that is very much more than tolerance of difference.

Self-confidence. Self-confidence and self-assertiveness in the British Council are crucial. If we accept mutuality as an organising principle it will inform how we do most, and perhaps all, of our work. Organisations which aspire to be more mutual need to be bullish about explaining and defending this difficult-to-measure benefit. Some audiences will be critically demanding, like government departments and diplomatic missions: we need to develop a convincing, solid, common narrative that confidently substantiates our analysis of our mission.

Honesty about one's own culture. Mutuality-based relationships are about building creative under-standing. They need to be as transparent as possible and they need by definition not to exclude the uncomfortable. A large part of that process involves knowledgeable honesty about one's own culture and a preparedness to be self-critical. Bombast and self-puffing will always be seen through.

The goal is an equity in relationships that is recognised by both parties. Out of this comes a respect that is more than toleration of difference

Conflict. Honest, open relationships and discussions will raise difficult issues. These will often be issues in shared history (imperial government, slavery, war) or the present (migration, foreign policy, attitudes to the non-Western world, trade, cultural products, religion). They will sometimes also express themselves at a more trivial level. It is important not to see disagreement and conflict simply as an upheaval to be smoothed over – it is often not reconcilable and the best that we can aim for is careful and respectful exploration of differences.

Critical reflection and internalisation. Organisationally and personally, the progression from understanding these characteristics of mutuality-based relationships to internalising them is very important. This means active analysis of our transactions and constant learning from what we analyse, so that an understanding of mutuality becomes automatic. We will not function effectively without simply looking at what people do, but why they do what they do.

Preparedness to change. There is little point in negotiating difficult subjects or taking on difficult discussions if we have pre-set positions that are non-negotiable. Asking our counter-party to change views, if we won't consider doing so ourselves, takes us up a blind alley: we need to reduce our non-negotiables to a minimum, and to understand that flexibility breeds flexibility.

Organisational culture. Like all cultures, organisational culture is constantly changing and being renegotiated. The application of mutuality to internal relationships is implicit in any mutuality-based approach to our work generally. This can't be left to chance: it needs to be managed in the understanding that the two processes are

Asking our counter-party to change views, if we don't consider doing so ourselves, takes us up a blind alley: we need to reduce our non-negotiables to a minimum, and to understand that flexibility breeds flexibility

interdependent, and failure in one means failure in the other.

Risk-taking. Mutuality is a high-risk, high-reward strategy. It means new approaches to partners, clients and sponsors, all of which have to be managed with care. It also means openness in interpersonal and managerial relations, and exposure to higher levels of critical feedback. The payback is in long-term impact.

Becoming more mutual

Mutuality, as we have seen, rests as much in how a project is implemented as in its contents. *How* is a frame of mind, a personal orientation to openness, risk-taking and change. We have mentioned the *Edinburgh Articles*, which see in mutuality a principle 'fundamental to all the British Council does, internally and externally'. Connecting Futures (CF) is entirely imagined and built on mutuality. CF project managers have debated and agreed what they call *touchstones*, which they see as marking a properly mutual project. These touchstones (below) are as close as CF wishes at the moment to get to defining mutuality, but they do provide a tool for recognising it which is at least a scientific advance on the poet's razor.

- Participants, partners, and the British Council in the UK and overseas must be involved as equal project partners in 'One Big Team'.
- There must be tolerance and respect for others, which includes listening, accommodating disagreement, and understanding and welcoming difference.
- Communication is both an output and an essential part of the process.
- The project must deliver impact both overseas and in the UK.
- Mutuality is negotiated, not imposed.

'Mutuality is not a value which travels freely, fits into any context and is there to be readily embraced. It needs to be made explicit and purposefully negotiated'

Amplifying this last point, Leah Davcheva,[18] writes that mutuality 'is not a value which travels freely, fits into any context and is there to be readily embraced by participants. It needs to be made explicit and purposefully negotiated'.

The Counterpoint workshops provided a number of ideas about delivering mutuality in projects which can be added to a community of practice which is evolving across the British Council. We would like to focus on three areas which emerged: the nature of partnerships, the role of the UK, and measuring impact.

Partners and partnerships

We found a remarkable consensus about how we select and involve partners in projects from their outset. Azza Hammoudi believes that 'In choosing UK independent professionals/consultants, we should seek individuals with a range of skills and competencies required for developing successful relationships and the agreed outcome. Professional skills are definitely an important area to consider, but equally important are the individual's interpersonal effectiveness, empathy and cultural sensitivity.'

