CHAPTER FOUR
BRITISH COUNCIL LIBRARIES:
INTERNATIONAL SCENARIO

4.0. Introduction

The British Council with 229 libraries and resource centres spread over 111 countries has been the most outstanding global agency in the field of information. During 2003 and 2004 the Council issued 7.5 million books and videos to 300,000 British Council library members, dealt with 2.3 million enquiries in their libraries and information centres and welcomed 8.5 million visitors. By meeting the higher learning needs of 30 lakhs of people, it has become virtually synonymous with the concept of information and knowledge. The British Council Libraries and resource centers around the world provide access to key sources of specialist, scientific, technological, economic, political, and management data, as well as supply books and other materials to support education and training initiatives. Reports and studies show that in many countries the British Libraries are viewed as the acme of excellence in the field of information and knowledge exchange. Over the past 50 and more years, the British Libraries have set the benchmark for quality in the realm of library services. Ever since its establishment it has served as a prestigious symbol of the British quest for knowledge and academic excellence. It has also evolved into an academic icon representing cultural symbiosis and international integration through information, knowledge and learning. While it began with the aim of improving cultural relations with other countries through promoting British ideas talents and experience in education and training, books and periodicals in English language and the arts, sciences and technology of Britain, the British Library has grown to a bionic medium for intellectual exchange and higher learning. This chapter outlines the genesis and development of the British Council Libraries and looks at the various activities undertaken by them. The
reviews, reports and surveys that shaped the British Council and its libraries are given in a nutshell as Appendix V.

The British Council’s success is an amazing saga of a creation which started out as cultural propaganda, graduated into ‘cultural diplomacy’ and finally excelled itself as a unique, missionary-like, international library work. The libraries continue to spread the word of their faith in a strong and ‘free’ public library service as a powerful weapon in the struggle against ignorance, poverty and tyranny, all under the banner of library development.

Libraries and information services provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium, regardless of frontiers. They serve as a gateway to knowledge, thought and culture, offering essential support for independent decision-making, cultural development, research and lifelong learning by both individuals and groups. For those who believe in the continuity of culture and peace, use of books - which treasure and conserve the culture of ages in recorded documents - and communication of information are two essential components required to remove misunderstanding amongst the nations and to promote cultural understanding.

Maybe it was this realization that prompted countries like France, Germany, Italy and Russia to establish contact libraries and information centres to work for the promotion of their language, literature and culture. Between the world wars, these agencies worked as propaganda centres for their respective countries but in time, of peace they assumed a cultural role, promoting cultural relations through their libraries and by providing up-to-date and authentic information on different aspects of their country and people. In fact, Britain was late to enter the arena but when it finally did in 1934, with the formation of the British Council, it was a fitting response to accumulating evidence that many countries were unaware of what Britain had to offer in education, training, culture, science and technology.
4.1.0 The Forerunners

4.1.1 Cultural Propaganda of Other Countries

The history of the organisation and its libraries begins much earlier than 1934. In fact may a writer have tried to explain why the British took so long to accept the necessity for some institution to undertake cultural propaganda, the real germ from which the British Council grew up, even if it were to be regarded only as an essential presence on a scene otherwise totally occupied by other countries. According to the current NATO definition, “propaganda” is “any information, ideas, doctrines or special appeals disseminated to influence the opinion, emotions, attitudes or behaviour of any specified group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly.”

Cultural propaganda is now seen as a part of ‘public diplomacy’, where open exchange of ideas and information takes place and which is central to foreign policy itself. ‘And it remains indispensable to...[national] interests, ideals and leadership role in the world.”

It is accepted in most countries today that cultural relations are an essential third dimension in relations between states: third, because they accompany politics and trade. The idea of people communicating with each other across national boundaries has been a constant theme throughout the world over the last 100 years and it is one of the fundamental beliefs of the European Community.

Things were no different in the 1930s. At that time there was nothing new in the idea that the language, literature, art, science and way of life of a nation might be spread abroad as a means of encouraging understanding and goodwill on the part of others. Both the French and the Germans had treated it as an important part of foreign policy since the latter half of the 19th century.

The French, who pioneered cultural relations, considered the representation of their culture abroad to be virtually a sacred mission and spent half their budget for foreign relations on it. The French idea of bearing a cultural mission to the world is of
long standing and it was a “messianic” approach. A private society called the Alliance Français, established in 1880, promoted the teaching of the French language through groups organised in many parts of the world and carried out a programme of school and libraries and arranged lectures and exhibitions of art and so on. Soon this society grew to be of the first importance. The Germans were neither later nor less active in the field, although initially their motives were rather different. They wished to maintain the spirit of Germanism in the millions of Germans living outside the Reich. Like the French, the Germans also believed in the importance of their national contribution to civilization and to the richness of the culture of the world. After the First World War, they had a further motive of wishing to re-establish themselves in the eyes of other countries. The Italians were also no different: if the French had the Alliance Français, the Italian had their Dante Alighieri.

Great Britain was almost alone among the leading European nations in not taking up the propaganda work. May be, the British thought ‘good wine needs no bush’. Any notion that Britain had a sacred or moral duty to spread its culture, as distinct from its order justice or trade, found little favour during the imperial days. Culture was not a concept that attracted enthusiasm within Britain: the British did not, like France, possess the intellectual tradition of seeing literature and language and the arts as an expression of nationhood that should be transmitted to others. One British official in 1919 concisely put it: “To promote one’s country in times of peace is not cricket.” A British Foreign Office Memorandum of this time commented: “Of the three main elements which make up British influence - political, economic and culture - the first two have long been recognised as fundamental. The third, cultural influence, while vaguely creditable, is of little practical use and so far above worldly considerations that it ought never to be degraded to political ends.”

While France diffused her language through a series of schools with seconded teachers and bestowed recognisably French attitudes of thought with it, Britain built upon the tradition and practices of the colonial country and left education to the Mission
schools, preferring simply not to bother about cultures as long as the country functioned in its favour. In his preface to “British propaganda in the twentieth century”, Taylor, the first historian to be allowed access to the British Council archives, attributes the British reluctance to use their culture to make people love Britain to their basic trait:

“...why the British have been particularly nervous about something they have demonstrated time after time that they were extremely good at. The British are a remarkable people with some remarkable achievements to their name. But their capacity to make other people appreciate this without the appearance of blowing their own trumpets- the famous British reserve or ‘stiff upper lip’- was something that always fascinated me.”

However it can be safely assumed from the attitudes prevailing at that time that the failure after the First World War to attempt any kind of cultural propaganda was more a result of conscious decisions than anything else. The word ‘propaganda’ had a negative connotation and the British had only extreme distaste for their war-time propaganda. The protest of Angus Fletcher - the then head of the British Library of Information, the forerunner of British Information Libraries - against the use of the word ‘propaganda’ bears testimony to this. It was a disturbing word, with “the debased meaning of a sinister activity”. Anything which smacked even faintly of organized publicity was regarded in official circles with extreme wariness.

4.1.2 The British Bureau of Information

But not everyone was entirely satisfied with a complete withdrawal from the cultural scene. As far back in 1917, Sir Henry Newbolt had reported to the then Department of Information that inadequacies in methods of distribution of materials like books and periodicals had seriously affected foreign appreciation of British thought, ideals and efficiency, ‘to the detriment of British policy and British trade’. The necessity for some kind of self - advertisement began to be felt more and during the late 1920s, an influential group of civil servants became convinced that British values of
parliamentary democracy should be subsumed by the rising tide of fascism. Realisation was also dawning on the Foreign Office about the need for an organisation responsible for the promotion of British culture, education, science and technology in other countries, along the lines of existing French, German and Italian cultural organizations. Britain’s first effort to counter the rapid growth of state-subsidised propaganda from other countries was The British Bureau (Library) of Information set up in New York by the English diplomat Robert Wilberforce after America’s entry into the war. This can be undoubtedly considered the forerunner of British Information libraries.

The British Bureau of Information was, from the outset, a reference collection on British affairs, expansively defined as the “whole of British civilization and institutions.” Emphasis was placed on British official documents, although information on current affairs was provided in the collection’s vertical files. For many years, the library was the only institution of its kind supported by the British government abroad. But even this was scaled down to the essentially passive role of a repository of official documents owing to a largely impervious attitude of the successive governments to the calls for cultural propaganda.

4.2 The Tilley Report (1920)

The Foreign Office was far from satisfied with the scepticism displayed by the British Governments about the value of spreading such tangibles as language, literature, the arts and civilised values. It wanted the work to continue and even established the News Department under Sir William Tyrrell to carry on the work of ‘propaganda’. The work of the department was to receive, collect and dispose of all information from abroad and to use information both in Britain and outside it. Again the work was strictly limited by the Treasury.

During the whole of this period, evidence grew of the damage done to British interests by the increasingly hostile propaganda of other countries as well as the size of the budget devoted elsewhere to cultural propaganda. While other countries were
spending huge amounts on cultural promotion, the British contribution to any similar programme was nil.

