

House of Commons

International Development Select Committee

The effectiveness of UK Aid

Written evidence from the British Council

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The UK is recognised as world leader in development, thanks to the effectiveness of UK aid organisations and the country's commitment to the 0.7% Official Development Assistance (ODA) target. In addition to being a central part of the UK as a force for good in the world, this status brings a considerable soft power dividend to the UK, which enhances the diplomatic clout of the UK and creates opportunities for trade and beneficial economic, social and cultural exchange. It is in the UK's national interest to retain the commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on development.
- 1.2 UK development policy and institutions should be considered as among our foremost strategic soft power assets. HMG should make therefore use of the forthcoming *Integrated Defence, Security and Foreign Policy Review* to embed the role of these strategic assets in UK foreign policy.
- 1.3 The British Council is an important and effective vehicle for the delivery of UK aid. Our approach to international development centres on on developing cost-effective solutions through a partnerships-based approach, combining our global expertise with local knowledge, to build capacity and support the creation of the foundation for future locally led sustainable development. Such an approach should be extended so as to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of UK Aid and development projects.
- 1.4 The British Council, like a number of organisations, is at serious financial risk as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. If the benefits of the British Council as an effective delivery partner of UK aid and soft power are to be preserved for the future, direct financial support from HM Government will be necessary to ensure the survival of the British Council as a strategic asset for the UK.

2. The British Council and International Development

- 2.1 The British Council has an established track record in international development, delivering projects in education, skills, the public sector, civil society and justice. We work with networks and partners at all levels of society to support positive change and bring people together to discuss issues of shared interest and to find sustainable solutions to development issues. This approach of partnership and empowerment enables us to deliver on UK development goals in a long-term and sustainable manner, while also serving the UK national interest by building trust in the UK and providing the foundation for further engagement, cooperation and mutually beneficial exchange.
- 2.2 Our longstanding presence on the ground in over 100 countries has given us an intimate understanding of local contexts. We use this knowledge, gained from daily interaction with a range of people and institutions, to adapt our approach and methodologies to local conditions. Our commitment to the countries and territories we work in, including conflict-affected and fragile states, has enabled us to become trusted partners for international development. Through relationships based on trust, we can offer continuity in unstable contexts and provide solutions that work.
- 2.3 Our partnership-based approach to development builds trust between the people of the UK and the wider world. This approach, which is rooted in the societies in which we work but always reflecting UK values – such as respect for democracy, equal treatment and the rule of law – means that, in combination with our extensive global network, we are well placed in assisting UK and global progress towards meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2.4 We are engaging directly with activity related to Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16 and 17.¹ However, because of the interconnected nature of the SDGs, we believe that we, our partners and those who participate in our global programmes can and will contribute to outcomes in all the goals.

¹ A full summary of our work as it relates to the SDGs can be provided upon request through the contact information listed at the end of the document

2.5 Our development work contributes towards the UK commitment to spend 0.7% of our national income on aid or Official Development Assistance (ODA). Part of this contribution comes in the form of DFID contracts that we successfully tender for, and the rest comes via the grant-in-aid funding we receive from Government. A portion of our grant-in-aid is designated as ODA and therefore can only be spent in eligible countries.² ODA spend contributes to Britain's reputation as a development superpower.³

3. Soft power and development: the importance of the 0.7% aid target

- 3.1 The work of the British Council supports the UK's international influence by increasing connections and networks with global decision makers, but also, crucially, by building trust in the UK. The UK's influence relative to other leading economies is enhanced as a direct result of the generosity of its aid programme, a factor that has been recognised in the Henry Jackson Society's *Audit of Geopolitical Capability: An Assessment of Twenty Major Powers*.⁴ Maintaining the UK's aid programme will be likely to continue to enhance the UK's international attractiveness and trustworthiness in the years ahead.
- 3.2 Our most recent survey of global trust in the UK, *Sources of Soft Power*, showed that the UK's contribution to international development was *the* primary driver of international trust in the UK Government, followed by the perception that the UK works constructively with other governments and the openness of HMG.⁵
- 3.3 Increased levels of trust are associated with an increased interest in and propensity to do business with the UK, and to visit or study here. Our research suggests that those who trust the UK are almost twice as likely to do business or trade with the UK, and more than twice as likely to seek to visit the UK and/or engage in UK culture in the future. Engagement with British Council cultural relations activity sees overall trust in the UK increase by over 50%.⁶ Much of this cultural engagement activity is delivered through our ODA-network and contributes towards official UK aid spending.
- 3.4 The link between trust in the UK and a propensity to do business or trade with the UK is particularly pronounced across a number of key markets. In both China and Turkey, those who trust the UK are almost three times as likely to intend to do businesses or trade with the UK; in the USA and South Korea trusting the UK doubles the likelihood of intending to trade or do business with the UK, with similar trends found in Australia, France, Saudi Arabia and Italy. Trust in the UK increases the propensity of those surveyed in India to trade with or invest in the UK by almost 45%.⁷
- 3.5 The UK's soft power has always depended in large part on perceptions of the UK as an open, free and democratic country that is a benevolent force in the world. The UK has generally been perceived as acting for the common good rather than out of narrow self-interest, as exemplified by