However, she concedes it is not easy to make the judgement based on CV or knowledge of professional competence alone, and this is equally true within the British Council. Here some help is at hand. The Learning and Development team has designed a long-overdue addition to the Competency Dictionary: an intercultural competence which describes the ability to initiate and manage the cultural dialogue needed to develop mutually beneficial relationships. The behaviours described in it are some guide to how we build the 'One Big Team'. Putting together project teams must be a carefully planned and deliberate process: as a small beginning, Counterpoint has commissioned three

'Professional skills are an important area to consider, but equally important are interpersonal effectiveness, empathy and cultural sensitivity'

intercultural training modules, one of which is called *Managing Cross-Cultural Teams*.

Accommodating a range of communication styles is extremely important in building a capacity for effective trust-building. Liliana Biglou[19] sees elitism as a serious obstacle to creating equitable dialogue: 'Our overseas offices understandably aim to recruit the best staff we can. However, this often means that we employ only well-educated professionals, who come from privileged backgrounds, in terms of their education, and economic and social status . . . There is little faith in the value of ordinary members of the society and on the whole there is very little effort to employ able staff who don't belong to the "intellectual elite" '. This tendency, about which we need to be clear-sighted and aware, rather than terminally self-critical, can influence the selection of partners. We need to be self-aware enough to widen, rather than narrow, the range of people and organisations from which we choose our partners.

Sultan Barakat,[20] one of two external participants, developed for us a model for building new relationships or consolidating old ones on the principles of mutuality.

The diagram suggests the benefits of applying a mutual approach to partnerships. The ideal trajectory followed is a progressive 'risk-investment' by both partners, each stage building on the foundation of the one before. There is a trade-off between the level of trust two or more partners have in each other and the relevance of the activity to each of their agendas: the 45° diagonal is the optimum trade-off. The line shows the increasingly mutual behaviour of the partners, the circle enlarging at each stage to show the size of the investment which the partners make. This investment is not exclusively financial: it could be a commitment of many different resources, from time and money to a preparedness to learn and explore. The benefits clearly increase with the joint risk taken. The different stages are:

1   **Information:** this is the level of providing rather than exchanging information. Partners or customers receive information which may or may not be relevant to them.
2   **Genuine consultation:** partners ask about and state their objectives and desired outcomes.
3   **Inclusiveness:** a check is made by both partners on whether the process includes the appropriate range of participants.
4   **Joint decision:** major decisions affecting the relationship are taken together.
5   **Acting together:** the partners share implementation and delivery.
6   **Supporting each other's objective:** those involved understand and help to realise the objectives of their partners.
7   **Accepting support from the other:** each partner realises the benefit they can gain from accepting the other's ideas and creativity. This is not just the immediate tangible benefits of that offer but the degree to which this openness reinvests in the relationship for the future.

Any relationship that aspires to mutuality will travel up the diagonal line – which is the index of trust.

The role of the UK

Almost every discussion about implementing mutuality hinges, inevitably, on the role played by the UK. Thinking of Bulgaria, Leah Davcheva stressed that we can't assume existing mutuality between regional cultures within a country, and this is at least as relevant to the UK, where equity of dialogue is skewed by the cultural and political ill-definition of England. Abroad, 'England' is systematically confused with 'UK', and 'English' often serves as a catch-all adjective. At home, popular, media and political parlance reinforces the muddle, as do the complicated, and quite different, nuances of the words 'Britain' and 'British'. So, at present there is an inbuilt gradient to our own national conversation, with a sense that Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are often looking uphill at an England that claims by default a cultural dominance based on history, while less and less comfortable with its own identity.

This is important to mutuality, because, if it takes two to tango, it essential to know who your partner is. Mutuality demands that we pay as much attention to the UK and its nations as we do to overseas countries. We have seen that this doesn't simply mean a mechanistic shifting of funds into the UK operation, but rather the design of a series of techniques for leveraging the impact of our work in the UK. But it does mean a new, integrated approach to evaluation which adds UK impact to the outputs of projects ostensibly located abroad. At the moment there is a tendency for the UK end of projects which are mutual in conception to be orphaned when it comes to follow-up. We allocate little resource, and little attention – but implicit in the whole mutuality idea, and above all in the leveraging of limited spending

in the UK, is the absolute need to make the most of what we have. So this requires our attention.

More generally, we need to remap the UK for ourselves, understanding quite how much and how fast it is changing. Devolution has allowed us to focus much more effectively on the constitutionally defined units of the UK, but we are still under-informed about ethnic and religious Britain. In the UK there are diasporas and transnational language communities that are already sometimes important to our work overseas: they, and more like them, could become much more important – even perhaps fundamental – in the future. There are resources that we may be missing because we are asking the wrong questions: we lament the collapse of language-learning in our schools while somehow overlooking the great reservoir of Bengali, Gujerati, Punjabi, Persian, Chinese and Arabic spoken as second languages, as though these only really count as languages when learned from scratch at SOAS.