Gradually pressure for government action built up and the then Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, appointed a Committee headed by Sir John Tilley to consider, among other things, how the government might make British ideals more generally known and appreciated abroad and to examine whether libraries along the lines of the British Bureau of Information should be established in selected foreign capitals\textsuperscript{12}. The Committee was appointed in 1919 to consider by what means His Majesty’s government might (1) foster a greater spirit of solidarity among British communities abroad and (2) make British ideals more generally known and appreciated by foreign nations. The report was submitted in 1920.

The Tilley Report provides interesting reading even today. It is surprising to find so many of its recommendations stated so definitely and so cogently as early as this. It urged a policy for schools for British and foreign children abroad and suggested that at least in South America, China, Egypt and Constantinople a prima-facie case already existed for sending experts to report on the possibilities and probable costs of establishing such schools. It alluded to the Alliance Français and suggested some British equivalent, proposed Institutes in foreign countries where lectures on English literature, history and art might be given. Among much else, it also recommended the dissemination of British technical works and other books and the creation, in certain capital cities, of British ‘centres’ housing libraries and reading rooms, which would contain books, periodicals and newspapers. It also asked for facilities for the reception and education of foreign students at British universities and technical schools. In short, The Tilley Report was a blue-print for the British Council\textsuperscript{13}.

The Tilley Report was unfortunately turned down by the Treasury and Lord Curzon sent it with a covering memorandum to the cabinet, requesting the latter to decide whether the report should be ‘shelved or a more generous policy adopted.’ Taking its cue from the Treasury, the Cabinet shelved this report, in spite of the fact that
other countries like France were spending large sums on building up solidarity with their communities abroad and nothing was heard officially of these matters for the next ten years.

4.3 The Projection of England

But the idea of the ‘establishment of English libraries’ as ‘a key central feature of cultural propaganda activity’ started gaining momentum in the years that followed. The latter half of the 1920s and early 1930s gave rise to several private initiatives like The Travel Association and the All People’s Association. There was also a growing press campaign which in 1932 included ‘The Projection of England’, a pamphlet in which Sir Stephen Tallents, a leading publicist of the imperial cause, proposed a semi-official organization not unlike the ‘subsequent British Council’14. More significant was the Report submitted by the D’Abernon Trade Mission to South America in 1929.

4.4 The D’Abernon Report

The D’Abernon Report was a very strongly-worded one which left no stones unturned. It was unsparingly critical of the British policy of keeping aloof from cultural work, so successfully undertaken and executed by other countries which made them more visible and also gave them considerable advantage over Britain. The report accused Britain of never realising the commercial importance of cultural influence and of never really exploiting the positive climate existing in countries like Argentina to spread English language and culture: “It is unhappily true that owing to want of interest and support on our part, British education does not yet enjoy very high favour. The universities send to France, Germany ... for professors: never to Great Britain.” 15 In a later passage: “To those who say that this extension in influence has no connection with commerce, we reply that they are totally wrong; the reaction of trade to the more deliberate inculcation of British culture which we advocate is definitely certain and will be swift.” The Report called for an immediate response from the Board of Education
and other related departments to tackle the crucial issues that were raised in it. These views were subsequently endorsed by none other than the Prince of Wales who, after a visit to South America in 1931, had been struck by the failing influence and lack of initiative of the British.\textsuperscript{16}

By now, things had reached a stage where it was no longer possible to ignore the warnings of the aggressive spirit of the propaganda of other countries. A small beginning was made in the right direction with the Treasury revising a long-term policy by allocating an annual grant of £2500 to the Foreign Office for British cultural activities. Referring to this, Rex Creeper wrote: “We have taken over a new sphere of activity - known, for want of a better name, as ‘cultural propaganda’. We have got from the Treasury a considerable sum of money to spend on it...It consists largely of promoting the knowledge of British art and literature etc. abroad and of finding lecturers on various English subjects to deliver lectures in different capitals.”\textsuperscript{17} The first grant sanctioned was for £300 to purchase books for foreign libraries, which was soon followed by a grant of £2500.

According to a memorandum by Creeper in 1931, it was indicated that the grant would be used mainly for gifts of published literature to foreign libraries and Anglo-foreign libraries abroad. But this was suspended during the financial crisis of 1931 and when it was resumed, only half of the earlier grant was sanctioned. But the blessing was that a pattern had been established\textsuperscript{18}.

In 1933, the Committee on the Education and Training of Students from Overseas was formed under Sir Eugene Ramsden who visited many countries like Denmark and Sweden to assess the potential for British education. His report also highlighted the importance of erecting awareness about British education and British Universities. Another individual to stress this point was Sir Percy Loraine, the then High Commissioner to Egypt. In his memorandum to the government, he expressed serious concerns about Britain’s apathy towards matters like cultural propaganda and promotion of British education. He outlined a policy for the future, which included the
development and maintenance of British schools in foreign countries and also an increase in the number of overseas students in British institutions. Sir Percy also asked for a **British Libraries of Information** with a central establishment at Cairo and later with branches in other capitals of the Near East, with a good measure of arts, social, cultural and educational aspects of Britain. Almost equally persuasive were the memorandums from C.G. Hardie and George West, all submitted around this time stressing the importance of establishing cultural relations with other countries, mostly through books, education and promotion of English language. In 1931, R.A. Leeper of the News Department, had also submitted a memorandum requesting the government to use the grant sanctioned for cultural activities overseas, including books for foreign libraries, for gifts of published literature to foreign libraries and Anglo-foreign libraries abroad.

Things were taken a step further by another Foreign Office venture which the Treasury approved early in 1931. Stephen Gasele, the Foreign Office Librarian and Angus Fletcher, Assistant Director of the British Library of Information, New York, visited Latin America and submitted a report in 1931. In this, they proposed not only gifts to local libraries and societies but also the setting up of substantial reference libraries in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro and of smaller British reference collections elsewhere. The pressure to undertake cultural relations was becoming irresistible and the idea of the establishment of English Libraries as a key central feature of cultural propaganda activity was very much in the air.

4.5 Leeper’s Memorandum

R.A Leeper’s memorandum on 18 June 1934 is considered a milestone in the history of the British Council in general and the British Council Libraries in particular. Leeper entitled it quite simply ‘Cultural Propaganda’, thereby displaying a remarkable degree of frankness. He contended that the British Government should do something to counter the rapid growth of state-subsidized propaganda from other countries, much of it designed to damage Britain’s political/commercial influence. He and others advocated
opposing this onslaught by the projection abroad of British cultural values, attitudes and achievements.

Leeper, known as the architect of the British Council, renewed the Tilley Committee’s suggestion that there be a separate body to look into the promotion of British interests abroad in the educational and cultural fields. Leeper’s proposal was for the establishment of an ‘unofficial Cultural Relations Committee’ with the task of raising funds to support such work. As for the work itself, one of its most useful aspects would be the establishment of English libraries. In Latin America, Europe and the Near East - the priority areas for cultural propaganda - the concept of the Anglophile society or the Anglo-foreign Institute, was already established and such bodies could receive ‘English libraries’ as gifts or loans. In his memorandum Leeper commended the British National Council for the All People’s Association, which the credited with actually having established English Libraries abroad. He argued for and in fact secured very close contact with the Association, which had branches in 14 European countries but was headquartered in London. Leeper’s proposal was to capitalise on the goodwill already created by such organizations that were conducting British cultural propaganda with other countries on a basis of reciprocity. He went on to assert that “establishment of English libraries at various European centres would be the best possible assistance to the spread of the English language and to a better understanding of British life and culture. The small presents of books hitherto made by the Foreign Office have been immensely appreciated but to produce the desired effect these presents should be made on a very much large scale. The most effective use of the money for this purpose is the establishment of English circulating libraries at various European centres.” For him, the very international basis of organisations like the British National Council was the most redeeming and favourable feature working in favour of the proposed venture since” the very fact that its basis is wide should, in the long run, render its activities more effective.”
It is however not clear whether Leeper envisaged such libraries as being under some form of British control. But, the British National Council of All People’s Association (APA) did play a brief, uneasy but important part in the gestation of the British Council. At the end of June 1934, the Committee of International Understanding and Co-operation came into being with Sir Evelyn Wench the Chairman of APA, as its chairman. But the life of the Committee, so clearly a forerunner of the British Council, was short and was wound up in November 1934.

But it did not put an end to the efforts that were going on. Leeper’s labours were finally rewarded in November 1934, when, as a result of his initiative, several “specialist” committees were established to consider the proposals put forward in Leeper’s memorandum. The most important among them was Lord Tyrell’s Committee, which also proposed the establishment of an “unofficial Cultural Relations Committee”.24

This Committee, like Leeper’s, advocated the cause of opposing the propaganda against England by the projection abroad of British cultural values, attitudes and achievements. The Committee’s first meeting took place on 5 December 1934 and it was agreed that it should be called “The British Committee for Relations with Other Countries.” Within a few months, the Committee became “The British Council for Relations with Other Countries”.25 The British Council was born and in 1936, it abbreviated itself to British Council.

