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Pioneering Gender Equality in Music: The legacy of the #WeAreEquals Music Academy

This year, British Council Spain has launched a new edition of its [#WeAreEquals Music Academy](#) – a programme for emerging musicians providing specialist training to help them boost their careers whilst defending gender balance in the sector. With a new focus on classical/contemporary music for its 2023 edition, the project keeps the same essence and purpose for which it was created four years ago when electronic music took centre stage. We talked to Two-Ex, a female DJ duo who won the 2019 edition, to learn about their experiences and the legacy of this programme.

‘This opportunity put us in contact with people from the music industry. We attended talks by influential gender equality collectives, such as MIM and She Said So and took part in sessions delivered by UK-renowned artists, who encouraged us to keep following our passion. Thanks to the astonishing Jamz Supernova, Afrodeutsche and Carly Wilford for this!

The #WeAreEquals Music Academy was also great for weaving together an excellent network among teachers, contributors and participants, which materialised in some musical collaborations and also some lasting friendships :).

For us, being allowed to play at one of the most iconic stages in the framework of the Madrid Pride celebrations was a boost on so many levels. It let us be known outside our usual circuit and brought new chances to play at different clubs, which, in turn, led us to play at even more clubs!

Thanks to initiatives like this, the representation of genders within the music industry is becoming more equal [...]. However, getting equal female representation in the leading electronic music line-ups still has a long way to go.

Our best advice for any woman thinking of boosting their career is to have fun along the way, hang with friends to share music and practice, and never lose focus on the important thing to enjoy yourself. The rest comes with hard work and desire ...’.

Where art meets sustainability – Crafting a greener tomorrow

Berlin Design Week's sixth edition, themed 'Resilience', celebrated design as a catalyst for progressive change and sustainable creativity, and spotlighted diverse talents and innovative projects from local and international designers across various disciplines. Sandra Junele's unique and sustainable wall art panels, crafted with natural yarn waste and organic glue, were showcased at the event, reinforcing her commitment to sustainability with support from the British Council.

'My name is Sandra Junele, and I am the founder of Junele, a small business specialising in unique and sustainable wall art panels. Our panels are crafted using pre-consumer natural yarn waste and organic plant-based glue. One of the remarkable aspects of our product is its circularity. When the panel reaches the end of its life cycle, the glue dissolves in water, leaving behind reusable fibres. Additionally, due to its natural composition, the panel is biodegradable. Moreover, when designed at a larger scale, it possesses sound-absorbing properties, adding functionality to its aesthetic appeal.

In the challenging landscape of today's market, it has become increasingly difficult to promote and market a product effectively. Therefore, I am grateful for the opportunity provided by the British Council to exhibit my wall panels at an international level, allowing me to reach a broader audience. The support and assistance I received from British Council Germany made the experience of showcasing my work in an unfamiliar city much more manageable. Their guidance and collaboration were invaluable throughout the process.

Berlin Design Week served as an excellent platform for me to present my work and engage with the public. It was an incredibly enriching experience, allowing me to share the story behind my sustainable art panels, discuss their creative process, and highlight their environmental benefits. The positive reception and feedback I received were truly inspiring, reinforcing my commitment to sustainable design practices.'



Bridging Truth and Creativity in Filmmaking

Jorge Muriel is a film director, actor, translator and teacher. A two-time Fullbright Fellow, his productions have received three Max Awards, five Actors' Union Awards and three Goya Award nominations (the Spanish Oscar equivalent). Jorge has been one of the participants selected for this year's [Future Screens: BFI Screenwriting Lab](#), a film scriptwriting lab for emerging filmmakers, organised by the British Council in association with the British Film Institute and with the support of the Fundación Academia de Cine.

'The most important thing I took away from the course is the reminder that you must dare to tell the truth about yourself through your stories. The need to dare to tell stories from our point of view, from our voice', says Jorge Muriel about the film scriptwriting workshop organised by the British Council, which aims to provide emerging filmmakers with the necessary tools and knowledge to enhance their creative process when writing feature films.

Jorge describes this experience as 'wonderful and transformative', adding that 'in this workshop, all the basic and important points every scriptwriter must consider are reviewed intelligently'.

