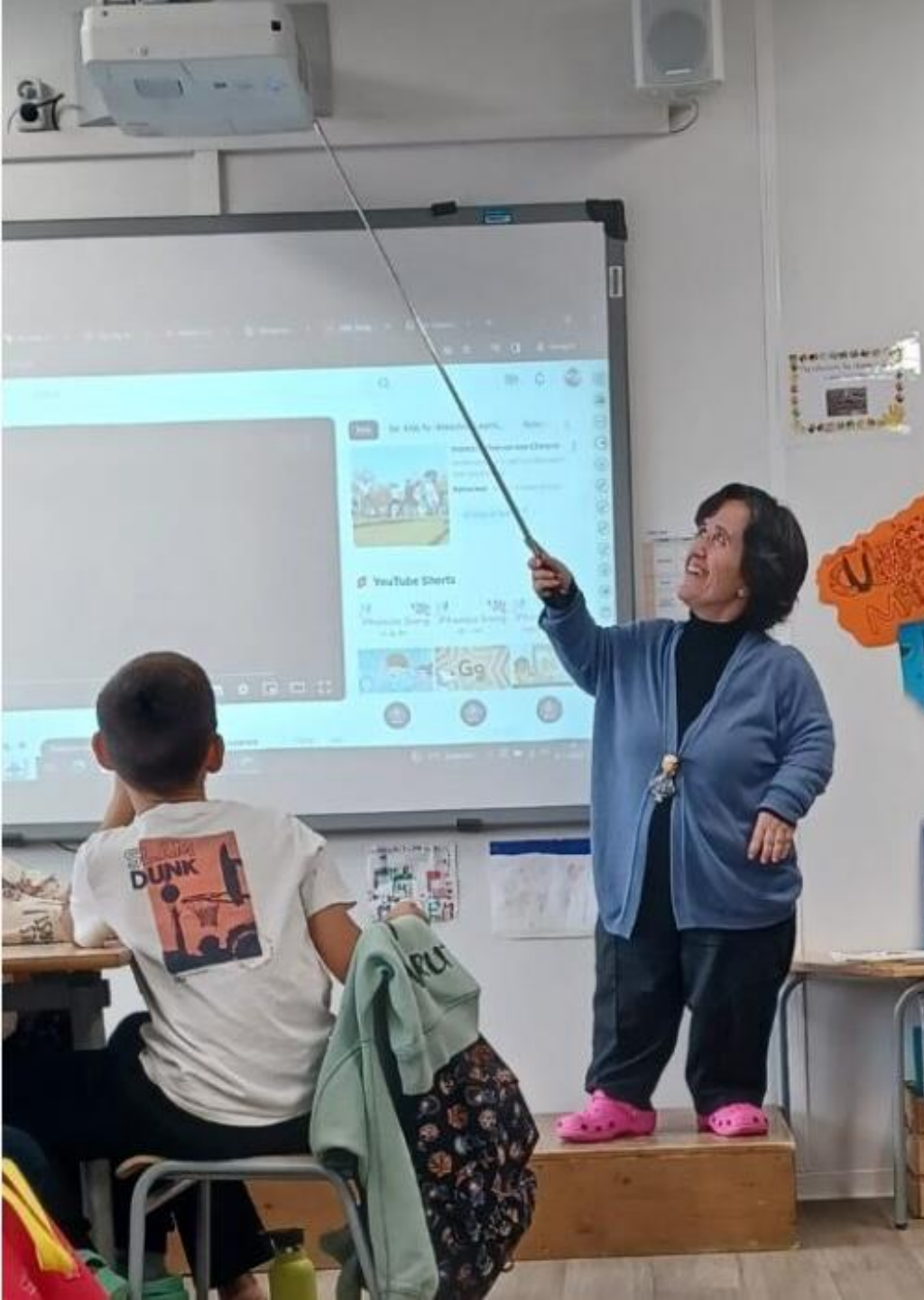




Human Stories

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Embracing Differences: The Journey of an Inspirational Teacher

María del Mar Garriga Molina, an English teacher from Spain with achondroplasia (dwarfism), embodies the transformative power of education. She believes that teachers are 'powerful agents of change' and that her presence in the classroom introduces the acknowledgement and appreciation of diversity in the hearts of her students.