² Grant-in-aid funding accounts for 14.7% of our income. A full break down of this and our contract work can be found in our Annual Report 2018-19, p 5, 81. Available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2018-2019-annual-report-final.pdf> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

³ British Council Annual Report, 2018-19. Available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2018-2019-annual-report-final.pdf> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

⁴ James Rogers (2019) *Audit of Geopolitical Capability: An Assessment of Twenty World Powers*. Henry Jackson Society. Available online at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-2019-Audit-of-Geopolitical-Capability-Report-web.pdf> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

⁵ The British Council (2020), *Sources of Soft Power*, pp. 3, 15-16, 18-21, 53. Available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2018-2019-annual-report-final.pdf> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

⁶ Research shows that trust in a country is associated with a greater intent to visit, study and do business. 75% of people surveyed who had participated in a UK cultural relations activity with British Council said they trusted the UK, compared to only 49% of people who had not, a 53% increase in trust. 15% of people who said they trust the UK said they intend to do business or trade with the UK, compared to only 8 per cent who said they distrust the UK, an 87.5% increase – British Council (2018), *The Value of Trust*. Available online at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_value_of_trust.pdf [Accessed on 23 April 2020] For full figures please see Annex 1

⁷ British Council (2018), *The Value of Trust*, p. 15 Available online at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_value_of_trust.pdf [Accessed on 23 April 2020] For full figures please see Annex 2

the UK's response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the UK aid programme and the work of the BBC World Service and the British Council. Other states have been willing to give credence to the UK's point of view, to listen to and even follow the UK's lead on key global challenges because it is trusted to act for the common good and recognised as a leading proponent of the rules-based international system. If the UK steps back from this role it risks a loss of influence and becoming less attractive and trusted by others. This could have real, tangible costs, including economic disadvantages - for example, from falling flows of FDI into the UK.⁸

- 3.6 The maintenance of the 0.7% target is therefore essential if the UK is to maintain the soft power dividend that comes as a result of UK Aid. To step back from this commitment would likely negatively impact the UK's diplomatic cloud and the perceived attractiveness of the UK, while simultaneously damaging the standing of the UK relative to other otherwise similarly positioned states.

Case Study: The Cultural Protection Fund

The £30m [Cultural Protection Fund \(CPF\)](#) aims to protect and rebuild opportunities for social and economic development by building capacity to foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage. Work in these areas gives individuals the skills to manage and promote cultural assets, and gives people an understanding of cultural heritage, how it can be protected and the role it plays in society and the economy. Managed by the British Council on behalf of DCMS, the CPF has funded 51 projects in 12 target countries across MENA. This investment contributes to SDG11.4, which is focused on per capita expenditure on the preservation, protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage. However, it also plays a major role in empowering women and fostering economic growth and development. For example, in Jordan the World Monument Fund's stonemasonry training programme, which is supported by the CPF, trains Jordanian and Syrian refugees in stonemasonry skills, providing them with the skills to drive cultural heritage and restoration, and the skills base for productive economic activity well into the future.