Jorge has not waited to put what he has learned in this training into practice. 'Just during the course, I was writing a second version of a feature film, and in these months, I have been applying concepts discussed in the workshop', he says. 'I have questioned the reason why I was telling that story and not another one frequently, and that has helped me to polish it and make it more honest', concludes the Spanish film director.

'I think you are a fundamental institution within the cultural fabric of Madrid. I really admire your commitment to culture and artists. I love what you do'.





From Fear to Fulfilment: A GROWTH Fellow's PhD Journey

Graduate Research Opportunities in Water Technology and Health / [GROWTH Fellowship Scheme](#) was established in 2015 to support Palestinian students studying for their PhDs at Israeli universities. As a GROWTH fellow, Riham Smoom's participation in the programme allowed her to achieve her dream of becoming a PhD student and introduced her to various new communities.

'I was born and lived in East Jerusalem my whole life, mostly with Palestinians. At the time, there were severe political tensions in the country, and I was afraid to do my university studies at an Israeli university as a Palestinian. After finishing my high school education, all Palestinian universities were closed and the only one open was the Arab College for Medical Professions department of Al-Quds University, where I got my BSc degree in Laboratory Medicine and then my MSc degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

While working at Al-Quds University Medical Research Centre as a research associate, I was selected to get training for prenatal genetic diagnosis in Jordan to work at an IVF centre. I found it fascinating to connect genetics lab work with preventing certain diseases, which made me love research even more. I tried to connect with professors at the Hebrew University and met Prof. Ittai Ben Porath, who let me work in his lab on a collaboration project with Prof. Yuval Dor.

I acquired advanced research skills during two years of work and led an independent project. My professors encouraged me to apply for the GROWTH Fellowship programme of the British Council, which opened the door to my dream to be a PhD student at the Hebrew University, at the Prof. Yehuda Tzfati Lab / Department of Genetics.

The fellowship allowed me to expand my knowledge and practice many more techniques, obtaining exciting and novel results. In addition to my satisfaction scientifically, I felt that I was making personal progress in speaking, interacting, working with people from different societies and developing together scientifically. This helped me learn more about their traditions, making me realise we're not all as different as I thought!

The fellowship programme helped me connect with other labs at the Hebrew University and other universities through collaborative work. Being invited to the British Council's UK-Israel Science Days 2023 in London as a speaker was a huge opportunity. It helped me meet and interact with people from my profession and work area, exchange knowledge, and make connections for the future.'

Turning Lego-Inspired Dreams into Affordable Green Housing

Newton Fund grantee Prof. Dr Mustafa Sahmaran (Hacettepe University, Turkey) has implemented a ground-breaking idea with a 'Lego construction system of "green" structural components for a low-cost housing' project. It is a unique, sustainable construction model, and Prof. Sahmaran now aims to help earthquake victims, homeless people and refugees by providing them with truly green, low-cost and reusable houses.

'I spent years developing innovative methods to tackle global challenges such as reducing the issue of climate change in the construction industry. I have also worked to engage my team in raising awareness about the circular economy and tackling global warming. In a search for international funds and strategic collaborations, I have come across the call of the Newton Fund.

This fund gives a unique opportunity to developing countries to collaborate with UK-based universities/research centres, which are leading in science, to promote these countries' economic development and welfare and shift stories for good by addressing critical gaps and pressing global needs. We partnered with Prof. Ashraf Ashour, a structural engineering expert from the University of Bradford, UK, and our proposal was granted to develop green solutions based on construction materials and structural engineering through the upcycling of Construction and Demolition Waste (CDW).

The project's goal was to develop globally applicable solutions to counteract the undeniable adverse effects of CDW on the environment, economy, and society and to gain possible favour from CDW through the development of 'green' construction materials. The project also recognises the importance of providing energy-efficient housing and accommodation, particularly in refugee-heavy or disaster-prone countries. Therefore, this project aimed to promote CDW circularity, contribute to sustainable infrastructure/structure development and address environmental, societal, health, and economic challenges associated with this waste.

