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United Kingdom
National Commission
for UNESCO

UKNC
Strategic Summary
(2022–29)

Introduction

UNESCO and the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC)

“Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed.” UNESCO Constitution

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It contributes to building peace and security by promoting international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information.

UNESCO fosters knowledge sharing and the free flow of ideas to accelerate mutual understanding and a more perfect knowledge of each other's lives.

UNESCO's programmes contribute to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.

In 2022, to mark the halfway point to the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, and to help ensure UNESCO stayed on course to meet its requirements within it, UNESCO published its **Medium-Term Strategy 2022-29** which directly links its mission with the attainment of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

UNESCO works towards its goal by strengthening the ties between nations and societies through an international network of 190+ national cooperating bodies known as National Commissions.

The United Kingdom National Commission (UKNC) is the focal point for all UNESCO-related matters in the UK and is a constitutional part of the UK's membership of UNESCO.

An independent not-for-profit organisation, the UKNC supports the UK's contribution to UNESCO and brings the benefits of UNESCO to the UK.

The UKNC is overseen by a Board of six Non-Executive Directors with an expertise and skills mix covering UNESCO's programme areas. The UKNC Board provides guidance and leadership to a Secretariat, led by the Chief Executive and Secretary General.

The UKNC is supported by core grant funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

UNESCO Vision

UNESCO's founding Vision of 1945 stated:

“Peace must be founded upon dialogue and mutual understanding. Peace must be built upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity... As a laboratory of ideas, UNESCO helps countries to adopt international standards and manages programmes that foster the free flow of ideas and the exchange of knowledge.”

It is in this spirit, UNESCO pledged to:

- develop educational tools to help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance and ensure that every child and every citizen has access to **quality education**
- strengthen the bonds between nations by promoting **cultural heritage** and the equal dignity of all cultures
- foster **scientific programmes** and policies as platforms for development and cooperation
- stand up for **freedom of expression**, as a fundamental right and a key condition for democracy and development.

More than seventy years later UNESCO's mandate remains to reaffirm the humanist missions of education, science and culture.

Mission and Theory of Change (2022–2029)

The UKNC fundamentally believes that UNESCO’s continued mission of using culture, education, science, and communication to bring communities and people together to foster intercultural understanding and build more resilient societies, has never been more relevant.

The UKNC’s mission is to ensure that UNESCO’s programmes and values are enveloped within social, economic and cultural life in the UK, and that the UK continues to be a leading voice in shaping the future direction of UNESCO globally.

Position in 2022

UNESCO published its **Medium-Term Strategy 2022-29**.

In response to the UNESCO strategy, a **UKNC Strategy 2022-26** was formally approved by the UKNC Board of Directors in August 2022.

The current **UKNC Business Case** was formally agreed with the FCDO in April 2022 and runs until the end of the current funding term in March 2025. A core requirement of the Business Case was creating a delivery plan and log frame that the Commission reports on annually to the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The evidence base for much of the UKNC Strategy and UKNC Business Case was the recommendations from two major research reports led by the UKNC:

- The National Value of UNESCO Designations to the United Kingdom (published June 2020)
- Sites for Sustainable Development: Realising the Potential of UNESCO Designated Sites to Advance Agenda 2030 (published October 2022)

UKNC Core Functions and 'cross-function' Priorities

The UKNC Business Case and FCDO Annual Reviews segment the work of the UKNC into three Core Functions:



Support the UK government in achieving its objectives through UNESCO



Support UK society and communities to maximise the benefits of UNESCO's mission and programmes



Support UNESCO to be a competent and relevant UN agency able to deliver its mission and fulfil its objectives

This UKNC Strategy 2022-29 has been segmented to match these Core Functions.

It is important to note that the UKNC has a number of priority focus areas that cut across all of the Core Functions. The priority focus areas include women's and girls' education, UN Structural Dialogue (UN reform), and support for the Rules Based International System (RUBIS).

Direction of Travel to 2029

The UKNC is a high-performing organisation, achieving an FCDO rating of A+ (the second highest grading possible) in each of its Annual Reviews for the last seven years. FCDO ratings are based on fiscal and operational performance (achievement of goals), ethical practice organisational culture, and standards.