Source: The British Council, *The Cultural Protection Fund projects* <https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/cultural-protection->

4. Embedding and preserving UK soft power assets

- 4.1 UK development policy and the bodies involved in its delivery should be considered as among the UK's preeminent soft power assets, and as essential components in the UK's global reach and influence.
- 4.2 To maximise this soft power dividend from UK development policy, these assets should be embedded into wider UK foreign policy. The upcoming *Integrated Defence, Security and Foreign Policy Review* must consider this, and develop an approach which capitalises on our strengths in this area and recognises the national interest dividends that it generates.
- 4.3 To do this, however, it is essential that the bodies and institutions, including the British Council, involved in the delivery of UK Aid survive the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic. With the British Council forced to close around 90% of our examination and teaching centres we face serious cash-flow challenges. Our paid-for activities in the English and Exams space help fund the global network which supports the British Council's wider activities, both in the ODA and Non-ODA network. Despite considerable innovations to deliver revenue generating activity in a remote manner there is simply no way to make up for the loss of revenue resulting from the closure of teaching and examination centres, and so acute financial challenges remain.
- 4.4 In response to these challenges, we have striven to innovate and cut costs wherever possible. We have also received some short-term financial support from HM Government. However, as a Non-Departmental Public Body, we do not have the financial levers or resources to be able to survive

⁸ The British Council (2020), *Sources of Soft Power*, p 45. Available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2018-2019-annual-report-final.pdf> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

independently and will require further UK Government assistance if we are to remain a going concern and continue to deliver effectively in the development space in the future.

5. Working in partnership with a focus on empowerment

- 5.1 Development works best when done in partnership with local actors. The British Council work with a range of partners internationally, including national and state governments and agencies, International NGOs, donors, business and social enterprises to develop and deliver reform and manage policy change in developing countries. Through this work we support the conditions that enable open economies and societies to thrive: an educated and informed population, the rule of law, the absence of conflict and corruption, and the presence of property rights and strong institutions.
- 5.2 Our approach holds that stable and inclusive societies allow people to thrive, pursue their ambitions and participate in their communities. We believe education has the power to change societies, enables people to flourish, support their communities and engage with their institutions. We also recognise the power of culture, in all its forms, to contribute to poverty reduction and eradication, enriching quality education, and building social cohesion, peace and reconciliation.

Case Study: Connecting Classrooms

[Connecting Classrooms](#) through Global Learning is a global educational programme ran in partnership with DFID. The programme, running from 2018-21 will train 60,000 teachers and school leavers in the UK and around the world to equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to live and work in a global economy and take action on global issues. This includes training on how to set up and run equitable partnerships, how to teach transferable skills, and how to deliver education and other services in an inclusive manner.

This project therefore makes major contributions towards SDGs 4 and 5 directly (quality education, and gender empowerment), while contributing to goals 8 and 10 (decent work and economic growth, and reducing inequalities) by equipping communities with the skills they need to make change and drive their own development.

Source: The British Council, *Connecting Classrooms*, <https://connecting-classrooms.britishcouncil.org/>

- 5.3 This means we focus on improving teacher training, and the provision of targeted resources. Each month over 300,000 of our lesson and classroom plans are downloaded for use in schools around the world, with these numbers increasing as a result of COVID-19.⁹ These are tailored to the needs of local communities and nations, and so become embedded, even after the life cycle of specific contracts or projects. For example, from 2011-15 we worked with the South African Department of Basic Education to develop and implement their strategy for English in primary schools, developing the [Certificate in Primary English Language Teaching](#) (CiPELT), which has been the principle teacher training tool for primary schools, and is deployed in more than 15,000 schools, reaching 200,000 teachers and over seven million learners.¹⁰
- 5.4 In Rwanda, we developed the [Rwanda English in Action Programme](#) (2009-11) which has trained over 85,000 teachers and still underpins teacher training examinations.¹¹ The benefits of these projects have outlasted the length of any contracts, because we focus on developing capacity and curriculum and other teacher training tools which can be continued and built upon after the end of any contract.

⁹ The British Council (2020), *Annual Report 2018-19* <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2018-2019-annual-report-final.pdf> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

¹⁰ The British Council, *Our Track Record: Certificate in Primary English Language Teaching*, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/track-record/certificate-primary-english-language-teaching> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

¹¹ The British Council, *Our track Record: Rwanda English in Action Programme*, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/track-record/rwanda-english-action-programme> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

- 5.5 We have also worked in partnership to help developing countries strengthen the rule of law, police, judiciary and institutions, as well as increasing access to justice and manage conflict resolution. This work is only possible when done in collaboration to combine local knowledge with our global expertise.

Case Study: Supporting good governance through exams

By [working with](#) organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) we are supporting the development of essential skills to promote good governance and fiscal practice across Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2018 we delivered 36,000 CIPS exams across Sub-Saharan Africa, providing access to high-quality, internationally recognised UK qualifications that improve individual employability prospects. Our work with CIPS has helped them access markets in countries such as Malawi, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and in 2018 we supported their transition to computer-based testing.

