

17th August 2017

The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP,
The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
King Charles Street,
LONDON SW1A 2AH

Dear Mr. Johnson,

BRITISH COUNCIL

Every August, an unrivalled global cultural phenomenon takes place within these shores, as the Edinburgh Festivals host performers, influencers and audiences from over 70 countries. But this year - when the UK has never been more in need of strong international links - we write to draw attention to the threat to a British institution under your aegis which has played a pivotal role in this success.

The British Council was instrumental in the founding of the Edinburgh International Festival in 1947 as a post-war platform for reconciliation and internationalism. In the seventy years since, it has worked across the International Festival, the Fringe and the growing family of Edinburgh Festivals to enable generations of artists and thinkers to connect with the world. Their voices have in turn championed pluralism and debate in the face of many epochal events including the fall of the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav wars, and conflict in the Arab world.

Now recent coverage in [the Times](#) has highlighted a risk that the British Council will be forced to wind up work in key countries in the developed world due to a planned shift of public funding exclusively towards developing countries. This direction of travel was set pre-Brexit, but given the events of the past year a rethink is urgently required on the part of UK Government.

What makes Edinburgh special is its status as a truly global meeting point and market place. Strong cultural relations with leading Commonwealth and G20 nations are vital to enable trade and knowledge flows of ideas and creativity that benefit the UK itself as well as our partners in the developing world. In tandem with the growing difficulty of securing UK visas for artists from developing countries, a move to reduce the worldwide connectivity of UK arts and creative industries at this juncture would cause long term damage.

In the 70th anniversary year of Edinburgh as a world-leading Festival City, we have enjoyed visits by your UK Government colleagues Damian Green, Karen Bradley and John Glen who have emphasised their support for our role in the future positioning of a Global Britain. In this light, we urge a reconsideration of the planned balance of funding to the British Council so that it can continue to play a key role across a wide range of countries, and sustain the momentum of cultural exchange and development at this critical time for the UK on the world stage as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,



William Burdett-Coutts
Artistic Director, Assembly

On behalf of:

Anthony Alderson, Director, Pleasance Theatre Trust
Nick Barley, Director, Edinburgh International Book Festival
William Burdett-Coutts, Artistic Director, Assembly
Sorcha Carey, Director, Edinburgh Art Festival
Linda Crooks, Executive Producer, Traverse Theatre
Simon Gage, Director, Edinburgh International Science Festival
Ken Hay, Chief Executive, Edinburgh International Film Festival
Noel Jordon, Artistic Director, Edinburgh International Children's Festival
Karen Koren and Katy Koren, Directors, Gilded Balloon
Fergus Linehan, Director and Chief Executive, Edinburgh International Festival
Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society
Orla O'Loughlin, Artistic Director, Traverse Theatre
Donald Smith, Director, Scottish International Storytelling Festival
Charlie Wood and Ed Bartlam, Directors, Underbelly and Edinburgh's Hogmanay