The UKNC has served as an example of how a National Commission can maximise its efficiency and influence. It is regularly called upon for advice from the government (including devolved administrations and overseas territories), UK UNESCO Designations, other UNESCO National Commissions, and the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris.

Since 2022, the UKNC has acted on feedback from the UK Government on how the Commission best meets its constitutional requirements and contributes to the achievement of UNESCO's mission.

One of the initial activities the UKNC undertook in line with its Strategy and government feedback, was a detailed review and analysis of the UK's engagement with UNESCO, and how it best meets the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2022-29.

Whilst the UKNC continues to deliver a high level and excellent standard of work, this has created ongoing pressure on its limited resources. The UKNC risks becoming unsustainable as demand on the Commission remains strong (and will potentially increase further following the election of the United Kingdom to the UNESCO Executive Board in November 2023).

To mitigate this, the UKNC has successfully sought additional funding to deliver projects and to enable capacity building within the organisation. However, the additional funding achieved to date is on a project-by-project basis. It is, therefore, vital that the UKNC prioritises its activity to meet its mission and statutory requirements best whilst building capacity for longer-term development.

Over the coming years, the UKNC wants to ensure that its role is as effective as possible in bringing UNESCO's programmes and agreements to the UK government, academic community, and broader civil society and ensure these audiences fully receive the benefits of and shape, UNESCO's global aims and activities.

This **UKNC Strategy 2022-29** sets the foundation for this and **incorporates and consolidates recommendations** from the current UKNC Business Case, UKNC Strategy 2022-26, and FCDO Annual Reviews.

In **Core Function 1**, mapping the current stage of UK Government and UK Expert engagement with the UKNC identified three areas where the Commission can undertake proactive policy engagement: Neurotechnology and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Women and Girls Education, and Intangible Cultural Heritage.

By following the Theory of Change, in 2029 the UKNC will have:

- A full and clear understanding of UK government policy priorities in the context of the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy and Programme Budget, the policy levers and mechanisms for influence and change at UNESCO, and how UK experts are engaging with UNESCO's programmes and activities.

In **Core Function 2**, the 'Sites for Sustainable Development' and 'National Value of UNESCO to the UK' reports identified the opportunity for UKNC to examine its role vis-à-vis the network of UK UNESCO sites and test how the Commission is best placed to ensure the UNESCO network in the UK is meeting its full potential, whilst becoming self-sustaining.

By following the Theory of Change, in 2029 the UKNC will have:

- Fully cemented its leadership role for the network of UK UNESCO Designations whilst capitalising on the decentralisation movement within the UK to ensure the network has become independent, resilient, and self-sustaining.
- Supported site coordinators to share best practice and create joint initiatives and designations will be seen by local stakeholders as relevant and vital bodies connected to local, national, and international networks.

- Supported new and existing UK UNESCO Designations, Chairs, Patronage events and Prize winners and showcased their activities to national and international audiences.
- Ensured that UK civil society has a better understanding of the type and diversity of UNESCO Designations and Programmes in the UK and internationally, and how these collectively contribute to the UK economy.

In **Core Function 3**, the UNESCO Medium-Team Strategy identified an opportunity for the UKNC to test and adapt how the Commission can better work with its counterpart National Commissions to advance and achieve Core Functions 1 and 2 and create a stronger global network of National Commissions that can influence UNESCO's programmes and policies.

By following the Theory of Change, in 2029 the UKNC will have:

- Ensured the UK is considered a proactive and supportive UNESCO Member state, and the National Commissions global network is relevant and effective (and its agenda is strategically focused on priority UNESCO issues)
- Become seen an exemplar National Commission within the global network with strong and strategic relationships with other Commissions, including Member States outside Group 1 that link to the UK government geostrategic priority areas
- Enabled UK Designations and other organisations & individuals to have access UNESCO global networks where required and the UK Experts and Chairs Network is an effective subject/issue relevant mechanism for change and has had a tangible impact to UNESCO's programmes.



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