'Every generation that leaves my classroom enters society with an additional understanding of disability—not because I specifically teach about dwarfism, but through my daily life and experiences', she shares.

Mar contributed to the British Council's research report, '[Being a Teacher with Disabilities: Perspectives, Practices, and Opportunities](#)', and holds a vision for the future. 'I hope that in the coming years, teachers with disabilities will become the norm, not the exception.'

Feeling 'natural' about her disability, Mar states, 'I wouldn't be who I am if I were taller'. She emphasises that the main issue stems from societal acceptance and long-standing stigmas surrounding dwarfism, particularly prevalent in Spanish and Latin cultures, where it has historically been associated with entertainers and royal courts. 'When I was younger, it was more challenging for me to navigate certain situations. However, overcoming them has made me stronger and more resilient. It doesn't mean that these challenges don't exist or impact me in certain situations.'

As a passionate, humorous, and creative vocational teacher, Mar has leveraged her stature in the classroom to her advantage. 'I always say that the relationship we create in my class differs from that of other teachers. Students feel closer to me because of my height, and I like to combine learning with fun, and not all teachers do that.'

Turkey-UK Collaboration Pioneers Virtual Reality Institute for Education Transformation

Prof. Dr. Oğuzhan Gündüz from Marmara University, Turkey, spearheaded a groundbreaking collaboration with University College London (UCL) under the [Connect4Innovation](#) programme to drive digital transformation in education. Together, they established the pioneering Turkey-UK 3D Virtual Reality Institute, leveraging VR technology to enable virtual collaboration between Turkish and British scientists while significantly reducing carbon emissions from travel.

‘Connect4Innovation fund provided us with the opportunity to introduce VR technology, which had just begun to be used in education in the UK, to Turkey. Students were able to visit and conduct experiments in a virtual lab environment. Our goal is to accelerate digital transformation in education and provide VR-based training and research opportunities, revolutionising international scientific collaboration through virtual reality and digital twin technologies. We aimed to provide hands-on training in advanced 3D printing technologies, promote sustainable practices by reducing travel-related carbon footprints, and bridge the gap between academia and industry to foster innovation and growth in digital technologies.

This partnership has enhanced our global visibility and positioned us as leaders in digital innovation and 3D printing.

Our project was recognised as the second most admired in the 'Technological or Digital Innovation of the Year' category at THE Awards Asia 2024, showcasing its impact and innovation. By utilising virtual reality and digital twin technologies, we aim to significantly reduce the carbon footprint associated with traditional educational and research methods.

By democratising access to cutting-edge educational tools and research facilities, we are creating an inclusive environment where knowledge and innovation are accessible to a broader audience, regardless of geographical constraints.’





Watch related
video

From Art History to Business: Study UK Alumni Awards Winner Shares Her Story

Sarai Lambert is an Essex University alumna. She won the 2024 France Study UK Alumni Awards for her work in Business and Innovation. Sarai applied to the Alumni Awards in the hope of sharing her story, which began in Art History and culminated in Business, and to encourage students to study in the UK.

Sarai Lambert studied Art History and Literature at Essex University. She was drawn to its campus: 'I looked at a lot of different universities. The first time I visited Essex's campus, I felt such a sense of safety, knowing that I could flex that independent muscle within the safety net of the university'. Sarai also valued the diversity in students: 'When I went there, I think there were 142 different nationalities at Essex University which was so enriching!'

As soon as she graduated in 2014, she uprooted her life and moved to France. She is now excelling in a career in Sales and has worked for a mixture of startups and big companies in tech. The impact of that career led her to win the 2024 Business and Innovation Alumni Award in France.

'A lot of my story has to do with transferable skills. I didn't study tech or sales or maths during my time at Essex but the communication skills, the presentation skills, and the open-mindedness from studying Art History and Literature transferred to the Sales world', she shares.

Sarai Lambert applied to the Alumni Awards in the hope of inspiring young people to be fearless both in their studies and careers. 'I spent the best five years of my life at Essex University. I met the most incredible people there, and it gave me the foundation to allow me to then go out into the world and build the most amazing life in France. I could not recommend going to study abroad enough to anyone!'