Counterpoint is beginning to do some of this work (as are Connecting Futures and other parts of the British Council): in early 2004 we launched the first of a series of seminars with small numbers of Muslim intellectuals, looking not at faith itself, nor at oddly defined 'communities' but at the coherent intellectual resource offered to us by Muslim Britons, who can give us powerful support in our trust-building around the world, if – and only if – we can convince them that we take them seriously as valuable components of the UK that forms our mutuality bridgehead. Mutuality, in other words, needs to infuse the mapping exercise and the relationships that grow from it, as well as the purposes to which we turn it.

Sultan Barakat led the development at the second workshop of a schematic map of the relationships involved in intercultural exchange, identifying three kinds

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of relationship: those between the UK and another country; those between two other countries, with UK brokerage; and those between cultural groups within a single country (which could just as well be the UK as anywhere else). It focuses us on the multiple possibilities of intercultural dialogue and exchange, but leaves unmapped all sorts of possibilities like working with transnational and diaspora communities.
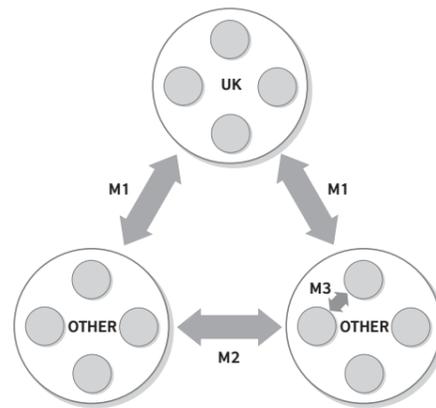
M1 = bilateral relations with a single country
M2 = relations between two countries with which the UK has developed relations, such as when brokering a regional project
M3 = relations between internal regions or cultural groups, either in a partner country or in the UK.

Impact measurement
Impact is 'the positive difference which the British Council makes to how individuals and organisations overseas engage with the UK'.[21] Our performance scorecard sees different 'levels of intensity' in this engagement, moving from *awareness* through *appreciation* and *engagement* to *advocacy*. This approach is based on marketing principles: the Ladder of

How do we measure the social collapse that is averted by the patient weaving of intercultural links? The despair averted by increased opportunities?

Engagement is an intelligent adaptation of the old marketing nostrum, A.I.D.A. (Attraction, Interest, Decision, Action). It is very useful, but we need, while recognising its value, to be clear that applying a model from one domain to a radically different activity can have problematic implications.

In the course of this paper we have drawn distinctions between the public diplomacy and the cultural relations aspects of the British Council's work. We see public diplomacy, with its relatively short-term goals and its quantifiable outputs, as much more susceptible to this kind of measurement than cultural relations. This shouldn't surprise us: it is time-limited, defined by projectised transactions and is fairly easily tied to measurable outputs. There is a danger that under this pressure to be measurable we gravitate too far towards the more easily measurable of our activities. But in fact the creative challenge is quite the opposite: to devise tools for measuring the impact of true, mutuality-based, cultural relations.

Cultural relations are different because they are built in, and for, the long term. If we are right in seeing trust-building as the central, underlying activity of cultural relations, we are talking about an outcome that cannot be measured against short-term targets because it is a long-term, organic growth. Like diplomacy, but to an even greater extent, much of true cultural relations is about preventing things happening, as well as about building. How do we measure the social collapse that is averted by the patient weaving of intercultural links? The despair averted by increased opportunities? The people who went to university instead of to *madrasah* in Pakistan or training-camp in Afghanistan?

The long-term nature of our work means that we can't rationally take year-on-year snapshots and evaluate success from them, shunting money about on

There are many aspects of social and cultural capital that invite only ridicule when monetarised

the basis of short-cycle impact. But we can't, either, take a leap of faith over a decade without some evidence to support our planning. Cultural economists have looked at the non-material value of cultural goods, and have tried to monetarise them as inputs into (for example) developmental cost-benefit analysis. This is interesting as far as it goes, but some more radical cultural economists like Arjo Klamer go further and insist that valuation and evaluation need to be removed from the 'moment of exchange'. Klamer says of this obsessively quantitative approach, 'Everything that matters is the number that determined the trade an equal one, not the controversy that went into its process. All valuations and evaluations, all deliberating, negotiating and conversing, all dealings are at that moment congealed in a single value: price.'[22] There are many aspects of social and cultural capital that invite only ridicule when monetarised: these might include being moved by music, being a good parent or – for our purpose here – trusting and being trusted.

