



Human Stories

12th edition

**British Council Europe: celebrating our community.
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River of Hope: Creativity in the current

In 2023, French artist Sébastien Kirch painted a 13-metre sail with light-sensitive inks to mirror the bleaching of coral—an artwork that slowly faded over time, revealing the effects of warming seas. This bold environmental statement led to an invitation to join [River of Hope](#), an arts-based learning project connecting young people in Rouen and Norwich through environmental education and creativity.

‘I accepted immediately,’ the artist says. ‘The idea of raising awareness through hands-on art with students really resonated with me.’

Working closely with the British Council, local schools, and UK-based artist Ali Atkins, the artist led ten primary school classes across Seine-Maritime through workshops blending science, English, and visual art.

‘The British Council team supported us at every step. As an artist, that kind of teamwork is invaluable.’ The students’ creations—370 vibrant squares of painted Wenzhou paper—were assembled into a collective 22-metre mural exhibited in Rouen.

‘They came to see that one topic—like rivers or climate change—can be explored from many angles. That’s incredibly powerful.’ The process brought its challenges—tight deadlines and late-night assembling sessions—but also deep rewards. *‘These students gave me a fresh perspective. Their energy and sincerity were like a breath of fresh air.’*

Through River of Hope, art became a bridge across disciplines and borders. *‘Each student contributed to something monumental. That kind of experience fosters real hope—for education, for creativity, and for our shared planet.’*





Letting English and imagination fly high: Celebrating 80 years of the British Council in Italy – Part 1

To mark our [80th anniversary in Italy](#), over 3,160 students from 59 schools in the Lazio region took part in a Creative Writing Competition. Participants were invited to draw inspiration from their favourite stories and imagine a new character or a day in the life of a famous literary figure.

In this two-part story, we share reflections from six secondary school students — on their experience in the contest, what motivates them to learn English, and how they hope to use it in the future.

- *'I have always been passionate about writing stories and developing my creative side; when I first heard about this contest, I immediately knew I wanted to participate. Soon, my enthusiasm spread across the whole class, convincing everyone to contribute to the realisation of the story.'* – **Gaia Sasso**
- *'In our story, we decided to bring together the two most iconic British characters of our generation: Mary Poppins and Paddington. With scattered memories from our childhood and all of our minds united, we managed to come up with "A Jammy Slip", combining the fantastic worlds of the two characters, making them interact and spiral into a hectic adventure.'* – **Chiara Benacquista**



Letting English and imagination fly high: Celebrating 80 years of the British Council in Italy – Part 2

- *'Participating in the Creative Writing Competition taught me many things, but the most important of all was teamwork. Meeting together and brainstorming ideas was the real deal [...] To anyone who wants to learn English, I'd say: never stop flying and don't let anyone stop you from exploring the world.'* – **Roberto Barbato**
- *'English is a very important and significant part of my life. What I love most about learning English is how it allows us to break down linguistic and cultural barriers among people, while practising it leads to a real reduction in the distances between individuals.'* – **Chiara Bravo**
- *'The more I practise English, the better it becomes, and I am really glad I got involved in the competition. English helps me communicate with other people whenever I travel around the world, and it increases my vocabulary, which helps me even when speaking in my own language.'* – **Carlotta Nepi**
- *'I love English as a language, always have, and it is the reason why I chose a Cambridge IGCSE-oriented path [...] I must address my advice to people who avoid learning English for as long as possible: it opens so many doors for your future. Nowadays, it is almost essential, even for work in general. Thank you for the opportunity!'* – **Edoardo Musumeci**

Leading by example: Samanta's journey as a youth ambassador

Seventeen-year-old Samanta lives in Ilūkste, a small town in southeast Latvia. A passionate folk dancer, student council member, and former youth parliamentarian, she's never shied away from a new challenge. When she spotted a social media post about the Youth Opportunities Ambassadors Programme, she applied without hesitation. *'Why not? I'm always open to new adventures and eager to learn something new.'*

Supported through the British Council's [People to People programme](#), the initiative brings together young people from across Latvia's Latgale region to develop leadership and media literacy skills. After three days of intensive training, Samanta and the other ambassadors organised school visits to promote youth opportunities and encourage civic engagement.