On 6 February 2023, Turkey experienced two earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6, damaging an area of approximately 350,000 sq. km, affecting 14 million people, and destroying at least 350,000 buildings. Turkey also hosts nearly 4 million refugees who need proper shelter and accommodation. In this regard, we use our successful outcomes obtained through the project to build truly green, low-cost and reusable houses explicitly targeted for fast and safe accommodation. We also designed and developed Lego-like/demountable structural elements that do not create additional waste, maximise energy needs reductions, and promote circularity in novel civil engineering materials/structures.

Our Newton Funded project provided an opportunity for scientists and experts from Turkey and the UK to come together and exchange experiences in developing holistic circular economy solutions to tackle the global issues arising due to unsustainable practices of construction and demolition.'





Empowering Eco Warriors: Bucharest's Inclusive School Takes on Climate Action

Corina Ionescu, an educator at Bucharest's Inclusive Education School Center No. 1, embarked on the Climate Action in Education course, which inspired her and her colleagues to launch a series of eco-conscious initiatives within their school, addressing critical ecology and climate change topics.

'At first, there were activities at the class level, activities on ecological themes of information, awareness, or therapeutic activities: messages on sheets of paper made from recycled paper, objects from natural or recycled materials such as wreaths from natural felt, dolls made of natural wool, homemade slippers made of felt, or candles from beeswax. Ecological activity in the schoolyard (raking, sweeping, whitewashing tree trunks, planting flowers) also took place. Everything was completed with a Spring Fair, where the products were exhibited.'

It had a significant impact and helped Corina and her colleagues achieve the results of the Erasmus project and prepare two optional courses on environmental education, which will be taught next school year to two classes.

'The purpose of the optional programme 'Protecting nature, protecting the future' is to increase the level of information and awareness regarding the issue of the consequences of pollution on the environment and to promote ecological solutions. The optional curriculum is based on the Sustainable Development Goals against the degradation of the planet through sustainable consumption and production, the sustainable management of its natural resources and the adoption of urgent measures regarding climate change so that it can meet the needs of current and future generations, by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The contents value creativity, imagination, team spirit, and competition, allowing students to assume roles and responsibilities in the community and offer viable solutions for maintaining an optimal living environment.

I suggest other teachers get involved in such activities to do smaller or more significant projects because the students like to participate, are motivated, are involved, and are part of nature. I wish success to all who will carry out projects related to the environment, climate change, and ecology, and the British Council is a source of resources.'



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Mastering IELTS: Top Tips for Achieving Proficiency in Your Exam

IELTS is ideal for individuals aspiring to live and study abroad and seeking to validate their English proficiency. It is the globally recognised English language test, accepted by over 2,000 European institutions. As part of the launch of '[IELTS Ready: Premium](#)', our innovative online platform designed to assist those preparing for the IELTS exam in collaboration with the British Council, we talked with Makhkambek. He is an English teacher and student from Uzbekistan who shared his insights on the exam and offered valuable tips on achieving an impressive score of 8, signifying proficiency in the English language.

'This year, I decided to take IELTS because the exam to certify my English language skills. I chose the British Council because of its quality and variety of services. My first reason was the opportunity to select the place, time and type of speaking exam; face-to-face or via online conference. I needed to have that face-to-face communication.

The second reason is the reputation of speaking test examiners [...]. Their ability to support the discussion and their skill and experience made IELTS my most comfortable speaking exam.

I can recommend one crucial thing to new IELTS test takers. Enjoy the talking and see the speaking test as an honest dialogue, or a discussion with a friend and not just as a question-and-answer session with the examiner.

If I had a chance to change anything in my last exam, I would rest well before it. Staying focused is essential to keep your mind clean and energised enough. So, good quality sleep and having at least half a week of free time before the main test is very crucial.

I was very happy to use the British Council's materials during my preparation. The 'Road to IELTS' tests are great for at least one reason. Their difficulty level is really close to the actual exam level. This was important because I wanted to check my level and readiness, and this helped me a lot.

My plan is to retake IELTS in the upcoming year to try and achieve C2 level. My last advice for future IELTS takers is the following: Don't be afraid and don't hesitate to apply for IELTS. Book the exam date, prepare for it and move towards your dream. British Council and IELTS exams are creating many opportunities for workers, students and university applicants. Good luck!'





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