How can we measure the impact of trust-building? There isn't an easy answer, ready-baked for us, and it is an issue we need to address urgently. There may well be ways – *pace* Arjo Klamer – of giving *some* kind of countable value to some aspects of this sort of work, but we shall need to be wary of the potential for absurdity. More subjective, narrative, methods are being worked out by Corporate Planning and Performance (CPP) as useful complements to quantification. A very interesting suggestion has been made by Jim Scarth[23] in following up the successful My Life, My Future workshop in Oman in November 2003: he is interested in measuring attitude change through the what is intensely mutual activity, by engaging 'a trained psychologist to do some work with the students both now and after the Launch and Visual Response stages . . . the psychologist would be tasked to explore various areas, e.g. self-awareness, confidence,

cultural awareness, etc.' This is a very interesting approach which might, through well-designed sampling, help to document the impact of mutuality-based activity.

Procrustes, the hotelier-from-hell of Greek mythology, either stretched his guests or lopped off their limbs to fit his beds: we must be wary of the procrustean model. Finding new kinds of evaluation is not easy, and methods for measuring social and cultural capital are in their infancy, but recognising how the current economic-based systems can misrepresent cultural relations is the first stage. Recognising how measurability can itself become a false criterion for choosing one project, or one line of work, over another is the second. The challenge is to redefine cultural relations in the light of mutuality and construct a mode of evaluation which will convince both our sponsors and our publics.

Conclusion: writing a new story

At the centre of our narrative we have put trust-building, the single outcome that unifies everything that the British Council does

We have sketched out a narrative of the British Council's rationale, power and mission that is significantly different from the account we are used to. At the centre of our narrative we have put trust-building, the single outcome that unifies everything that the British Council does. We suggest that the British Council's unique selling proposition is its ability to build international, intercultural trust, through long-term relationships. We maintain that our ability to build trust is based on our independence of government (and is potentially damaged by perceptions of our closeness to government). And we take mutuality to be the package of values which, exclusively, enables us to build the trust-based relationships that are our highest level output.

Trust-building has a very important role in the UK's strategic positioning after 9/11 and the Iraq War. Levels of trust are at a historic low, and rebuilding them is vital to at least two key areas of the UK's international interests – global security and the building of strong, socially inclusive infrastructures for Western democracy. The British Council must explore this vision of its role and develop, institutionally, the confidence that cultural relations is hard-nosed work with significant strategic outcomes. It is not in any sense an add-on, or peripheral, or optional.

There is a paradox at the centre of this assertion. Trust-building requires independence of government, while pursuing national objectives. It is the same sort of paradox faced by the BBC, 'a state-funded broadcaster which must be independent of the state in order to deserve its state-funded privileges. The British state would lose prestige if it had a tame broadcaster . . .'[24] Like our outcome, trust-building, our objectives are high-level and long-term: we must be clear that all our work serves the FCO's strategic purpose of working for 'UK interests in a safe, just and prosperous world'. But while it

serves the strategic purpose of the FCO, the British Council cannot safely form part of a day-to-day, opinion-management operation without gravely risking its unique ability to deliver trust.

In the past, the British Council has avoided reaching this conclusion because the world before globalisation was more compartmentalised; and the West had a greater, less damaged, legacy of trust. It has often been advantageous to the UK, to the British Council and to the FCO to preserve ambiguities, so that the British Council has at times benefited from perceptions of its being more *official* than it is; and missions have often benefited from perceptions of the British Council's being more *independent* than it is. That is the Push-me-pull-you role we still seem often to play, and it is hard to reconcile it with unambiguous acknowledgement of trust-building as our mission, and mutuality as our fundamental value.

In this paper we assert that there is life left in the old model; that the two roles, governmental and non-governmental (public diplomacy and cultural relations) can be combined successfully as long as we maintain and sharpen clarity about which role we are playing – clarity both in our own minds (difficult) and in the perceptions of partners, clients and customers (more difficult).

Not everyone agrees. In the course of the mutuality debate there has been an argument that this contradiction is too great to be sustained – that we cannot keep both balls in the air without undermining our own trustworthiness.

All parties are committed to the 'UK's interests in a safe, just and prosperous world' – the debate is about how we can most effectively support those interests and help to form that world. To this debate, as to the whole range of thinking about the British Council's role, future, potential and impact, the idea of mutuality is central.

Mutuality is the precondition of trust, and we need to continue to think, as individuals and as an organisation, about how we can build mutuality into our thinking – and our intuition – at every level.

Recognition of mutuality as a core value means recognising the direct link between moral input and geopolitical impact. This seems to us to be precisely what a cultural relations organisation is all about.

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