Source: The British Council (2020), *Annual Report 2018-19*, p. 34 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2018-2019-annual-report-final.pdf>; and The British Council, CIPS, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/professional-university/professional/cips>

- 5.6 This partnership-based approach also means that projects can continue after our day-to-day involvement has come to an end, by focusing on training local people to deliver development themselves. The [Sone Sie](#) project in Myanmar, the winner of the 'Outstanding International Development Project in a Fragile State' at the 2015 British Expertise Awards, promotes inclusive, accountable and fair governance in Myanmar to underpin a more democratic, prosperous, and peaceful country. This has been done by creating a team which act as a credible facilitator and broker in the community, and has created 26 formal civil society networks, involving 766 organisations. From 2011-16, 6,197,236 beneficiaries were supported to have choice and control over their own development. In 2017/18 we assisted in the projects transition into a locally managed and independent organisation, meaning the benefits of UK aid and expertise outlive the length of any particular contracts.¹²

6. Comprehensive development programmes

- 6.1 While much aid spending focuses on the poorest, the work that we engage in as the British Council is, broadly speaking, focused on the building of capacity. While work must be done to ensure that the basic needs of the poorest are met, we believe that it is also vital that there is a focus on providing a basic education and creating jobs. This requires a functioning economy, which in turn relies on a skilled workforce and external investment. We therefore believe effective aid must focus on skills, supporting the development of strong and independent institutions, and creating opportunities for young people whose futures depend most on successful development.
- 6.2 This is why we work in partnership to ensure that change outlasts any specific development project. When it comes to education, we therefore focus on developing strong curriculums and training teachers so that young people can receive an internationally recognised education, aiding the competitiveness of developing economies. Our work in this space has been greatly effective, resulting in lasting curriculum changes across the world and improving the skills base of developing economies.¹³

¹² The British Council, *Sone Sie*, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/track-record/pyoe-pin> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

¹³ The British Council, *Our Track Record*, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/international-development/track-record> [Accessed on 23 April 2020]

A Flexible Approach – Active Citizens and COVID-19

[Active Citizens](#) is a social leadership training programme which equips people with the skills needed to deliver change and development in their communities. By focusing on social leadership and the principles of change, our facilitators enable people around the world to lead the charge for sustainable development and change. By providing people with the skills to make change themselves, this is an efficient means of investment as it creates a generation of future changemakers, who can learn both from each other and UK expertise. Across 80 countries we have not trained 300,000 community catalysts who don't wait for change, they drive it themselves.

The flexibility that this approach allows has been seen in full effect in response to COVID-19, where, among many other projects, Active Citizen groups have:

- **Pakistan:** British Council-trained 'Active Citizens' are supporting 30,000 families in rural communities across Pakistan who don't have access to services and information, in order to raise awareness of, respond to and prevent COVID-19. They are also using a digital platform to locate and connect with families and households who need support in terms of rations and donations: many households in Pakistan have limited or no access to food, medical supplies and other basic services. Active Citizens are also partnering with NEO TV, a local news channel, to provide daily updates on their progress, achievements and future outreach plans, and to collect audience responses in order to identify where support is most needed.
- **Tunisia:** Active Citizens coordinators have led crisis-response initiatives in collaboration with local municipalities, including an initiative which has identified the most vulnerable individuals in local areas and has collected and distributed emergency food parcels. The coordinators have rallied many of the young people in the Active Citizens network to support these crisis-response initiatives. Future proposals are currently being considered, including supporting local tailors in the production of PPE equipment and supporting the further development of a Tunisia-wide Fabrication Laboratories (FabLabs) network to help address medical equipment needs.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The Government should consider UK development policy and the institutions involved in its delivery as among our preeminent soft power assets. The forthcoming *Integrated Defence, Security and Foreign Policy Review* must therefore embed the work of organisations delivering effective official development assistance, like the British Council, into HMG foreign policy in a way that recognises both the global development and soft power gains of doing so. The immediate challenges of COVID-19 represent a threat to the future of such soft power assets, and we therefore encourage HMG to take steps to preserve these strategic assets.
- 7.2 The UK Government's commitment to spending 0.7% of national income on Aid is a significant driver of trust in the UK. Maintaining a steadfast commitment to this target will ensure that the UK continues to act as a force for good in the world, while protecting and enhancing the soft power dividend that the UK enjoys as a result of being a leader in the development field.
- 7.3 UK Aid is most effective when delivered in partnership with local communities, organisations and governments. By combining local knowledge with our global expertise, and focusing on training and building capacity – be it of teachers, judges or community activists – change can be embedded, lasting beyond the lifetime of any DFID contract, and the onus can shift from external aid flows towards locally led and financed development.

