



Human Stories

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Investigating the world around us through science teaching and communication

Eoin Murphy's passion for science started in secondary school when he discovered that classes provoked 'a sense of enquiry about the world around me'. Several years later, he's not just a biochemist but also an educator and science communicator. Eoin interacted with the British Council through projects like [Famelab](#), Scientifically Speaking and our [Voices magazine](#). Today, he guides us through his vision of science and education while inviting us to understand adventure travel as a way of sparking questions and making new scientific discoveries.

'After I finished my studies in biochemistry, having spent a lot of time doing lab research, I knew I wanted the communication of science to be a big part of my job. During my postgraduate studies I had also worked as a tutor for undergraduate students who had missed time due to illness or other factors. I really enjoyed that experience and it led to me entering the teaching profession.

The British Council has allowed me to develop my communication skills, build networks and understand the true possibilities of what can be achieved when people work together [...] The experience I have gained working with the British Council has given me a foundation to apply my communication skills across a range of media. It has also helped me realise that the only limits are the ones you set for yourself.

My time in science taught me the importance of investigation and I believe that this can be applied to education as well. There will be times where students learn new information from a teacher but in my opinion true learning occurs when students learn through their own investigation. Whenever possible I try to build my classes around this philosophy.

The travelling I have been fortunate enough to do over the years has led me to believe that despite all the questions which science has helped answer, the world is still full of discoveries ready to be made. For me, adventure travel can offer the opportunity to go to difficult or extreme places. Visiting these places can help us to see the world in a different way and perhaps allow us to make new scientific discoveries.'





Making a difference with English language teaching

The [English Together project](#) creates a community-based development model for English language teachers in Turkey. Thanks to this project, teachers have access to a sustainable nationwide network of Professional Development Communities (PDC) where they collaborate with their peers and learn new teaching techniques. Buket Durmus shares her experiences on how this project contributed to her teaching skills and how it made a huge difference for her students.

'I strongly believe that our society is enriched by the connection we make with different people of different identities. Being a person with a physical disability, the inclusion emphasized in the call for the English Together project caught my attention. I wanted to partake as an advocate for equity in various academic platforms. My primary motive was to share my personal experiences with my colleagues and give them an insight into a person from a minority group's life. I also aimed to show people with disabilities that they should be brave enough to take action regardless of their challenges.

English language teaching is a flourishing field and we should constantly chase opportunities to keep up with new methodologies. The English Together project is tailored to serve this interest by training language teachers. It proved itself to be a unique cohort where I can gather the necessary skills and knowledge to be a driver of change in my local community.

The biggest obstacle I've been dealing with is overcoming my students' bias towards learning a foreign language. However, thanks to new communicative language teaching methodologies and interesting extracurricular materials this project provided, I was able to positively shift the students' outlook on learning English. The favourable changes I made in my classes make me feel more self-confident and I feel so proud that I am more creative and resourceful in digitising and diversifying my classes now.

Through PDC meetings, we can find a safe ground to talk about our common problems with brilliant English language teachers around Turkey and develop solutions together. Sharing good practices and practical resources helps us develop together. It also gives a sense of unity and alliance while you are trying to relate, understand and find solutions to their problems together.'

A start-up idea becomes a reality

The [Big Idea Challenge](#) video pitch competition is a key part of the British Council's Creative Spark programme and encourages young people to develop an innovative start-up. Anano Shaverdasvili is one of this year's winners with their idea BOOKi, which aims to create an easy-to-use online platform for second-hand booksellers and buyers of all ages. Anano shares how this challenge helps them turn their dream idea into reality.

'My primary motivation to participate in the competition was to test our idea on a broader level and see whether the community believes in it. In the end, it turned out that most of the audience saw the potential in BOOKi and we had chosen the right way to start.

One of the competition's awards was mentoring sessions which included different kinds of tasks. One of them was talking to our potential customers giving us different advice, feedback and a better perception of existing reality. It was a great personal journey because I had to find relevant ways to talk to various members of our society and use individual approaches to acquire desired information.

