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United Kingdom  
National Commission  
for UNESCO

# What is the UK National Commission for UNESCO?

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) brings UNESCO together in the UK. It is an HMG core-funded constitutional part of the UK's membership of UNESCO, and the official cooperating body for UK civil society with UNESCO.

The Commission brings together over 60 UNESCO land-based designations covering Biosphere Reserves, Creative Cities, Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, alongside the network of over 30 UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks in UK universities. These form part of a global network that supports UK international influence and standing.

## Why the UKNC matters locally, nationally and internationally



### Locally

**Connects local communities:**

UNESCO designations cover around 14% of the UK's landmass, over 160 Parliamentary constituencies, and are home to an estimated 10 million people. The UKNC is the central, coordinating, point for all UK UNESCO designations, bringing benefits to all corners of the four nations.



### Nationally

**Economic benefit:**

UNESCO in the UK adds significant value (£151 million a year\*) to the UK economy.

**Expert policy advice:**

The UKNC coordinates a network of over 100 experts that provide world-leading policy advice to HM Government Departments in a pro-bono capacity.



### Internationally

**Strengthens UK soft power:**

The UKNC's programmes and projects, and work with our wider network covering education, science and culture, provide tangible examples of UK 'soft power' in international arenas.

**Leadership in multilateralism:**

The UKNC – and its place in the UNESCO network of 200 National Commissions – supports peace, sustainability, and inclusion on the global stage through trusted international partnerships.

\*Source: The National Value of UNESCO Designations to the UK. 2020

## Positive impacts: across UNESCO's Programme areas



### Education

#### Ensuring non-discriminatory recognition in global education

The UKNC supported the UK joining the 2019 Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. The Convention establishes universal principles for fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory recognition (including for refugees and displaced learners) of higher education qualifications, helping underpin the UK's global leadership role in education and SDG4.

 [unesco.org.uk/impact/education](https://unesco.org.uk/impact/education)



### Social and Human Science

#### Setting normative standards and ethics in artificial intelligence (AI) and neurotechnology

AI and neurotechnology are fast-expanding fields in the scientific world. UNESCO recognises their benefits but also the potential ethical issues, and thus the importance of developing sound and ethical regulation at the international level.

The UKNC, through human-science members of our expert network, is providing guidance to HMG departments to ensure that the UK is positioned as a leader on the global stage in enacting sound and reasoned policies on ethical issues in science and technology.

 [unesco.org.uk/impact/science](https://unesco.org.uk/impact/science)



### Natural Science

#### Addressing global climate change challenges

The UKNC partnered with DCMS to successfully deliver the £1.8m Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage (CCUH) project. Funded by HM Treasury, and involving DEFRA, DSIT, and others, the CCUH project developed open-source tools and data frameworks to help UNESCO sites across the UK, and their international counterparts, tackle the interconnected challenges of climate change, sustainability, and heritage protection.

This scalable model presents the UK as a global leader through innovation, community engagement, and systems thinking, and highlights the value of UNESCO designations in delivering climate resilience and sustainable development.

 [unesco.org.uk/projects/climate-change-and-unesco-heritage](https://unesco.org.uk/projects/climate-change-and-unesco-heritage)



### Culture

#### Safeguarding and showcasing 'living heritage' practices

The UKNC advised DCMS on the UK's adoption of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). More commonly known as 'living heritage', these are the cultural traditions and practices so valued by communities across the UK.

The UKNC has now been appointed by DCMS to build the first UK-wide ICH Inventory, to help safeguard and showcase these valued practices.

 [unesco.org.uk/impact/culture](https://unesco.org.uk/impact/culture)

#### Building resilient and adaptive heritage networks

Local to Global is a flagship programme by the UKNC that strengthens and connects UNESCO designated sites across the UK.

By connecting local heritage to global goals, Local to Global (funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund) demonstrates the power of UNESCO sites to inspire change, test new approaches, and amplify their impact. This network empowers UK communities to preserve their unique heritage while contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive future.

 [unesco.org.uk/projects/local-to-global-programme](https://unesco.org.uk/projects/local-to-global-programme)



### Communication & Information

#### Driving global action through UK research

The UKNC accredits, convenes, and works with a growing network of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks across UK universities to align with UK priorities and shape international collaboration on critical development and human-rights challenges.

The Chair teams are experts who contribute directly to UNESCO's global programmes and frameworks through world-leading research and thought leadership covering a wide spectrum of areas: global health and sex education; peacebuilding, media freedom, human rights and refugee integration; inclusive, equitable education and gender equality; water science, ocean governance and disaster risk reduction; and knowledge for sustainable futures.

 [unesco.org.uk/impact/communication-information](https://unesco.org.uk/impact/communication-information)