



Human Stories

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Reflecting on the past and embracing the future: the 25-year journey of the Good Friday Agreement

10 April 2023 saw the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, the deal enabling peace over conflict as a way of dealing with decades of differences in Northern Ireland. To mark this important anniversary, Co-operation Ireland and the British Council have brought together 25 25-year-olds from across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the UK to share their reflections on the impact the signing of the agreement has had on their lives to date, and to hear their goals and hopes for the next 25 years. Their voices and sentiments are collected in the #Film25 project, which Margaret Lucey, Programme Manager Co-operation Ireland, explains below.

‘For me as an Irish Citizen, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is a source of pride and a symbol of new beginnings [...] In 1998, we came together with the loudest voice we as citizens could have. We used our vote and voted overwhelming “YES” – it was a yes that we wanted to work together for the greater good of all.

As the #Film25 project facilitator, what stood out for me was how the recent challenges of COVID-19 and Brexit have focused young people on the need to maintain peace on the Island. Although all they knew was a life of peace, they still had a real sense of division and conflict among different communities on the Island and across the Islands.

Although the bombing and shootings have gone, there is still so much distrust and prejudice. The trauma and hurt of those horrific years have still been recounted and remain substantially unhealed. For everyone involved, regardless of our generation, there was a shared awareness of the fragility of the existing peace and the need to protect it moving forward for the next 25 years.

Co-operation Ireland and the British Council have identified the urgent need to work with communities, particularly young people, to rebuild trust by creating opportunities for engagement and dialogue. We work directly with new generations to help them gain the skills, confidence, and connections to transform their lives and contribute positively to a shared society.

We need to continue working with these young voices to capture their commitment to engaging in these peace-sharing initiatives. Their message was simple: they wanted more and to engage with their younger peers to keep building a peaceful future for Ireland/Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the whole world.’

The silent power of Deep Listening

More than 200 Lithuanian professionals from educational and non-governmental organisations had the unique chance to experience the feeling of being truly heard in our fast-paced environment. They all explored the **Deep Listening** approach developed by the British Council and the BBC World Service as part of the global programme Crossing Divides. Thanks to this initiative, thousands of young people from 119 countries have trained and practised their listening and understanding skills. In March 2023, the programme took place in Lithuania, and we talked to one of the participants, Arminas Varanauskas, about his experience.

‘There are three essential things about Deep Listening: (1) it’s not so much about listening but about hearing what the person is saying, (2) equally important – showing the person that you listen to them and hear what they are saying. Ultimately, both aspects lead to (3) encouraging agency in the person and following the person’s thoughts rather than putting out your own.

Deep Listening techniques are powerful tools that help understand people's needs and make them feel accepted. Keeping people engaged is crucial because my work directly involves learning and training activities. I must provide a safe space for them to make mistakes and provide timely support. We need to remember what miracles simple human connection can create.

Deep Listening helps you better understand the person you’re communicating with and be more present. Being truly present is precious, given our permanent availability and the disturbances it can cause. It’s also respectful to the other person and gives you many positive vibes. You don’t believe it? Just try.

The application of this approach goes beyond our professional and personal spheres. One of the underlying social challenges we need to solve is ongoing polarisation: social media and algorithms accelerate that. It is online where we use most of our speaking (and sometimes yelling, even if THAT’S IN CHAT 🗣️), spend less time listening and least time hearing. But it’s the basis of democracy. That’s the basis of our shared understanding, our social agreement, and everyone’s well-being. Only by being aware of others can we solve those challenges, and by doing that, ultimately, we will make a better life not only for people across the globe but for ourselves, too. ❤️👐🌍’





The Alumni Awards: unlocking a multitude of opportunities and possibilities

Hasan Tanriseven is a deputy governor in Turkey. His journey with the British Council started when he won the [Alumni Award](#) for 'Social Impact', leading to many more learning opportunities.

'One year of studying in the UK helped broaden my horizon and enhance my capabilities as an administrator and a community leader. The UK education contributed to my innovation and creativity skills and, eventually, enabled me to aid people more successfully and create positive impacts in my country.

I applied for the British Council's prestigious Alumni Awards in Turkey and won the 'Social Action Award' in 2022. Receiving this award gave further momentum to my studies. I am a lifelong learner, and the Alumni Awards opened the door to studying one more UK course to update my knowledge to help people even more. It also has opened a new chapter in my professional and academic life. My network has enlarged, and these new connections have facilitated in-depth interaction and discussion with other professionals and academics, bringing about a new understanding of leadership.