Empowering Researchers: Breaking Barriers Through Communication and Networking

How can early career researchers master communication in multicultural settings? Thanks to the British Council's [‘Researcher Connect’ programme](#), over 60 young researchers from Spain and Portugal participated in a transformative 2-week online course. Some even won travel grants to visit UK research councils. Today, we catch up with Gonzalo Reguera from Navarra, Spain, to hear about his journey.

‘I had the incredible opportunity to spend several weeks at the prestigious School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University. Guided by Professor Ruth McAreavey, Head of Sociology, I honed my skills in presenting and discussing my research with UK academics and fellow researchers. Networking with other researchers was a game-changer, sparking new ideas and forging strong professional connections. The feedback and insights I received were invaluable, greatly enhancing my thesis.

Being in such a vibrant environment, I have been fortunate to participate in many events. I have given a seminar on the core elements of my research and have been invited to events organised by Newcastle University's Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) and the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE).

Outside the academic world, I have set up a good connection with Peter Hetherington, a journalist from The Guardian, with whom I have been able to reflect on challenges shared by the UK and Spain. I am looking forward to materialising all the ideas generated for collaborations, be it publications, meetings to broaden the dissemination of our work or new visits to colleagues from other UK universities. This visit has been a turning point for my academic career. I am incredibly grateful to the British Council for helping to make this visit possible.’

Empowering Youth Through Sports: A Journey of Olympic Excellence and Leadership

Daina Gudzinevičiūtė dedicated 34 years to Olympic Trap shooting, culminating in a gold medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Since 2012, she has led Lithuania's National Olympic Committee and holds key positions as Vice-President of the European Olympic Committee (EOC) and a distinguished member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In 2017, she started collaborating with the British Council's 'Dreams & Teams' initiative, aimed at fostering leadership skills among youth through sports.

'Imagine children organising mini-Olympics for their school or community—planning games, award ceremonies, and tackling challenges together', Daina explains. "'Dreams & Teams" is both fun and educational, empowering children to become confident and capable leaders.'

Sports are pivotal in helping youth explore and maximise their potential. 'Participation in sports builds confidence, as young people set and achieve goals and get to witness their growth firsthand' Daina emphasises. 'They also learn teamwork and leadership skills and experience the positive impacts on their physical and mental well-being.'

Daina reflects on how her Olympic journey enriched her own character. 'Achievements and setbacks alike teach you resilience and perseverance', she shares. 'Consistency and purpose are crucial in achieving goals, whether in professional sports or a career.'

Daina's path towards the post of the National Olympic Committee president was the result of consistent interest and involvement in sports policy even since her professional athlete's career. 'Knowing the cost of competing at a highest level by myself makes much easier working in National Olympic Committee.'

Daina's journey to the presidency of the National Olympic Committee reflects her unwavering dedication, deep involvement in sports since her days as a professional athlete and firsthand experience of the demands of elite competition.

Promoting the benefits of sports and the Olympic movement remains paramount to Daina. The skills cultivated through sports—goal-setting, resilience, and personal development—are 'invaluable in everyday life and will help develop your personality', she concludes.