4.6.0 Organization and its Activities: The First Phase

Since 1934, the British Council seeks to project Britain abroad by promoting British ideas, talents and experience in education and training, books and periodicals, the English language, the arts, sciences and technology. By 1940, when the Council was granted a Royal Charter, the main features of its operation had become firmly established as:
to make the life and thought of the British peoples more widely known abroad and to promote a mutual interchange of knowledge and ideas with other peoples;

to encourage the study and use of the English Language;

to enable students from overseas to undertake courses of educational and industrial training in the United Kingdom; and

to bring other peoples in closer touch with British ideals and practice in education, industry and government, to make available to them the benefits of current British technology and to offer them opportunities of appreciating contemporary British work in the fine arts, drama and music.

Thus it cannot be said too soon that the business of the British Council is not merely relations with other countries but cultural relations. A statement of its early aims and objects reads as follows:

- to promote abroad a wider appreciation of British culture and civilisation, by encouraging the study and use of the English language and thereby, to extend a knowledge of British literature and of the British contributions to music and the fine arts, the sciences, philosophic taught and political practice;

- to encourage both cultural and educational interchanges between the United Kingdom and other countries and as regards the latter, to assist the free flow of students from overseas to British seats of learning, technical institutions and factories, and of United Kingdom students in the reserve direction;

- to provide opportunities for maintaining and strengthening the bonds of the British cultural tradition through out the self-governing Dominions.

- to ensure continuity of British education in the Crown Colonies and Dependencies.

If allowance is made for the change in status of ‘the Crown Colonies and Dependencies’ and of their consequent relationship to Great Britain, these words still serve as a fair description of the aims and objects of the British Council. In 1977, British Council, Saunders and Broome summarise the broad objectives of the Council as:
• to promote a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom among countries abroad;
• to promote a wider knowledge of the English language;
• to develop closer cultural relations between the United Kingdom and other countries; and
• to administer the United Kingdom’s educational aid programme

Over the years, the very nature of the British Council as an extended arm of cultural work, though independent, has been pulled it many directions as a result of the shift in the government policies. Still, even after 70 years, the strategic objectives of the British Council read as:

• to build appreciation of the UK’s creativity and scientific innovation among people overseas, and to strengthen their engagement with the diversity of UK culture;
• to increase international recognition of the range and quality of learning opportunities from the UK, to promote the learning of English and to strengthen educational co-operation between the UK and other countries; and
• to enhance awareness of the UK’s democratic values and processes, and to work in partnership with other countries to strengthen good governance and human rights

4.6.1 The Pre-War Years

In its first few years, the Council’s operations focused mainly on Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, its main activities being the sponsoring of modest exhibitions, music tours, book presentations and visiting lecturers schemes. The Council opened its first overseas offices in 1938 and its operations expanded rapidly all around the world during, and particularly after, the Second World War (1939-45).

The British Council set up its overseas British Council offices working at first through British embassies and High Commissions and the first one was at Cairo. When it first started out, the initial work of the British Council was despatch of books and periodicals to 14 countries and formation of specialist committees and the first to be set up was a 4-man books and periodicals committee under John Masefield. The main function was to make recommendations regarding books, periodicals, etc. for societies, libraries and institutions on the recommendation of British diplomatic missions overseas. In
1936, the mission of the Council was re-defined as: "Selection of English books and periodicals, both general and technical, for presentation to English libraries of British Institutes, foreign universities and Foreign - British societies abroad, establishment of new libraries in all important cultural centres where none exist. Exhibition of British Books Abroad; Book Fairs." 30

The establishment of criteria of suitability of the print materials to be supplied was another issue to be tackled. An advisory ‘Panel of Book Selectors’ was set up to side-step this problem and the panel members were entrusted with the task of preparing lists of newly published works in their respective fields and passing judgment, when required, on their suitability. The Panel included eminent personalities like Ivor Brown, Prof. R.J. Coupland and Prof. Daniel Jones. It also gave guidance on periodicals. Such specialist committees were to become a permanent feature of the structure of the British Council, although today they have only a purely advisory function.

In his perceptive study of British publicity and propaganda overseas between the wars, Dr. Philip Taylor suggests that "the Council's main achievement prior to the outbreak of the Second World War was that of survival" 31 and this is certainly true of its work with books and periodicals. The majority of pre-war presentations went to foreign educational, professional or research institutions or to Anglo-Foreign institutes usually established for the study and teaching of English and the Anglophil Societies. In addition to this, new British Institutes were also set up under effective control of Council employees. This was regarded "as the normal method of developing Council activity in any area where there was not an indigenous Anglophil Society" 32. By March 1940, it was reckoned that there were 23 ‘British Council Institutes’ in Europe and the Near East, with another four expected to open shortly 33.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to see the pre-war presentations as totally at variance with the development of Council libraries. From the start, the new Institutes were intended to have libraries and reading rooms more or less under the Council control. They benefited most from these presentations and the essential purpose of these libraries was to support the teaching and study programmes of the Institutes. But they also enabled libraries like those in Lisbon (1938), Cairo (1938), Alexandria (1939),
Baghdad (1939) and Valetta (1939) to take off. These libraries in a way provided more of a basis for the subsequent development of a Council library network than anything else and there was a growing conviction among the powers-that-be that such libraries were "perhaps the most enduring form of all the work we (i.e. the Council) undertake." In short, the British Institutes in pre-war years functioned as centres of British studies interpreting British culture abroad. In a report of a tour of the Middle East, Ifor Evans, the Council's Education Director wrote that "British Council Institutes can alone give a meeting place for informal discussions and social contacts in these countries and British officials and businessmen. By its activities in education, in technical services, in presenting British methods...and by the supply of books, films and visual publicity the British Council can not only make Great Britain known but indicate that the whole of western civilisation can be known through British means and British personnel." Libraries were a normal feature of these Institutes and their supply was just one aspect of the massive wartime expansion of the Council 'printed word' activity; but before the war ended, a policy had emerged which greatly enhanced the priority given to library work, as well as significantly altering its pattern. The Anglophil societies were Associations of Friends of Britain, partially supported, although not created, by Council funds. These were founded mostly in Latin America where, generally by law, foreign-sponsored centres were not allowed. The libraries of the British Institutes were supported and operated by the British Council; those of the Anglophil societies, for the most part, were not.

4.6.1.1 Pre-War Developments, 1935-39

If one isolates the papers recording the history of the British Council up to the outbreak of war in 1939, with their constant re-iteration of the themes of quality and the need for slow growth towards a long-term objective, they give a picture of out-of-this world innocence which suggests that the officials of the Foreign Office and the many distinguished men serving the British Council -which included great names like Lionel McColvin (Books and Periodicals Committee) and Lord (George) Lloyd (who succeeded Eustace Percy as the Chairman of British Council) - were all equally unaware that a war of unknown proportions was now almost upon them. This,
however, is a question of perspective. Lloyd’s major pre-occupation was to increase British influence in areas vital to her interests in the event of war.

The truth was that the original conception of the Council’s functions was being superseded by another. The Council was no longer expected merely to rescue British prestige from neglect; it had to defend that prestige from deliberate attack. In a speech quoted by Colin Forbes Adam, Lloyd said: “Our cultural influence is, in fact, the effect of our personality on the outside world. What most interests the outside world, beyond the fact of our power, is the use to which that power will be put. The answer to the question lies deep in our national character—a character which many, even our friends, have misunderstood and our opponents have been concerned to misinterpret. All the more reason that we should give the world free access to our civilization, and free opportunity to form its own judgment on our outlook and motives...... we have in many places a wary and critical audience to convert but our opponents’ lack of discretion has worked largely in our favour. Everywhere we find people turning with relief to the less insistent and more reasonable cadences of Britain. We do not force them to ‘think British’, we offer them the opportunity of learning what the British think”.39

The concluding sentence is a very telling one, revealing the complete transformation in the government’s attitude to cultural propaganda. This was partly due to the small beginnings made by the British Council and its reluctance to venture into ‘oppressive and one-sided propaganda’ which others like Germany, Italy and Russia were indulging in.

4.6.2 Emergence of the Libraries as the Key Institution: Shift from Institutes to Libraries

The 1940s saw the British Council’s role as ‘agent’ expanding. Book Export Scheme was launched in 1940 to stimulate the sale of British books and periodicals by using the Council machinery. Government support/ grants-in-aid steadily increased
from an initial £6000 in 1935 to £15,000 in 1936, £60,000 in 1937, £130,000 in 1938 and £386,000 in 1939. The Council’s “books effort” was also expanding to include activities such as

- provision of the Secretariat for the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education’s Books and Periodicals Commission.
- administrative responsibility for the Inter-Allied Book Centre in London
- answering of bibliographical enquiries from abroad
- extension of library work to the Colonies
- interchange of scientific and learned publications with other countries and,
- as agents for the distribution of periodicals for the Ministry of Information.

Mrs. D. A. Ormrod was the Director, Books Department from 1940 until early 1946 and she was the first one to advocate for professional standards and professional supervision for Council libraries. She was the very first trained British Librarian ever to have been recruited by it. She was convinced of the Council’s need both for subject specialists and for qualified librarians. Ormrod, along with Joan Harmston, set about creating bibliographic aids for Books and Periodicals department.

Early in 1940, the Committee had ruled that “the freedom of choice of books ... can no longer be maintained under war-time conditions and that the choice of books would now lie either with the Council Representative or with Books and Periodicals Department.” Towards the end of the war, a new Libraries Sub-committee was formed to advise Books Department on library policy. Unwin was the Chairman and Ormrod, Secretary.