8. Context: The British Council

- 8.1 The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. This

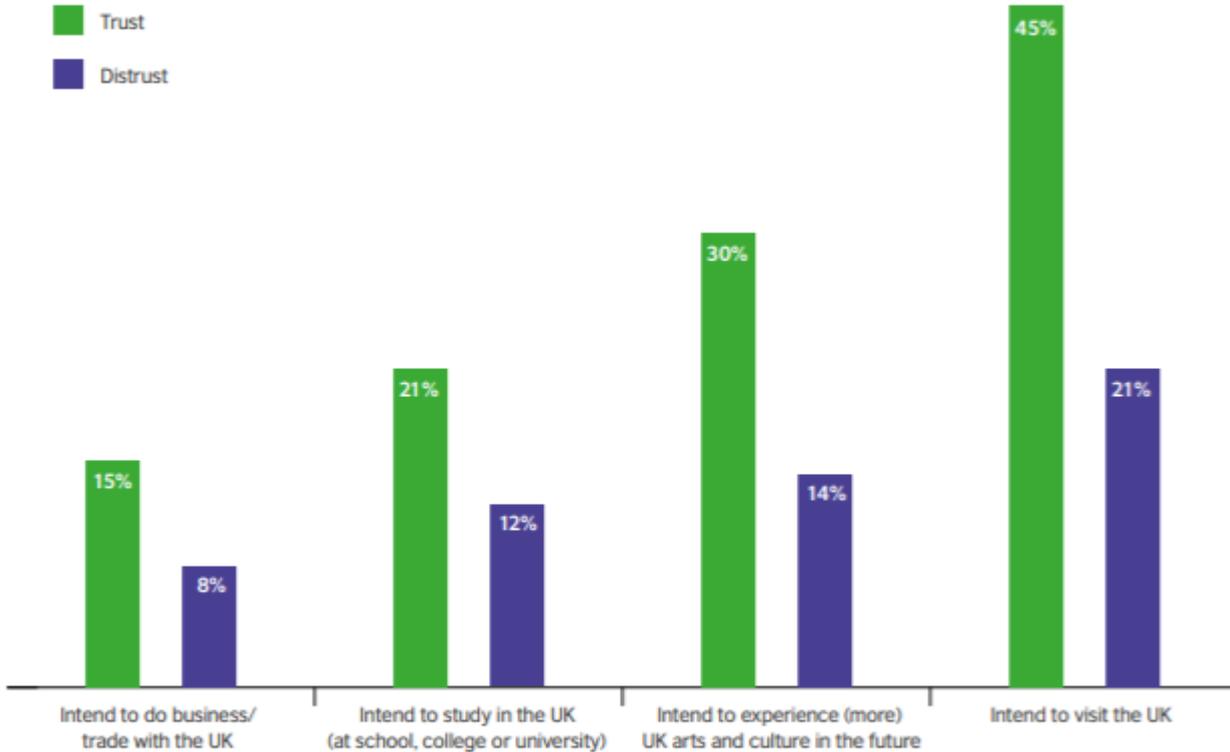
enhances the security, prosperity and influence of the UK and, in so doing, helps make the world a better, safer place.

- 8.2 This purpose gives us a unique remit as it relates to international development and UK Aid, as we are able to draw on a breadth of experience, influence and expertise when it comes to creating innovative, cost-effective solutions for embedding and sustaining change.

