



Human Stories

9th edition

**British Council Europe: celebrating our community.
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From Teacher to Mentor: Transforming Careers and Inspiring Learners

Anna Voskanyan's career took a transformative turn when she joined the British Council's [Learning Hubs](#) in Armenia. The programme not only helped her gain new skills but also inspired her students to see English as a gateway to new opportunities. As she transitioned into mentoring fellow educators, her impact extended beyond the classroom.

'I've been a teacher at Vanadzor School since 2008, but my career took a new direction in 2017 with the Learning Hubs,' Anna explains. 'As part of the programme, I completed a 37-hour course on "Principles of English Language Teaching for Primary Education" at Edinburgh College and passed the Teaching Knowledge Test modules and Aptis exam.'

Through Learning Hubs, I started teaching social entrepreneurship and storytelling, where students not only improved their English but also developed skills in communication and teamwork. The programme boosted their confidence and engagement in school life, inspiring them to pursue new opportunities.'

As Learning Hubs expanded, Anna became a facilitator, mentoring other educators. '(...) transitioning from teaching to guiding other educators through Teacher Activity Groups and the [Online Teacher Community](#) taught me new skills like using technology and leading discussions,' she adds.

The experience has enriched her teaching, benefiting both her students and colleagues. 'I highly recommend this programme to other teachers as a vital step in their professional journey.'

Symphony of Success: How Passion, Education, and Talent Shape a Musical Journey

Alexandros Charkiolakis, one of our [Study UK](#) regional ambassadors for the EU, embodies the perfect blend of talent, education, and dedication. With a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Music from the University of Sheffield, Alexandros now resides in Athens, Greece, where he leads the prestigious Friends of Music Society. His journey is an inspiring testament to young prospective UK students and musicians, showcasing how one can combine the art of managing cultural institutions with a deep passion for music.

'I have the privilege of directing one of Greece's most esteemed cultural organisations, the Friends of Music Society, which has been a cornerstone of the country's music scene for 71 years. Along with the Greek State, it is one of the 'founding fathers' of Megaron – The Athens Concert Hall. Currently, we manage the Music Library of Greece, a youth orchestra, an adult choir, a scholarships programme, and various other initiatives aimed at shaping a better future through music.'

Alexandros began his studies in the UK in 1999 and reflects on his time at the University of Sheffield with fondness:

'The opportunities for personal and professional growth in the UK were limitless, and the education I received there never failed to meet my expectations. Studying at a world-class institution like the University of Sheffield, whose Music Department was rated five stars, was an exceptional experience.'

One of Alexandros' most cherished memories from his time in the UK is the trust and encouragement he received from faculty members: 'I was entrusted with conducting the Student Orchestra for three and half years and even found a new venue for it to play in the city. I will always cherish these moments.'

In addition to a solid foundation in music education, Alexandros' experience at Sheffield equipped him with the skills to excel in the field of musicology. After spending four and a half years in academia at Istanbul Technical University, he realised his true passion lay in cultural management. Looking ahead, Alexandros envisions himself continuing to work in the cultural sector, leading major projects at the Friends of Music Society and contributing to Greece's rich musical heritage.





Revolutionising Language Testing: The AI-Powered English Test for Kids

In 2024, the British Council's Primary English Test was recognised at the International e-Assessment Awards for its groundbreaking use of technology to transform learning and assessment. By the end of the year, this innovative tool will be available in select European countries, providing children aged 9-12 with the unique opportunity to assess their English proficiency during the critical transition from primary to secondary education.

At the core of the Primary English Test is the British Council's socio-cognitive approach, which ensures that the test is both rigorous and aligned with students' needs and interests. Thanks to Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration, the test offers an engaging, modern experience that motivates students to perform at their best. In this edition, Ada Lanzaro, New Product Development Lead at the British Council, shares the significance.

'The Primary English Test is the first of its kind – an English proficiency test specifically designed for young learners, developed by the British Council. It's fully digital, delivered on computers and scored by computers using proprietary AI models for the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

The Primary English Test is underpinned by machine learning-driven automated scoring approaches, guaranteeing transparent, fast, and accurate results. All responses are scored according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) standard.

Together with the use of AI, the test offers high levels of engagement through an immersive experience. High-quality animation motivates students to achieve their best in a real-world English evaluation. We've completed our first round of pilots in our British Council's teaching centres in Lisbon, Milan, Bogota, and other East Asian cities, and the feedback collected has been very positive. Families state they are "excited about understanding their children's level through the result of the exam".