There was certainly a growing concern with library matters and gradually qualified librarians came to be appointed to Council posts overseas. Ormrod was quick to sense the need for qualified and experienced librarians to manage British Council libraries. Ideally what was needed were trained British Librarians in London and in all overseas offices. But the immediate requirement was for a Libraries Officer at
headquarters empowered “to initiate and co-ordinate library policy in the Council’s work and to guide with expert advice the librarians of Council centres abroad”\textsuperscript{41}. But Ormrod saw that the Council, with its need constantly to adjust a changing balance of priorities and demands and moreover to reach a consensus between the views of headquarters and those of the workers in the field, could not relinquish control of policy to a home-based specialist.

A confidential memorandum covering all areas of Council activity, prepared in 1944, predicted that “an increasing importance will attach to the library services rendered by the Council”. While the British Librarians overseas were trying to bring order from chaos, those at home were planning for the peaceful times ahead. The vision had already been put in place: a new role was visualised for the Council library both in cultural projection and as a model role of good library practice and it predicted the ‘very large proportions’ which Council library work was likely to take on in the Colonies.\textsuperscript{42}

The memorandum submitted by Ormrod can be considered the first clear indication of what was, in broad terms, to be the approach of Books Department towards library policy for many years to come. The scheme had two essential components. \textbf{She submitted that there should be a full-fledged permanent English library in each country with the primary function of a reference library and information centre along with a regularly replenished Central Book Depot which would provide loan collections to various outlets.} The second suggestion was that \textbf{everything should be under the care of fully qualified staff.} This would make it possible to evolve a ‘planned policy’ for library work in the country concerned. Ormrod was of the opinion of the personnel in charge of operations. According to her, they had virtually no training or even any knowledge of the functions and resources of Books Department.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{All this was against the concept of the Council Library as an integral part of an Institute.} The proposal, in a way, questioned the dominant role of presentations in the Council’s books work. There was now a move to reduce the presentations to
individuals and institutions. Instead, the Council was asked to “make its primary concern the establishment in each country of either a really good central reference library, or, in countries where the national library system is highly developed, good institute libraries to supplement the national libraries” [44]. The Council’s Annual report for 1944-45 also confirms this shift in the emphasis from institutes to libraries, from book presentations to central libraries and from a few beneficiaries to a large number. The central library would serve the British Institute in the capital city and any other British Council centres in the country. In due course of time, the library would, through the libraries of their own institutions, act as a lending library for the benefit of students, research workers and professional men and women.” [45]

The policy was to set up an office, headed by a Representative, in each country, freeing itself from local rivalries and representatives. About 50 Council libraries were established along these lines between 1945 - 48, out of which 35 were in Europe, and most of them had well-trained staff and suitable premises.

### 4.6.3 War & the Council Libraries

There were doubts about the Council’s ability to find sufficient resources to meet all the challenges and demands of post-war Europe and the wider world. But Ormrod overruled the objections and declared that library would be an integral part of the Council’s work and one of the most cogent outward expressions of it, which is true even now. There was no other way to serve the Council’s essential work without a British Library. Gradually, a string of libraries were opened in Paris, Latin America and the Middle East and the British Council libraries were no longer a concept that had been developed to meet the challenges of post-war Europe. These libraries, managed by experienced London-appointed librarians, were designed to supply books on loan to institutes, clubs and ultimately, schools and other educational institutions. The librarians were to deal with educational matters and students, science, music, medicine, films and a host of such fields and through their contacts, promote British life, thoughts and culture.
This can be considered a turning point in the Council's library work since it is from this point onwards that the role of overseas British Council Librarian assumes different dimensions. The Council Officers overseas were expected to be 'generalist' jack-of-all trades, employed on the basis of the willingness to turn their hand to most things as needed. It was decided in principle that when the Council had a library abroad, it should also have a trained librarian to run the library in general and to implement the instructions from headquarters in particular.46

The Books Department still had a prominent role in determining library policy overseas. Similarly in practice, until about 1948, most books were selected at headquarters. The overseas librarians started voicing their protests against such policies. They conferred that since their libraries and their requirements differed from the Country Library System in England, only the Representative and his Institute Directors could rightly judge and decide what was best suited for them. They asserted that they should be entrusted with the formulation of library policy and book selection of their regional libraries.

The headquarters was asked to reconsider the stance that a standard collection, selected in London, would serve the needs of Institutes and Centres worldwide. Moreover, selecting and procuring books for the increasing number of overseas libraries was also becoming a heavy task for the under-staffed Books Department. In spite of all these problems, the Council did its best to post at least one qualified British librarian at each country which had one or more Council libraries.

The war, along with challenge and change, provided an opportunity for rapid expansion also to the Council. When the war ended, it naturally opened the door for further expansion in Europe and Asia but it also brought in a bleak financial climate, made worse by the not-so-friendly Ministry. The Council's activity in Colonies was not directly affected but the library work ran into difficulties.
4.6.4 Post-War Developments (1946-54)

When the war ended, the first concern of Books Department was the establishment of Council libraries in Europe and the Middle East, through which it hoped to spread a general knowledge of Britain and the British way of life and to serve specialists, all by adapting to local needs. The Council had now come to accept the fact that each country had different needs and therefore demanded differential selection of books and periodicals at home and flexible librarianship abroad.47 There was now a marked move from presentation to the central library concept and this started showing positive signs in places like Prague, Vienna and Spain.

By 1950, the Council had control of a library system which is geographically the most extensive that the world has yet seen. The move towards the central library concept continued, mainly due to purely economic factors. The Council realised that the only way to deal with the demand for British Books was by building up adequate and rounded collections on its own premises and to make them available by a variety of methods to those who needed them. Though this was uneconomic in the early post-war years, the central library had positive heuristic virtues and made it of great value to the Council. The thrust was now on “the oneness of human knowledge and the humanity of all scholarship.”48

But the sailing was not going smooth for the Books Department at the headquarters. The Books Export Scheme was wound up in January 1947. The newly-formed Central Office of Information (COI) which had taken over most of the Council’s extensive work in publishing and film production and the whole of its book export effort was not interested in undertaking the task of book procurement for the Books Department. Thanks to the timely intervention of the Treasury, the Stationery Office was persuaded to take up the job but the Council’s freedom to choose the supplier was curtailed. The Council’s scope was, in a way, being restricted to ‘educational and cultural work alone.’
4.6.4.1 Definition Document (1946)

In 1946, the Foreign Office put out a circular defining the work of the Council. This so-called Definition Document was necessitated by the Government decision to maintain and indeed to extend the network of information offices and libraries attached to British diplomatic missions, which had grown up ad hoc during the War. The object of the document was to prevent overlap between these information services and the Council, which was expected in the future to confine itself to specialist audiences and not attempt to address the general public. However, the Council was allowed to maintain libraries when it was essential for its other works' success. The Council was not to enroll members of the public as its members. But the document exhorted the Council to “make every effort to attract such users ... with an educational purpose in mind and the objective then would be not a service of information but books”. Joint libraries were recommended with the active participation of the Council and the Information Officer, the former choosing and supplying materials on 'cultural subjects' and the latter, on 'political subjects'.

Though this evoked much confusion at that time, in retrospect, it will be seen that the Document did not much affect the functioning of the Council libraries. In practice, the restriction on providing 'a service of information' for the general public did not inhibit the development of a reference service. On the other hand, it went on to re-affirm Document's effect on the development of British Council Libraries that the Council libraries could never exclude the general public. The Foreign Office finally came around to the Council's view that a proper library and properly trained librarian were both essential if they were to embark on large-scale educational work. Still there had been no substantial increase in the number of joint library since 1952 though there were about 18 joint libraries and 67 purely Council libraries by then.

The Council could come out of the 'definition' exercise with its library work mostly unscathed and the credit for this goes to General Sir Ronald Adam, the Council’s new Chairman. He was in no doubt as to the importance of libraries: "My experience of
education in the Army over the last five years has shown me that **no educational work can be carried on satisfactorily without a proper library and that no library is any good without a librarian...when we are engaged in educational work on a large scale, it will be essential to have a library...(and) a properly trained librarian to manage this...**" 53. Finally the Foreign Office did agree that libraries and librarians were essential. The possibility of the work of ‘definition’ taking libraries and librarians off the Council’s agenda vanished. 54

### 4.6.4.2 Barnicot’s Era

The task of producing a code of principle and method for a global network of libraries was undertaken by J.D.A. Barnicot who became the Director of the Council in 1946 after Ann Ormrod’s departure. He was able to establish the professional authority of Books Department and its consequent role in the management of Council libraries. By 1952, it had been accepted that **country library policy was a matter to be jointly determined by the Representative and Books Department but with the latter laying down general principles.** This sort of authority was built up not only to keep representations without librarians on the rails but also to support librarians in their ‘professional clash’ with the Representatives. Barnicot also initiated a system whereby a separate annual report on library work was to be submitted by each representation. This strengthened the libraries because they could thus produce technical justifications for their work. This also reinforced the professional authority of the Books Department and its direct links with the overseas librarian.