With our mentor, we discussed many different perspectives and the potential future of our idea. We also attended launchpad sessions and got information on developing stages for start-ups. And with the given grant investment, we can create an actual MVP (minimum viable product) template and test it on basic levels to find out what needs to be changed and how we should continue working.

By winning this competition and further additional benefits, my social and communications skills got better, I got more determined towards my goals and took personal responsibility for BOOKi. Throughout that time, I have been in touch with mentors and people from various backgrounds and with different experiences, from whom I learned a lot and made connections that will help me in the future. Currently, we are negotiating with several biggest book suppliers in our main town in Georgia. Our MVP is still in the development phase, and we hope we will launch it soon'.





Are online tests the future of exams?

Maria Ellwood and Jonathan Partington are part of the British Council team, which has prepared a new product – [IELTS Online](#). 'It's the same test we have been organising for over 30 years but delivered online. This means that in time, test takers will be able to sit the test whenever and wherever they wish (provided they have a private, quiet space with a good internet connection),' says Jonathan. IELTS Online is very similar to the computer-based test in test tasks. The main difference is in the test check-in process which is done remotely by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and a human proctor. During the test, customers are observed by a proctor remotely, with communication taking place via an online chat or phone.

'IELTS Online has been developed as a response to the Covid-19 lockdowns around the world, and the desire now technology enables it to make IELTS even more accessible to people looking to prove their English proficiency with our world-leading test. This product also aims at people who don't live in big cities. It can be less convenient for them to travel to the testing centres to take IELTS, and now they can do it in their homes.

IELTS Online is now available in seven countries: Hong Kong, Italy, Germany, Indonesia, Ukraine, Turkey, and Qatar, but we are planning to launch it in 10 more countries by the end of March 2023. The British Council needs to ensure a strong leading position for the new IELTS product from the start -by carefully observing product performance in the market and collecting and acting on customer feedback. Our strategy is to prioritise quality over speed.

'We see that there is a lot of interest in online testing. It began to grow before 2019 but naturally accelerated greatly during the pandemic when online testing and learning became the main form of delivery. Our customers tell us they appreciate the convenience of taking a test when they want, where they want, using their own equipment. They also like the test format and the convenience of the registration journey', says Maria.

In-centre tests are still very popular and form our core offer, and it may take some time for online learning and testing to become the dominant mode of delivery. But as we know from hundreds of examples in other industries – technology is the future.'



Anne-Michelle Heron: pianist, painter and polyglot

Anne-Michelle Heron is a talented thirteen-year-old French artist with Bulgarian roots. Her great passions are playing the piano, learning languages and painting. She started playing the piano and learning English at the age of five. She has won more than 30 international piano competitions. She has performed in the world's greatest concert halls, such as Carnegie Hall in New York, Mozarteum in Salzburg, Megaro Moussikis in Athens and all the great venues of Paris. But her successes go beyond music. Anne-Marie has also won several international painting competitions in Israel, Bulgaria, Spain and more. She was, in fact, one of the winners of the latest British Council world art competition for young students.

'I play the piano four hours a day. I am a student at CRR, a professional conservatory in Paris. Becoming a high-class pianist is my goal in life. I participate in many international competitions. The English language is the world's lingua franca and is spoken and understood everywhere. When you can understand people and talk to them, you feel like a citizen of the world.

I speak three languages (French, Bulgarian and English) and I'm learning Spanish now. My dream is to learn Japanese as well, so I can get into this vast culture in more detail. I think it is very important for a person to speak many languages and live in a multicultural environment. Speaking many languages develops our thinking, our culture, and our oral and written expression. In addition, it can greatly help in a person's successful career.

Drawing has been one of my hobbies since I was a little girl. My favourite artist is Van Gogh. I like his best exhibition "Distortion". I like to paint in bright and contrasting colours because they create a positive mood and desire for everything. With this painting (winning artwork in the British Council competition) I wanted to show the richness of Bulgarian tradition, the strength of the Bulgarian spirit, the beauty of Bulgarian traditional costume and the picturesque nature of this country.

In the future, I want to become a famous pianist and play in the most famous concert halls in the world. I want to live on the wings of music and art. Music speaks louder than words!'