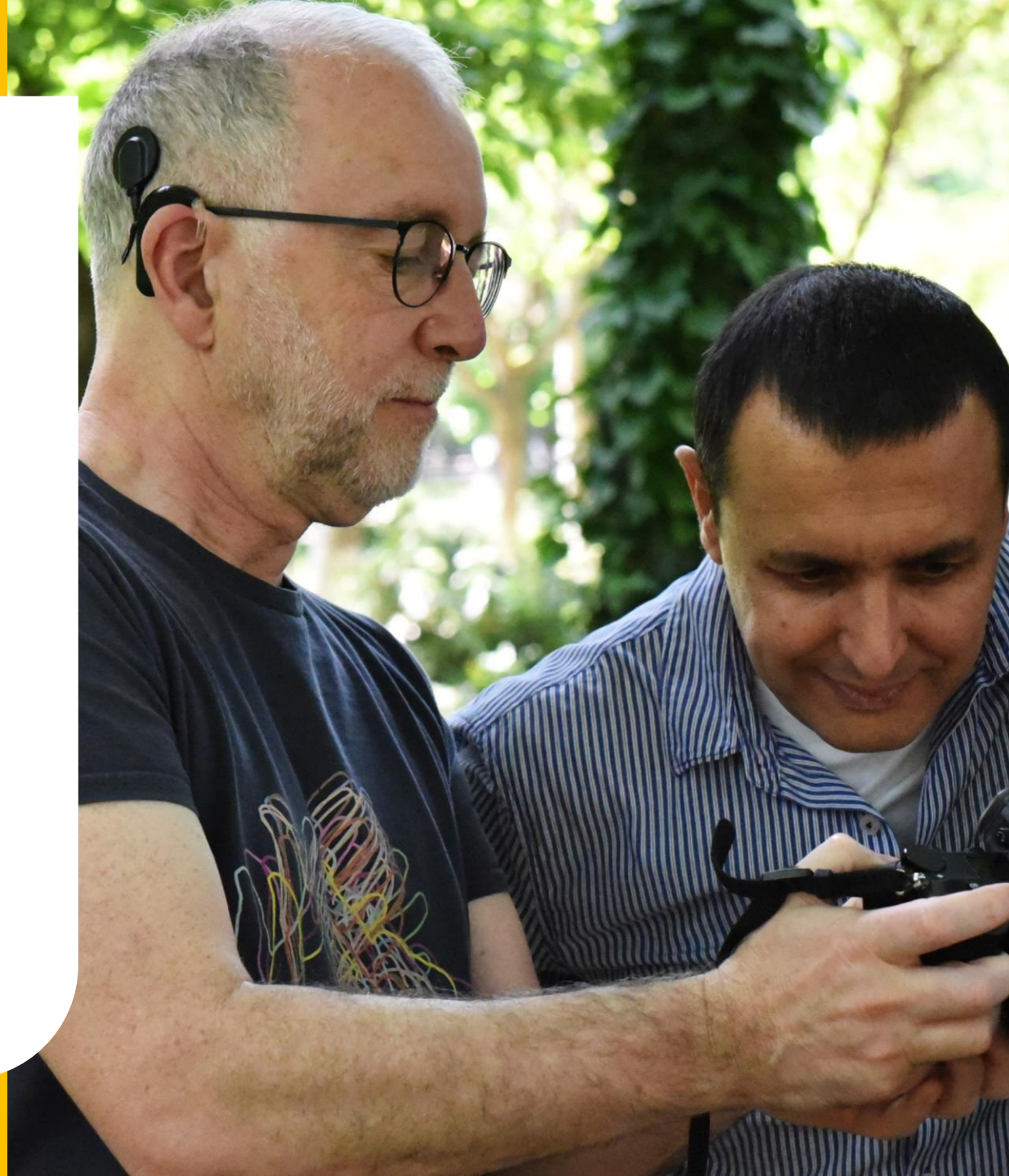
Fostering Artistic Inclusion Through Deaf Photography Collaboration

As part of the [Creative Collaboration programme](#), Uzbek photographer Husniddin Ato collaborated with UK deaf community photographer Stephen Iliffe on his “Deaf Mosaic” project. They conducted a workshop in Tashkent in May 2024, which not only showcased artistic collaboration but also highlighted the British Council Uzbekistan’s commitment to supporting inclusion in the country.

‘I am deeply grateful to the British Council for funding my recent visit to Tashkent, where I had the privilege of collaborating with the Uzbek deaf community. As a UK photographer, my “Deaf Mosaic” project aims to convey a simple yet powerful message: with the right support, deaf people can achieve anything.

At Tashkent’s prestigious House of Photography gallery, I led a two-day workshop to inspire young Uzbek deaf photographers to use cameras as tools for self-empowerment. During this workshop, we created a mural artwork that expressed the pride of Uzbekistan’s deaf community in their country, identity and culture.

This mural is just the beginning; over the next few months, we plan to create many more artworks. With sufficient resources and support, we hope to exhibit these pieces in both Tashkent and London. My long-term aspiration is for British Council Uzbekistan and ‘Deaf Mosaic’ to continue working together to build on this progress, fostering greater opportunities for the deaf community.’





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