Another matter to be settled was the question **whether the Council libraries should charge for their services.** In the true public library tradition, these libraries were also supposed to offer their services free and there were even some, like McColvin, who firmly believed that setting up a good British Council Library in a foreign country was ‘the best possible demonstration of how it can give its own people freedom, truth, tolerance and understanding.’ Many Council libraries had already introduced fees and Barnicot put an end to the vexed question by recommending that
charges should be made only if the local conditions demanded it. But in view of the reduction in the Council’s funds, library subscriptions became an attractive source of revenue. Finally in 1954, owing to financial pressures, it was decided to introduce subscriptions throughout Europe.

Barnicot’s tenure is remarkable for the attempts at standardisation. He produced a series of documents to regularise and standardise Council library practice with regards to classification, cataloguing, stock and book selection. There was a growing desire to promote co-operation between Council libraries. A policy regarding book selection was also evolved during 1952. The Office Circular No. 156 (1 Oct 1952) gave a clear directive on priorities, indicating the subject areas which all libraries should cover and those which were optional, the choice depending upon local policy and need. The Definition Document of 1946 had earmarked English Language and British drama, fine arts, literature and music as ‘cultural subjects’ and British civilization and institutions as ‘general subjects.’ These subjects were now stipulated as integral part of the collection, to be adequately represented in Council libraries. Then there were ‘optional subjects’ like philosophy, science, medicine and educational theory, which might or might not be included in the collection, depending on local demand, relevance and priorities. Similarly, detailed rules were laid down about the exclusion of books by foreign authors, politically undesirable books and religious books. The British authorship was normally a pre-requisite but books published outside Britain were also admissible. Children’s sections were also not encouraged.

The guidelines laid down in the circular were applicable only to operations in foreign countries and in Commonwealth countries though in cases where there was no other public library as in Hong Kong the Council library was allowed to reflect a more general range of subjects.

The document’s greatness lies in its anticipated subtlety. It allowed the maximum possible freedom of choice; at the same time it answered every question likely to arise in library work. A supreme example of the law-making skills of John Barnicot, its thrust
area was book selection and the author saw to it that there were no loopholes left behind. Most of the guidelines are still being observed in the British Council libraries.

4.6.4.3 Post-War Period: Cuts and Closures

In the post-war years the Council witnessed some drastic cuts in Government funding and also the closing down of some of its operations overseas. Between 1948 and 1954, the number of oversees librarians dwindled from 38 to 14. But the Council quickly learned to take unpredictable funding and redundancy in its stride and showed resistance. As a result there was no corresponding decline in the number of libraries. Interestingly it rose from 86 in 1947 to about 107 in 1950, again fell to 98 in 1952 and 90 in 1955. There was relative stability and perhaps even as much as a three-fold increase in the total book stock.

However the period of forced economics certainly saw a marked and significant shift in the distribution of the Council libraries. There was a move away from Europe, as is evident from the fact that the number of Council Libraries in Europe in 1955 was 33 as compared to 50 in 1947. Political troubles, fear of confiscation and intensification of the Cold War forced the Council to close as many as 5 libraries in Eastern Europe and the 5 branches which the Council had opened in France were ‘on loan’ by 1954. The financial squeeze affected the library work in Latin America also where it almost completely collapsed. Barnicot had warned earlier that small collections of books had a remote chance of growing into full-fledged libraries since they would be the first casualties in the event of a declining budget.

4.6.5 Asian beginnings

The post-war years brought the first establishment of Council libraries in the Far East despite the financial cuts. Three libraries were set up in China between 1946 and 1949 but they were closed down in 1951/2 with the coming of the communist regime. Joint libraries were established in Burma and Thailand. The Council’s first library in Tokyo, Japan was opened in 1953 with a modest collection of British books and
periodicals donated by the United States Information Service and also from the Information Section of the British Embassy. In 1954, another library was opened in Kyoto and this time it had the collection from the closed-down Peking Library. Compared to these, the one opened in Bandung, Indonesia in 1950 was a success. There was now a growing enthusiasm for English as a language of higher education that was made compulsory second language in 1952. But British books were highly priced and were not readily available and this also contributed to the popularity of the Council Library in Bandung, which soon went on to be one of the busiest in terms of issues.

With the opening of Council Libraries in India, a new chapter was being written in the annals of the British Council. The British Council Library network in India is the largest operation in the network today. These libraries, 11 of them, beginning from Madras (which was opened in 1949/50) to Chandigarh (2001), have had a phenomenal growth.

The success also brought in local expertise. The flourishing growing operations in Pakistan and India were seen as an opportunity to have locally engaged indigenous librarians to manage the library services. John Makin, who came to India in 1950 to head the library operations there, realised that the Council Librarian would always be looked up to provide standard library service and he considered it an important part of his task to improve the standard of libraries, “particularly the professional prestige of his Indian colleagues.” Makin conducted refresher courses, training programmes and tours and seminars to make the Council’s work better known and also to develop local contacts, thus becoming a very visible, strong, local presence. The story in Pakistan was also no different. But the Council librarians found that the demand of Asia was quite different from that of Europe.

The post-war years saw a troubled climate in the Middle East. There were plans to build a new library in Jerusalem but the Council staff was evacuated from Palestine in 1948. In Egypt also, the Council’s work was still Institute-based. Unfortunately the Cairo Library had to close down for some time after it was burned down in the riots of
January 1952 and only 2 or 3 thousand out of a stock of 21,000 books could be salvaged. In spite of all, the libraries remained busy, buzzing with activities and knowledge-hungry readers.

By this time the Council was also finding it difficult to meet all the challenges, especially to recruit qualified librarians with the right calibre, attitude and perception, and above all, force of personality, who could deal with foreign specialists and intellectuals. Still the Council was fortunate to have a fully dedicated small band of overseas librarians who could deliver ‘the goods’ with the help of the bibliographical and inference back-up service so systematically built up at headquarters in the post-war years by Bernard Adams. Another aid available to the overseas librarian was the advisory visit of a British Librarian, the very first one being that by McColvin to the Middle East, Australia and the USA in 1946/7. All this was perhaps a re-affirmation of McColvin’s belief that “only a British-trained librarian can know and show what a British Library is and only he can deal effectively with British material and give an adequate information service”\(^5\). The Advisory visits are still the order of the day in the British Council Libraries, though not all the visiting librarians are “British trained librarians” now.

4.6.6 Work in Africa: 1943-56

The post-war period also witnessed a rapid expansion of the Council’s network in the British colonies. It was in the four West African colonies that the Council’s first ventures into public library development took place under the leadership of Hugh Paget, the Council’s first Representative there. Besides pressing for the creation of an adequate library service, he impressed upon the headquarters that the library development should be a major aspect of Council’s work in Jamaica. This resulted in a survey conducted by Nora Bateson and her report paved the way for the Council’s leading role in Jamaican library development\(^5\). Dr. H.G. Stewart, a Canadian Librarian who founded and directed Trinidad Central Library, also sought the help of the Council in building up the central library service later known as Regional Library Scheme, Trinidad. In 1945, the Council
took over its formal responsibility. The local authorities were to bear the running costs whereas the Council promised a continuing supply of books. In 1947, it was renamed as 'Eastern Caribbean Library Scheme'. In 1948, two British Librarians - Arthur Bryant and Sidney Walter Hockey - were appointed in Jamaica and Trinidad, respectively.

By this time, the Colonial Office, which had initially encouraged the Council to take a leading role in library development, had a change of mind and in its own Definition Document\textsuperscript{59}, ruled that "\textbf{it is not the function of the Council to establish or maintain general public libraries in the colonies.}" The Council was not to commit beyond assistance in making presentations, helping in local staff training or lending temporary help organise library services.

The change in the rules, thus set by the Colonial Office’s Definition Document, marked the beginning of the end or the Council’s first ventures into public library movement. What had been the ultimate aim, namely transferring libraries to the colonies as a ‘growing concern’, was converted into an immediate aim, though the Council could prolong its association with Jamaica a little longer\textsuperscript{60}.

But the good work was continued by Hockey and his team. After about five years of policy, struggles and practical work, each island in the Caribbean had the basic organisation of a Central Library Service. The Council relinquished all responsibility for the Eastern Caribbean Scheme in 1953, very much against its will and the scheme petered out during the 1960s.

It was a different story altogether for the Jamaica Library Service, having been built on a firmer basis than its Eastern Caribbean counterpart, Bryant’s priority was for building up library services in the country districts and by March 1951, the number of ‘outlets’ had increased to 27 (from 18 in 1950). It was then decided to open no more branch libraries but instead, to concentrate on providing ‘Book Centres’, with collections of 200-500 books, manned by volunteers. Lack of funds continued to be a problem but gradually, with more funds from the Government, the service developed.
To the Council Trinidad and Jamaica were two sides of the same coin, and Trinidad, was a warning as to what would happen if the Council committed itself to something and to a stated financial input without first obtaining any corresponding commitment from the governments concerned. It is this practical wisdom, the need for matching undertakings by host governments that underlies all the overseas operations of the British Council now. A note written in 1947 recalls that at the end of 1944, the Council had undertaken to place technical advice and the services of its organisation at the disposal of colonial governments and also to train library staff, while the provision of suitable accommodation and the long-term maintenance of public libraries, were to be responsibility of the Governments. One such success story was that of the Gold Coast Library Service, founded by Evelyn Evans, the best known librarian ever to have worked as a British Council officer. This deserves special mention since it provided an inspiration and a model for future ventures into library development, including those of the Council itself, particularly to the need for library legislation as a precursor to development. 53 (Coombs) Another name to be remembered in connection with the Council's library development is Roy Arthur Flood, who served the Council for 33 years from 1947 and was one of the central influences on the Council's library work 61.