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Annex 1: The association between trust in the UK and intention to engage with the UK

Levels of trust and distrust in people from the UK among people who intend to engage with the UK

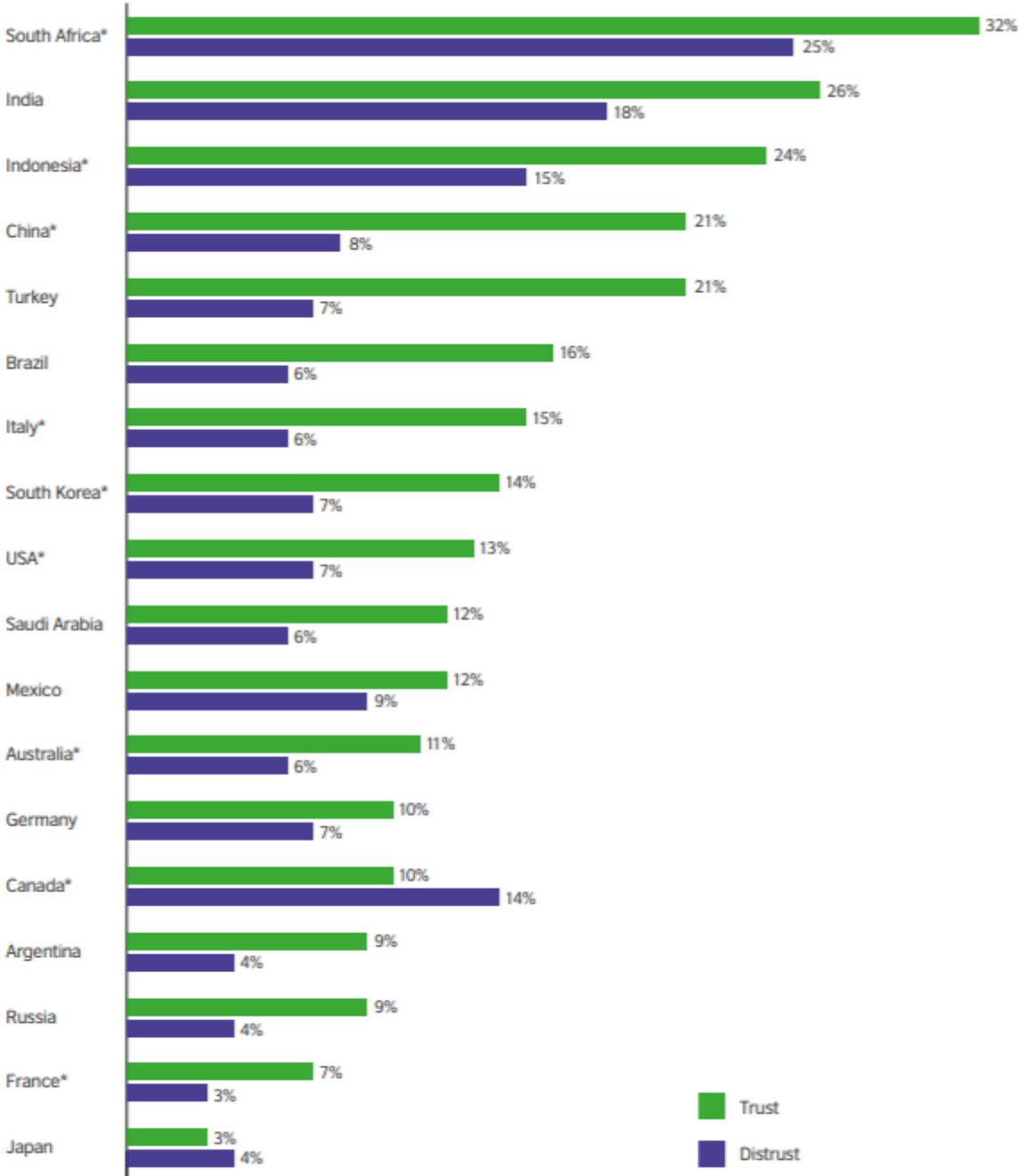


Base: All excluding UK participants (18,010). Those who trust people from the UK (10,980); Those who distrust people from the UK (2,618). Fieldwork dates: 8 September – 16 October 2016. Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations. Source: Fieldwork by Ipsos MORI, analysis by In2Impact. Thinking generally about people, to what extent do you distrust or trust people from the UK? Distrust = scores 0–4, Trust = scores 6–10 on a 10 point scale.

Source: British Council (2018), *The Value of Trust*, p. 14

Annex 2: Association between trust in the UK and intention to do business/trade with the UK (G20)

Percentage of people who said they intend to do business/trade with the UK by whether they trust/distrust people from the UK.



Base: All excluding UK participants (18,010). Fieldwork dates: 8 September – 16 October 2016. Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.
Source: Fieldwork by Ipsos MORI, analysis by In2Impact. Thinking generally about people, to what extent do you distrust or trust people from the UK? Distrust = scores 0–4, Trust = scores 6–10 on a scale of 0–10.