After participating in the Alumni Awards, I benefited from the limitless learning opportunities British Council offers. Learning and practising English was more difficult a few decades ago, but now the British Council provides invaluable resources and opportunities in this digital technology age. I have always been keen to improve my English level. Finding people to speak English with is difficult if you do not live in a metropolitan area, but the British Council removes boundaries. It does not matter if it is 6 am or 10 pm: you and five other people from Colombia, Italy, Japan, Ghana or elsewhere can discuss different topics moderated by a native English speaker. [English Online](#) gave me that chance. Furthermore, [English Score Tutors](#) has enabled me to discuss various issues and review my writing pieces individually with tutors. The British Council's English Online and English Score Tutors programmes allowed me to speak English with people worldwide. For that reason, the British Council has contributed invaluable support to my learning journey.

I'm an external lecturer at prestigious universities, along with my regular duties. I advise my students to learn English well and, if possible, consider at least one year of study in the UK.'



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Building connections through music with BrutPop

Alejandro Van Zandt Escobar works for BrutPop, an organisation based in France whose aim is to make music more accessible through events or workshops. Thanks to the British Council's [International Collaboration Grants](#), BrutPop was able to take their connection to a British partner, LifeSize, to another level.

'BrutPop had already met LifeSize a few years before we started this project. We met them online at the beginning of the pandemic when we reached out to interview them about their work.

We are happy to have been able to participate in the International Collaboration Grants programme by the British Council. It allowed us to take the time to meet up in person, both in Hastings and in Paris, and to work together effectively by sharing best practices. We could also organise two Sonic Fairs on each side of the Channel.

These events are a mixture between a funfair and a contemporary art experimental sound exhibition with instruments that are open to play with. The Sonic Fair's objective is for people to experiment and interact with sound through playfulness, even people with complex access needs.

Our organisations share a common interest in experimental approaches to music and sound-making and how that can be related to questions such as inclusion and accessibility. We are thankful for participating in this project which we consider a big second step after our first online collaboration with LifeSize, and we hope it will lead to many more years of cooperation.'



Image from a Sonic Fair © Alejandro Van Zandt Escobar

Following a deep passion for aviation and making dreams take flight

Gizem Colak is a Women in STEM scholar whose passion for aviation brought her and her daughter to the UK. The [Women in STEM scholarship](#) inspired her to help passionate women get the education and financial support they need.

'I studied economics 15 years ago and since then, I have been working in commercial departments of airlines in different parts of the world. My primary goal was to build on this experience by obtaining academic knowledge in my field. I applied for Women in STEM scholarships to study Air Transport Management at Cranfield University, one of the most prestigious universities worldwide in the aviation industry. Obtaining a degree from this programme is essential if you aspire to climb the corporate ladder to top management positions, as it equips students with the skills needed for the aviation industry.

If it weren't for this fantastic opportunity, I wouldn't have been able to pursue this course. The desire to attend this course has always been on my mind, and I was even accepted previously but couldn't attend because I was pregnant then. Cranfield has always been a dream for me that had to be postponed. However, the scholarship opportunity was a dream come true, as it was also provided for my daughter, allowing me to move to the UK with her for a year.

It's been a fantastic experience for me to become a student again. I managed to juggle everything and my passion for aviation kept me motivated. My daughter thrived in this international environment at the age of 3 and became fluent in English.

As for my future plans, I want to give something back to the industry by supporting more women who are passionate about aviation. I hope to find ways to help other women by creating educational opportunities and offering scholarships. There are many talented and ambitious women in the aviation industry in Turkey. However, much work still needs to be done to ensure that women have equal opportunities and representation in the field.

My message to all women with talent and potential but lacking financial support is this: Don't hesitate to apply to Women in STEM scholarships and chase your dreams! Believe in yourself, step out of your comfort zone, and explore the world to gain valuable global experience. The UK is well-known for its excellence in education, and it's the perfect place to achieve the right skills that can change your world.'





A shining testament to how education can bring about incredible transformations

Discover the remarkable story that showcases the life-altering influence of education and English as a means to unleash individual potential. Read the inspiring journey of Giorgi Nikoladze, a British Council scholar from Georgia, who has successfully realised his aspirations by securing a place at the esteemed Kutaisi International University (KIU).

Giorgi's journey began with a British Council course to improve his English skills to succeed in his exams, igniting his passion for language learning.

Thanks to KIU's initiative and financial support, the British Council successfully implemented a project to prepare students like Giorgi for their upcoming exams. This achievement was made possible thanks to an open call, which allowed the British Council to equip students with the necessary knowledge.

'The British Council course played a vital role in my results in the national English exam. It enhanced my linguistic skills and equipped me with invaluable skills in grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing proficiency. The course strongly affected my personal and professional development', says Giorgi.

Under the guidance of the British Council and KIU, Giorgi experienced personal and professional growth. As a first-year student, he demonstrated exceptional dedication and aptitude, earning recognition for his outstanding academic performance.

Giorgi highlights the profound impact of education. Through language training and a supportive academic environment, Giorgi excelled academically and experienced personal and professional growth. His story is a testament to the transformative power of education, inspiring others to embrace learning and its potential to shape lives for a brighter future.



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