4.7.0 A Change of Direction (1954-70) 62

Between 1955 and 1965, the Council libraries continued to retreat from Europe and the number of libraries there dwindled from 33 in 1955 to 25 in 1965 but those elsewhere, excluding the 'associated libraries', had more than doubled- from about 50 in 1955 to 103 in 1965. In many of the developing countries, the library found itself the standard-bearer of the Council's educational mission. The emphasis was on the provision of vocationally useful material, to provide course materials and reading space for both college and 'private students', where there was inadequate library provision. In a few countries, the conventional Council libraries were abandoned in favour of 'teachers' centres'.

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The Drogheda Report\textsuperscript{63, 64} submitted in 1953 by the independent Committee of Inquiry into the Overseas Information Services, under the chairmanship of the Earl of Drogheda, ushered in a change in the Council’s fortunes and also funding of its book work. It displayed genuine understanding of the way in which the various aspects of the Council’s work supported each other and also of the importance of books and libraries in this interplay. Libraries, it declared, were the essential core of all British Council centres abroad and it was imperative that the supply of books, periodicals and display material for libraries and reading rooms be restored. The Committee was convinced that the Council’s existing constitution was the right kind of body to pursue this kind of activity. The downward trend was halted and indeed reversed and the Report also helped to reorient the Council towards a considerably effective manner of spending its funds and was also a move away from cultural work in developed countries to ‘educational’ work in the developing world. This meant a reversal of the post-war policy of concentrating on Europe. But then the Council was already heavily involved in library development work in the colonies and this change of direction was to be the central feature in the years to come.

The Drogheda Report, contrary to the Colonial Office Definition Document of 1948, removed the restrictions imposed on Council assistance to public library development in the colonies. In the first place it proclaimed the dichotomy of ‘education’ and ‘culture’ at which the Definition Document had only inadvertently hinted. Secondly, both the documents stimulated and validated a gradual loosening of governmental purse strings. Finally, it confirmed the change in geographical priorities which was already under way. “Hard times were coming to an end, but there had been a change of direction.”\textsuperscript{65} New priorities were established and the end of the 1960s saw some significant changes of emphasis - a higher profile in Europe and a new look at the role of the Council libraries in countries where they had no definite role. As a result, the Council started exploring the opportunities presented by advances in information science and its associated technology.
4.7.1 The Sinker Impact

Sir Paul Sinker succeeded Sir Ronald Adam in 1954 and it was he who moulded the Council in a form, which, today is still readily recognizable, to develop it as a practically effective organisation on the lines drawn in the Drogheda Report. He had a clear vision of the Council and where its principal targets should lie. He was instrumental in getting the Council concentrate attention “on people who in their respective spheres exercise, or are likely to exercise, influence, people who can use, and need to use, books and periodicals on their own special subject”66. Sinker was of the opinion that the Council should “seek to add strength to the strong, not rescue the weak ... appeal must be to those likely to influence opinion and not, except indirectly, to the mass.”

This shows a marked change in the Council’s direction and a shift from the public library but with a difference: it was becoming selective, since the Council’s purpose as well as circumstances was different. Similarly the charging of subscriptions, as a means of controlling membership, was also becoming acceptable, in spite of protests from stalwarts like McColvin, Barnicot and Sydney. For Sinker, the purpose of Council libraries was not to spread the gospel of the public library movement; they were an essential part of the Council’s ‘printed word’ work which, by helping to ensure that English reading matter is as widely available as possible, would support the Council’s two pre-eminent tasks - educational work, especially English language teaching and the cultivation of personal contacts with ‘people of actual or potential influence’67.

Sinker tried to bring about a change in the book selection policy too. He found the definition of the terms ‘cultural subjects’ and ‘the integral subjects’ as explicated by Barnicot who first drafted the Council’s policy on book selection, old-fashioned. He wanted the Council libraries to have a large proportion of books only those on subjects that conformed to his line.
### 4.7.2 Hill Report

Changing pattern of international relations and financial constraints have always affected the British Council. In 1956 the Council libraries were closed in Egypt, Syria and Jordan and the library was reopened in Cairo only in 1963. The institutes in Athens and Salonika were also shut down in the period 1956 - 57.

The Suez debacle of 1956 so altered Britain’s position in the world that the government was forced to turn to its neglected information services in an attempt to restore some of its lost prestige. This led to the appointment of Dr Charles Hill as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and his tenure saw the doubling of the Council’s grant and also the fastest expansion of its books and library work. His White Paper on the Overseas Information Services, the so-called Hill Report, published in 1957, contained five proposals, all of which dealt with books expansion:

- To revive the British Book Export Schemes for countries with foreign exchange difficulties
- To give assistance to British newspapers and periodicals to increase their circulation in difficult markets
- To promote the production of low-priced editions of a range of British books on sale in certain countries
- To authorize a further expansion of [Council] library services in several countries and to increase the Council’s resources for presentations of books and periodicals abroad
- To assist through the Council in the development of library systems in a number of Colonial territories, including the establishment of central libraries, regional branches, book vans and book boxes.
All proposals were accepted by the Government. The expansion of library services and of presentations resulting from Dr Hill’s initiative was, by British Council standards, a massive affair. The following figures (Table 4.1) show the increase in the book grants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Book Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958/9</td>
<td>99,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959/60</td>
<td>229,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969/70</td>
<td>463,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Book Grants, 1958 - 70

In 1959, British Books Overseas Advisory Committee was also created to advise the Council on matters pertaining to the export of printed material.

4.7.3 Changes in the British Council

Changes were taking place in the Council’s recruitment policy as well. Understaffing had always plagued the Council’s library activities and this was mainly due to the fact that the choice was always between sending material for the library or a professional librarian, but not both. This always resulted in most of its libraries being managed by a Council staff with logically ‘engaged staff’, mostly totally in experienced as librarians and none with the necessary background of knowledge of British books and the British way of life. Thus the Council libraries were performing only a fraction of what they could and it was during 1956-60 that steps were initiated to recruit more librarians for the Council work.

The Council’s annual reports of this period (1954 - 70) lay plenty of emphasis on the diverse nature of the library services around the world. The Council seems to be getting clearer about its objectives and also the composition of a British Council library,
especially its book collection which was to be a judicious, balancing mixture of the British and the local. The success stories during this period were that of the Council library at Greece (Athens) Iraq (Baghdad), Indonesia (Djakarta) and India. There was a good local studies collection, a proven attraction and there was much emphasis on library orientation programmes for the benefit of new members.

As for India, its phenomenal growth took place in gigantic stride. Between 1954 and 1970, as many as 8 branch libraries were opened in India and till date, the Council’s library operation in India remains the largest ever. Incidentally, the ELBS books (originally signifying English Language Book Society through subsequently also interpreted as Educational Low-Priced Books Scheme), a Hill initiative, was originally intended for India as substitute for the multiple textbook enterprise. Though there was much demand for these books, they were a drain on the Council’s resources and the scheme was wound up in India in 1969.

But Europe had a different story altogether. It can be safely said that expansion in the sub-continent and elsewhere had been achieved at the price of a continued retreat from Europe. Most of the long established libraries like Oslo, Stockholm and Brussels fell by the wayside. Still, there was a quality of usage in the remaining Council libraries like Vienna but even this was adversely affected by the mandatory introduction of subscriptions in Europe and gradually, these libraries adapted themselves progressively to the ‘Status of specialised centres of English studies and information on Britain and Commonwealth affairs.’

There was also much interest in the British example, especially in Germany, where the public library system was growing vigorously. This provided the Council with both a challenge and an opportunity - challenge, to make its own libraries true examples of the best British practice opportunity to proclaim the virtues of British librarianship by means of lectures, conferences, visits to Britain, training programmes etc. It had to be ‘efficient and had to present to its users a favourable example of modern library practice and organisation.’ With this changed the role of the Council librarian
as well. In the 1950s, the emphasis was on formal preparation for Library Association examinations, with a view to further training in Britain. The 1960s saw the Council playing a supporting role, contributing largely to professional training. More and more qualified librarians were sent to Britain to attend specialist courses and scholarships were made available for this purpose. But the Council libraries still suffered from shoestring budget and “the amateur approach” as Flood put it bluntly. Inadequate staffing still prevented the Council from achieving thorough professionalism and competence. Even so it is undeniable that the libraries were meeting needs not met by an indigenous service and were, in many ways, providing an example of what should be done.

4.7.4 Challenge of Information Provision

The challenge of information provision opened more doors to the Council in the late 1960s. There were various specialised information centres in Britain providing Current Awareness Service, information retrieval and photocopying services. The Council saw it as its duty to publicise and promote these and in 1968, an experimental scheme was started in Europe whereby books stocked by the National Lending Library for Science and Technology (NLLST) were made available through Council libraries and this process gradually made the Council the overseas arm of the British Library Lending Division (BLLD).