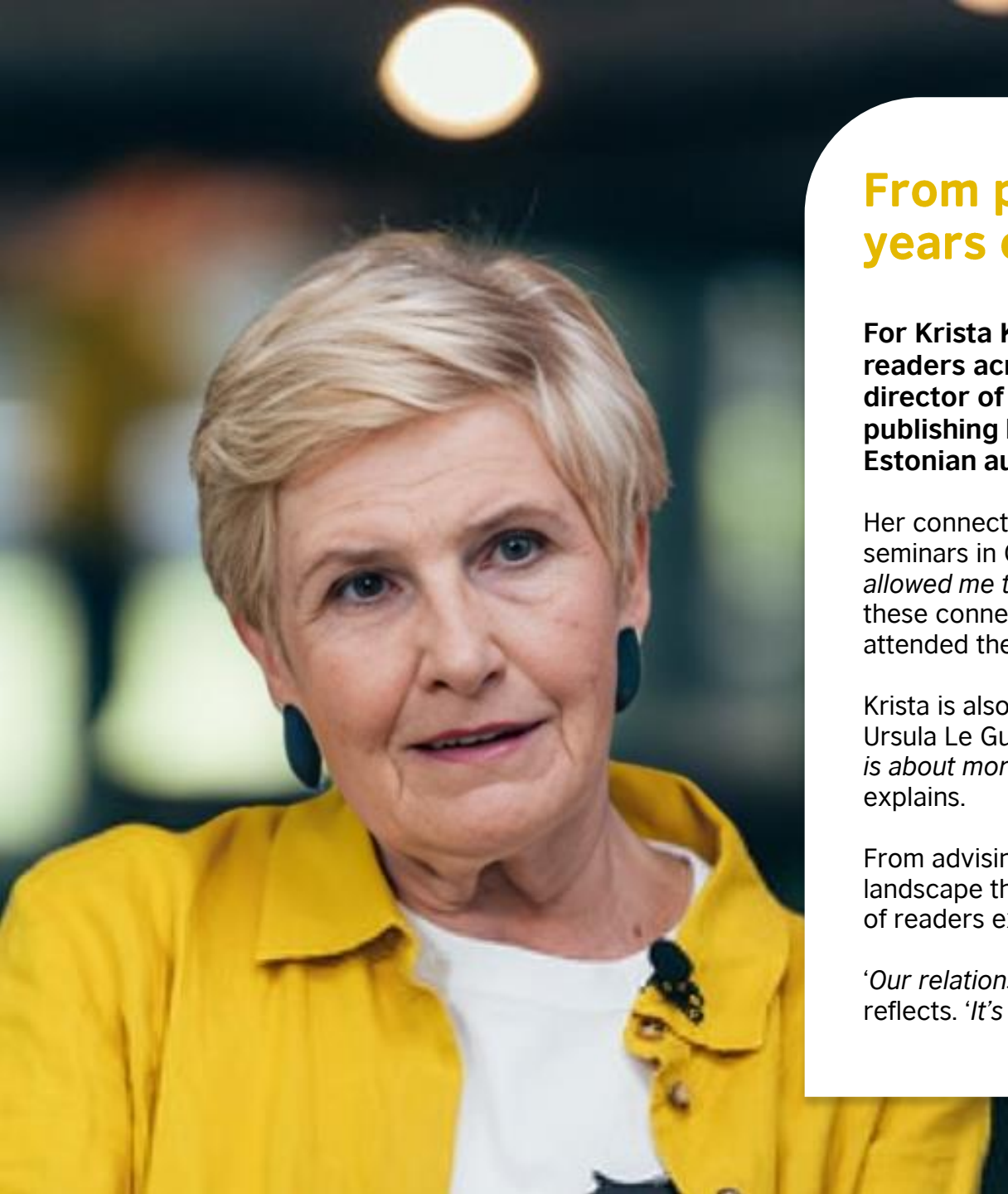
She visited five schools and spoke to over 360 students. Presenting at her own school was the hardest—*'I worried about their reactions'*—but the support of classmates helped her grow more confident. Over time, she learned to manage nerves, speak with clarity, and make her sessions relatable. *'Sometimes, it felt like they would run off to apply for opportunities as soon as the bell rang!'*

One visit in particular stayed with her: a small rural school where teachers told her they rarely receive guests. *'Everybody was happy to see me.'*

Now, Samanta is mentoring the next generation of ambassadors. *'I reminded them that there are no limits to what they can achieve.'*

She's not yet sure where the future will take her—but she knows she wants to help others find their path. *'I love sharing my experiences and giving others the confidence that they can succeed.'*





From page to festival stage: Krista Kaer and 30 years of literary exchange

For Krista Kaer, literature is not just a profession—it's a lifelong mission to connect readers across languages and cultures. As one of the initiators and the programme director of Tallinn's HeadRead Literary Festival, and editor-in-chief of Estonia's largest publishing house, Varrak, she has long been a bridge between British literature and Estonian audiences.

Her connection with the British Council goes back over 30 years, beginning with literary seminars in Cambridge in the early 1990s. *'Those seminars were invaluable,'* she says. *'They allowed me to meet British authors in person—authors I would later invite to Estonia.'* Thanks to these connections, celebrated writers like A. S. Byatt, Helen Oyeyemi and Robin Robertson have attended the HeadRead festival.

Krista is also an award-winning translator, responsible for bringing the works of Doris Lessing, Ursula Le Guin, Oscar Wilde, and all seven Harry Potter books to Estonian readers. *'Translation is about more than language—it's about making a voice heard in a different cultural context,'* she explains.

From advising the British Council library in Estonia in its early days to shaping the literary landscape through publishing, translation and live events, Krista's work has helped generations of readers explore new perspectives.

'Our relationship with the British Council has been one of mutual trust and inspiration,' she reflects. *'It's not just about authors and books—it's about the ideas and conversations they spark.'*



A scientific perspective: the impact of English Together through teacher-led research

In 2019, Arife Kızıl, an English language teacher in Ankara, joined [English Together](#)—a collaboration between the British Council, Türkiye’s Ministry of National Education, and the Sabancı Foundation.

Following training with UK educators, she became a Professional Development Community (PDC) facilitator, taking on new leadership and mentoring responsibilities.

‘This new role not only expanded my leadership responsibilities but also allowed me to mentor peers, design learning experiences, and contribute to shaping the professional growth of my colleagues,’ she recalls.

Through the PDC meetings she led, teachers explored interactive, inquiry-based methods that transformed classroom dynamics. Her students became *‘more confident, collaborative, and enthusiastic,’* showing how teacher development directly benefits learners.

Inspired by the programme’s impact, Arife chose English Together as the focus of her PhD. Motivated by its voluntary and sustained learning model, she examined its effectiveness using Guskey’s evaluation framework. Interviews with 11 teachers and seven principals revealed long-term benefits to teaching, learning, and school culture.

‘Every teacher and school leader I interviewed said it was valuable. As teachers, we engage in professional learning communities to reduce isolation and develop shared pedagogical knowledge and beliefs,’ she says.

Arife’s journey shows how peer-led development fosters lasting change—proving that teachers really are *‘the real influencers’*.



**Share your story
with us.**