The Primary English Test also helps the British Council's teamwork come to life as a holistic group of researchers, product and AI developers, teachers, and our exams teams have worked hand in hand to deliver an innovative, convenient, and exciting solution for children worldwide.'

Revolutionising Climate Action Education

Dr Melike Kuş, winner of the 2023 [Alumni Awards](#) in the Science and Sustainability category, is a renowned expert in climate change adaptation and sustainable development. With the award funding, she was able to pursue a course on nature-based solutions at Oxford University, which laid the groundwork for a transformative new curriculum for urban planning students in Turkey.

‘As an urban planner, my focus has shifted from disaster risk management to environmental planning and climate change adaptation,’ Dr Kuş says. Over the past 11 years, she has coordinated the Land and Water Programme at the Nature Conservation Centre and contributed to UNESCO's MAB Committee. ‘Winning the UK Alumni Award highlighted the climate and biodiversity crises and fuelled my passion for nature-based solutions.’

The award enabled her to complete Oxford University's Nature-based Solutions to Global Challenges course. ‘This led to the swift development of a new course on nature-based solutions, which I co-designed with Assoc. Prof. Meltem Şenol Balaban from the Middle East Technical University City and Regional Planning Department.’

Launching in Spring 2024-25, the course will equip urban planning students with knowledge of ecosystem-based adaptation and resilience. ‘Our goal is to prepare students to tackle climate challenges through collaborative, innovative projects supported by partnerships that offer hands-on experience,’ Dr Kuş explains.





Amplifying Young Voices: The Power of Spoken Word Poetry

The British Council [Poetry Competition](#) in Germany, in collaboration with Haus für Poesie, recently concluded its fifth year, celebrating the impact of spoken word poetry. The competition invited students from grades 6-12 to engage with the theme of 'Otherness' through poems inspired by *The Game* by acclaimed spoken word poet Kevin Mclean.

Kevin Mclean, Creative Director of I Am Loud Productions and host of Scotland's Loud Poets, served as the guest judge for the competition. He emphasised the impact of spoken word poetry: 'Spoken word poetry connects deeply with audiences, sharing stories that might otherwise remain unheard,' Mclean shared.

Students across Germany crafted poems in English or German for the poetry competition, reflecting on Mclean's work and the theme of 'Otherness'. 'The theme offers a powerful lens for students to explore their own perspectives,' Mclean noted. 'It's been inspiring to see how they have engaged with these ideas.'

The winners, who presented their poems at the 2024 Poesiefestival in Berlin, also had the opportunity to meet Mclean and participate in a workshop with him. The competition underscored poetry's role in bridging cultural and linguistic gaps. 'Poetry unites people and sparks important conversations,' Mclean explained. 'This competition has been a fantastic platform for young voices to shine.'



Bridging Isolation and Community: Transforming Remote Work into Social Impact

Iryna Podoliak, a Ukrainian currently living in Gdańsk, Poland, has built a successful career as a remote translator, proofreader, and SEO copywriter, translating from Polish and English into Ukrainian. Despite her professional achievements, she often feels the challenges of remote work – especially the lack of social interaction and community engagement.

Longing for connection and a desire to develop new skills and experiences, she joined the British Council's [Youth Connect for Ukraine](#). This initiative empowers young people – especially women, girls, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds impacted by the war in Ukraine – by helping them acquire new skills, build meaningful relationships, and make a positive impact on their communities.

'Leadership skills are the most important thing I've been able to improve thanks to the programme. I'm someone who constantly generates great ideas but often lacks the decisiveness and confidence to bring them to life,' Iryna shares.

Inspired by the programme, Iryna organised her own social initiative: the Children's Fair, an event with various outdoor games and attractions designed to engage kids, encourage social integration, and foster creativity.

'We wanted the kids to participate in activities, make friends, and have fun. Such events encourage children to spend time outdoors, be physically active, and tap into their creativity. Beyond that, it was a wonderful opportunity for their parents to connect, integrate, and build relationships as well,' she explains.

After the success of the Children's Fair, Iryna is eager to continue creating projects that benefit children, especially those with migration experiences, focusing on their integration and social development.

For Iryna, leadership means making a meaningful impact on others' lives: 'If you want to engage in social actions but feel that a particular skill is lacking, train it like a muscle. Leadership, public speaking, organisation, time management – you can improve in all areas.'



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