A conference of representatives from Europe in 1969 wanted to modernize the Council libraries, a view which found a supporter in Arthur King, the then Assistant Director-General of the British Council. It unanimously accepted that the Council libraries should be made into “a centre for the availability of specialist information in answer to requests ... more functional in the sense of serving an end not sub-served elsewhere in the library system in the country concerned” 72. It was this urge for change, which later led the Council libraries to library automation and inclusion of visual aids. However, at that time, there were serious misgivings about how librarians would cope with the challenge and move with the times. Barnicot’s remarks reflect this: “(I hope) that he (W.L Saunders, who was invited to join as the Council’s adviser) will advise the Council on how to turn librarians into books officers and/ or into information officers”.

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The Council librarians had faced many challenges since then; and every time it has been proved that the Council librarians, whether London-appointed or locally engaged, always rise to the occasion and accredit themselves in the best way possible.

Two important reports were also submitted in 1969: The Review Committee on Overseas Representation (or, the Duncan Committee Report) and British Council/ODM Working Party (or the Mark/Phillips Report). The former had only good to say of Council library work and recommended expansion for the Council. The latter recommended that the Council should in future have a say in the formulation of educational aid policy. It suggested that Council representatives in developing countries should be used as much as possible in the administration of such aid and should normally be regarded as educational advisers to the Ambassador or High Commissioner. It also recommended a partner’s role for the Council with regards to book promotion, which was later to lend a greater dimension to the Council’s Books Work, with the setting up of a Books Division in 1970 (later renamed as Libraries Department). According to Ferguson, who took over from Barnicot in 1970, this was a change intended to promote the idea that the Department was not merely a servicing agency occupied with the supply of material against orders, but a planning, coordinating and indeed, a supervisory office. This was also necessary because of the evolution of a new policy for libraries.

4.8.0 Last Steps in Library Development (1970-80)

4.8.1 Library Development in the 1970s

By the early 1970s, the British Council had become fully established as an arm of British diplomacy as well as a recognized organ of educational aid. Its value and potentialities were being widely understood and it was an essential part of government strategy in the negotiations for entry into the common market. The Council also had great enthusiastic supporters in Edward Heath, the then Prime Minister and Christopher Soames, the British Ambassador to France. The latter understood the possibilities of the
British Council but he believed that “to realise its full potential, the work of the British Council needs a substantial change - a change not in degree but of kind”.

There was now widespread recognition of the primary importance of books, periodicals and libraries to the advancement of literacy and to education generally - and hence to economic and social progress. What there was not and what was needed, was a “British Books Aid Policy”.

Consequently a Joint Council - ODM (Overseas Development Ministry, later known as Overseas Development Administration - ODA) Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) Working Party on Books, Periodicals and Libraries was set up under the chairmanship of Robert Washburn. Its attention was drawn, among other things, to the questions of ODM sponsorship of public library development work and of the provision of a pool of experts for such work. The Working Party also felt that “British Books Aid policy” required, first and foremost, the separate and adequate funding by ODA of a programme of book and periodical presentations, to be administered by the Council under the control of a ‘Coordinating Committee’ representing various agencies concerned with educational development overseas. In addition, the Low Priced Books Scheme was also to be expanded. It also recommended that the Public Library Development Scheme should be fully sponsored by ODA and that the annual allocation should be doubled. Based on the Working Party’s recommendations, “an expanded books aid programme” was announced in 1971.

All these meant that the Council and the Libraries Department in particular, were acquiring heavy, new responsibilities and there was a doubt among the Council's well-wishers that its own libraries - described as “the obvious focal points for any extended programme of books aid” by the Working Party - might be adversely affected as a result.

There had been no shortage, within the Council, of criticisms of its libraries in Europe and of suggestions for their improvement. Kenneth Humphreys, the Chairman
of the Libraries Advisory Panel, observed that reference services had been neglected, and in some cases, even information services were non-existent, in the Council libraries in Europe. Fortunately, for the Council, in March 1972, in the expectation of Britain’s entry into the European Community soon, the Heath Government made available special grant-called ‘Rippon Money’ - for the development of educational and cultural relations in Europe. The grant was of 6 million pounds, spread over four years, and more than half of this went to the Council to strengthen its work in Europe. The Rippon Money helped to refurbish or locate a number of libraries, to strengthen reference stocks, to promote staff training, to encourage contacts between British and European librarians, to build up specialised information centres in libraries, notably in Madrid and Milan and to encourage inter-lending, a sphere in which the Council had already established its position in some European countries. The Council was becoming more involved in actively promoting the lending and copying services, becoming the normal channel for the sale of NLLST (National Lending Library of Science and Technology) coupons in other countries.

The library as an integrated multimedia resource centre became official policy in the 1970s. In a document (1975) that was the first of its kind, Ray Snodin, the first Controller of Books Division, stressed the importance of developing information and reference services using the latest techniques and methods. “Libraries are less and less primarily a collection of books for loan and the main need is for the development of speedy and more comprehensive methods of information retrieval, increased book promotion, updating technique, concentrated training, the improvement of servicing from London and of premises overseas and possibly readjustment of local organisational structure”.

Nevertheless, progress towards its full realisation was decidedly slow. This was because of the misgivings on the part of overseas librarians who were reluctant either giving up their control by letting their ‘kingdoms’ absorbed into the Council Library or to take up the added responsibility required for such specialist work. However, contacts
between librarians were being encouraged, largely by supporting visits to and from
Britain, in the form of group study tours, lecture tours, consultancies, individual
programmes or attendance at conferences, courses or seminars, many of them organised
by the Council. A feature of Council Library work in the 1970s was the growth of this
‘exchange of persons’. According to Annual Reports, the number of British librarians
going abroad under Council auspices was 16 in 1974/5 and rose to 110 in 1979/80.
Similarly, the number of visitors to Britain shows a record leap from 70 in 1972/3 to
285 in 1976/77. 80, 81 It continues to expand.

4.8.2 Computer Applications

Another remarkable aspect of British Librarianship which the Council had been
assiduous in publicizing and promoting - but surprisingly, not practising themselves -
was the use of computers in libraries. In 1975, a Libraries Department Working Party
was set up to look into the feasibility of computer - based system to produce library
catalogues. Since there was no central cataloguing, there was much variation in the
quality and manner of cataloguing and classification between countries and even
between libraries in the same country. Moreover, there was an increasing demand
engendered by an economic need to make the holidays of Council libraries overseas
easily known to other libraries and an easy method of duplicating Council library
catalogues was required to meet this demand. 82, 83 Most libraries were, by this time,
receiving British National Bibliography cards but even that could not ensure effective

ITMARC was designed to convert the union catalogue of Council libraries in
Italy into machine-readable form and to produce a microfiche version, updated monthly.
The retrospective conversion, done manually, went a good deal more slowly than
planned. Monthly updates were produced, using the British Library’s Local Cataloguing
Service initially. From October 1977 onwards, a British Library Automated Information
Service (BLAISE) terminal lent by the British Library took over the job. It success
formed the basis for proposals for an in-house system designed to catalogue current
accessions to all Council libraries. This system, which was known as the Global Cataloguing Service (GCS) became operational in May 1980. Germany and Portugal received the first batch of catalogues produced by computer in London on the basis of order and despatch information.

The GCS had its fair share of teething troubles. There was considerable consumer resistance especially from the Council library staff overseas, due to conservatism or inertia. Things were not helped by the choice of computer printout, rather than microfiche, as format. This initial misjudgment was subsequently put right and all Council libraries were covered by the service by 1987. GCS died a natural death by the late 1990s, when, because of library automation and virtual networking of the Council libraries in a country, it was no longer relevant. The acquisition of a BLAISE terminal at Head Quarters in 1977 marks the beginning of in-house online information retrieval by the Council. Cologne was the first overseas library to follow suit in 1978 and then came Paris and Vienna in 1979. Since then there has been a steady spread of on-line facilities overseas. In some libraries, on-line retrieval is seen essentially as an adjunct to the bibliographical and reference assistance given to existing readers, in some others, it is promoted as a special service of particular interest to industry, business and commerce. Along with this, there has been an increasing emphasis upon the use of such retrieval to promote British databases like BookFind, especially in book selection and in most libraries; the services are charged a nominal fee.

The Council’s success story in the 1970s was that of India which accounted for between 50 and 60% of the Council’s global library issues. The day-to-day running of the libraries was fully in the hands of senior Indian librarians - there were only two London - appointed staff and more than half of the Council’s local staff in India were engaged in library and books work. However, the problems the success brought in were many and these are broadly outlined in the next chapter on ‘British Council Libraries in India.’
4.8.3 Reviewing the Situation

All these activities also produced a growing anxiety about standards and methods and there was a suggestion by Roy Flood, early in 1974, of an independent review of library and information work. There was also a concern about the sort of professional support from Libraries Department, which was needed overseas. Flood’s paper laid before the Panel on 17 July 1974, concluded with the reflection that future development of the Council’s library and information services if it were not to be piecemeal and uncoordinated required an overall view of the organisation and expert management planning. It also recommended a ‘Survey’ by a senior librarian, perhaps a member of the Panel, concentrating ‘on the relation of the Head Quarters organisation to the global library service and the aims of the library operation’.