Building the future of sustainable rugs production with a genuine combination of tradition and innovation

Haizea Najera is the founder of [ALLCA](#), a brand of digitally printed rugs, produced in handwoven recycled and recyclable polyester. ALLCA won one of the Sustainable Maker Awards, an initiative organised by the British Council in the context of its Europe programme [Circular Cultures](#), undertaken in collaboration with the Worth Partnership Project, Dutch Design Week and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. These awards aim to promote and develop the most promising innovation and sustainability projects.

‘One of the things I value most about my participation in the project is that the British Council believed in ALLCA even at its very early stage. Another crucial thing was the creation of a network of contacts and mentoring because I was assigned a professional who guided me through all the steps of the project. The financial support was also important in producing and fund my prototypes.

ALLCA is a way to express myself by creating something beautiful, unique, special, and functional and doing it with my values and beliefs. It’s a way of trying to be very clear and transparent by making sustainable rugs.

I’m preserving tradition in the way that carpets are weaved on ancestral looms. Innovation comes because rugs are printed [...] I think that this combination of tradition and innovation is exciting for the final product, but also in terms of the collaboration with graphic artists, designers and artisans.

In light of my previous experience in the fashion industry, I wanted to change the times –that sense of the constant need to consume – as well as the pressure that the capitalist mindset puts on the production cycle and the consumers. What I did want to keep were all new techniques, aesthetics, materials, and anything connected with the innovation and textile exploration.

The advice I’d give to any female entrepreneur is to try and face the lack of knowledge with humility and admit that there are things you simply don’t know. Share this lack of knowledge with others and try to learn it’s essential [...] so it is to keep your strong beliefs while being open and honest.’



Alexandra, the girl who found English a language for dance

Alexandra Mavromatis is a student who has been learning English at the British Council in Georgia for four years. Her great passions are learning languages and dancing. She is only ten years old and speaks Georgian and English. She is also trying to learn Greek (her father's mother tongue), and she plans to learn French and German in the future. A real polyglot for a global, multicultural and hyper-connected world! Alexandra considers English a key language in her life as, in addition to her professional future, it helps her to communicate with international participants in international dance competitions.

‘Dancing is my passion and I often participate in international dance competitions. Knowing English helps me to communicate with dancers from other countries. All the announcements in international competitions are in English, so knowing it is essential.

In addition to English, which I have been learning for four years at the British Council, I’m trying to learn Greek which is a beautiful language. When you have experience learning English, it’s much easier to learn another language. In the future, I’m going to learn French and German.

I’d like to study law and odontology, so I want to be a lawyer and a dentist. Knowing English will be very important for me to do both jobs effectively: as a lawyer, I’ll be able to help foreign people, and as a dentist, I’ll be able to cure foreign patients. What I like most is that we only speak in English in our classes, and this helps me become more confident.’



Breaking frontiers for emerging artists

Since 2020, the [Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries](#) has been dedicated to supporting the careers of outstanding emerging UK artists, curators, producers and creatives and working in partnership with leading arts and cultural organisations. Grace Collins is one of the Fellows as they had the opportunity to visit Athens with the support of the British Council.

'As one of the Jerwood Weston Fellows across the UK, I was given the opportunity to visit one of several countries with the support of British Council in the form of funding, information, and connections. Our group was hosted in Athens for four days, where we were shown the ropes by introducing us to arts professionals and cultural spaces in the area.

Working abroad isn't something I'd considered accessible to me before; it seemed expensive, intimidating and a bit of a luxury. I didn't understand how people could go to another country and magically create new connections with arts professionals. Still, I was keen to learn what might be possible outside of the increasingly conservative culture in the UK.

British Council supported the trip with calls before travelling, allowing us to hear from professionals working in Athens and do our homework before flying out. We also had amazing hosts while away, who introduced us to a vast range of organisations, from large institutions to smaller artist-led spaces.

Since the trip, I'm embedding what I experienced abroad back home in the Northwest of England. Refreshed by political conversations with peers, broadened scope for what can be achieved by creating public artworks and how European NGOs are pushing socially engaged art. I'm excited about pushing the boundaries of my collaborative practice in different environments in the future and looking for a way to return to Athens to continue my learning.'



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