There was also the growing importance attached to, first, an efficient headquarters back-up to information work overseas and secondly, to the development of multimedia resource centres or libraries. On both accounts, the Libraries Department upheld the view that the system needed an overhaul. It pointed out that there was no mechanism for the co-ordination of the various information services nor yet any clearly defined allocation of responsibility, often resulting in gaps and occasional duplication in information provision.

Another concern was the posture of Education and Science Division (ESD), which, in the Council’s Annual Report for 1973-74, claimed that the heart of the Division is a unified Education and Science Information Service. ESD went one-step ahead and issued a circular in 1976, offering advice on information / Resource Centres. This was definitely seen as a divisive course, a sort of introduction of a dichotomy into the Council. It was a normal extension of the library service and initiative; it should have come from the Libraries Department and not from a division. This was more than a struggle for power. If Libraries Department was sincere in believing that division of responsibility diminished effectiveness, there were those in ESD who were equally convinced that they knew better than the allegedly ‘traditional’ librarians how to run an
active information service. The latter believed that given the then existing Divisional structure, it would be dangerous to let Books Division, a traditional books/library operation, have power over ESD’s resources. They insisted that there was “an important distinction between library services with public access and lending facilities and operational information resources, such as Education and Science and other divisions maintain.”

All this was leading to a different kind of advisory pressures and organizational strains. Flood’s suggestion for ‘independent review of library information work’ was taken up in 1974 after the reorganization of Libraries Department, following the removal of its supply function. Saunders and Broome submitted their report, entitled, ‘Review of the Library and Information Services of the British Council’ in 1977.

4.8.3.1 The Saunders - Broome Review

This report is a landmark in the history of the British Council, representing as it does, the first comprehensive review ever undertaken of an area of activity that regularly accounts for about a fifth of the organization’s total budget. Essentially, it underlined the need for co-ordination of information provision at headquarters, for specialist training for Council librarians, for a more defined management role for Libraries Department and for the strengthening of its supervisory and advisory capacity. They strongly recommended the establishment of a central reference and information unit.

A Steering Committee under Assistant Director General Roderick Cavaliero studied the Review and submitted a report in 1978. The report endorsed the various statements of principle made by Saunders and Broome including the need to answer all enquiries made of the Council effectively and speedily and welcomed the recommendations concerned with training and the reorientation of libraries. There was also a rethinking on the Medical Library Information Service and the Central Library (formerly the Home Library). The former was excellent but Saunders and Broome had
queried whether it was appropriate for the Council to maintain it and the Steering Committee also questioned the appropriateness. As for the Central Library- the ‘residual’ headquarters recipient of enquiries and requests for about 30 years - Saunders and Broome had been unconvinced of its usefulness and the Steering Committee agreed. As a result, the Libraries Department started planning something smaller and more relevant to need. However, the Steering Committee rejected the major recommendation of Saunders and Broome - the creation of a central reference and information unit.

Naturally, this disappointed Saunders and Broome. In their view, “the Council will not be getting value for money from the vast information potential of its headquarters until it accepts the need for a total, overall information policy and strategy for Spring Gardens (British Council’s Headquarters)”, central to which should be “the existence of the cadre of library / information specialists receiving professional direction from some sort of central unit such as that which we proposed.” Roy Flood, in a forthright “Minority Report” which he added to the Steering Committee Report, also voiced similar sentiments. According to Flood, the Steering Committee had not really dealt with this point and besides, had conveyed ‘an ambivalent attitude towards Saunders and Broome’s concept of the role of Libraries Department, which was “a more positive management role involving research and development and innovation and providing leadership in library and information work.”

Still, the significant single contribution of Saunders and Broome was that they could increase the Council’s own awareness of the importance of its library and information work. Their wish was certainly to achieve this: “Library and Information services have in the past perhaps been less effectively organised than they might have been, despite the central role, which they have to play in the Council’s affairs - possibly because the importance of this role has never been fully appreciated. It is our hope that this report will assist in securing for them the recognition which is their due.”

When all these came up before a new inter-departmental committee on 24 April 1979, Cavaliero remarked, “while there might be no strong support within the Council
for a centralised information service, the most expensive resource was personal and there was too much evidence that the Council was not properly coordinating and planning its use of this resource." 94

Nevertheless, the 1979 cuts, which took place just 9 days later, brought a radical change of climate to these deliberations and it destroyed the last chance of the increase in resources for which Saunders and Broome had hoped. But it made it possible to accomplish the formation of a Central Information Service. Central Information Service was set up on 1 April 1980, bringing together the information staff from ESD and ELLD with Information and Bibliographical unit of Libraries Department. The new service was free-standing, non-divisional department, reporting directly to an Assistant Director-General. Many of the information workers continued to carry at their operational duties within the specialist department but with professional control exercised by the Service's Director. Their recommendations were to take new shape much later, in the 1980s.

It was the climate engendered by the Saunders - Broome Report which helped the Council's new Director General, John Burgh, faced with an 18% cut of the core budget spread over four years, to proclaim that one of the Council's two 'core activities', 'in all countries, large or small, developed or developing', was the provision of information about Britain." 95

4.8.3.2 Berrill Report 96

In 1977, the same year Saunders and Broome submitted their review on the library and information services of the British Council, another report was to make a great impact and it almost closed down the Council's overseas offices/libraries. In fact, the efforts of Saunders and Broome were temporarily put in the shade by the CPRS (Central Policy Review Staff otherwise known as the Think Tank) Review of Overseas Representation. Sir Kenneth Berrill was Head of the CPRS at the time and he was asked by James Callaghan, the then Foreign Secretary, to review the entire range of foreign
policy requirements, both at home and overseas, and to consider what the future pattern of their overseas work should be.

The terms of reference of above was "to review the nature and extent of our overseas interests and requirements and in the light of that review to make recommendations on the most suitable, effective and economic means of representing and promoting those interests both at home and overseas. The review will embrace all aspects of the work of overseas representation, including political, economic, commercial, consular and immigration work, defence matters, overseas aid and cultural and information activities, whether these tasks are performed by members of the Diplomatic Service, by members of the Home Civil Service, by members of the Armed Forces or by other agencies financially supported by the Government."

With regards to the Overseas Services, according to James Callaghan, "the work they do have been done well and often outstandingly well, but the purpose of this review is to examine whether the tasks themselves may require to be changed."

From the beginning, there had been doubts about the suitability of the Think Tank for this particular task. They persisted until the end and the Council had its own misgivings about the whole exercise. It appeared that the Think Tank had only a minimum knowledge of what the customer wanted. Begun early in 1976, the Review culminated in a Report (Berrill Report) published in August 1977. It is a massive document dealing with an enormous range of government services. The pessimism concerning Britain's future and the radical nihilism of the recommendations about the Council were characteristic of the whole report. The authors were sceptical about the value of cultural influences in international relation." Chapter 12 is devoted to educational and cultural work and deals not only with the British Council but also with the work of the Technical Education and Training, Organisation for Overseas Countries (TETOC), the Inter-University Council (IUC) and the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchange (CBEVE). As far as the Council was concerned, the report made two alternative recommendations. The Council should be abolished altogether, or, if
not, it should cease, for the most part, to have an overseas presence separate from
diplomatic mission and should operate on a considerably reduced scale. ‘Books aid’,
including assistance to library development, was approved of, but the CPRS team was
‘less convinced that it was necessary to provide British Council libraries on such a large
scale as at present.’ According to them

‘The libraries had a case for them as part of the aid programme in the poorer
developing countries; but even so...there may be scope for considerably increasing
the BPP (Books Presentation Programme) for handing over the libraries to be run
by appropriate bodies in the countries concerned.’

In most rich developing countries, the provision of libraries should be on a Paid
Educational Service (PES) basis, with the costs borne by the country concerned.

As for developed countries, since it was possible either to purchase British books
or to read them in libraries, consideration should certainly be given to closing
down Council libraries.

The Council libraries should however be retained in the Soviet bloc ‘where the
purchase of British books may be more difficult.98

The basic message about Council libraries in developing countries was a simple
one: give them away to those who cannot afford them, sell them to those who can.

With very few exceptions, the CPRS report was received on all sides with
expressions of outrage and dismay. The British Council by now “went into a state of
collective shock”99. However, it was quick to point out that it was unrealistic to suggest
handing Council libraries over to poor developing countries that did not have the staff
or funds to run them100. Moreover the British Council had already started to develop
British educational services overseas in the mid - 1970s as a self-financing activity and
the proposition of the Think Tank to market and manage such activities was in fact only
extension of what the Council had already been doing.
The PES approach did not find any favour with the Council since it believed that rich countries would not pay for them. Sir John Llewellyn, the then Director-General of the British Council, rejecting this and the other recommendations on Council libraries, pointed out that these libraries had to serve the ends of the Council and not just seek revenue. Llewellyn’s remark was reinforced by Peter Tahourdin, the then Deputy Director-General: “The library is very often not a concept of Boots handing over Agatha Christie or Len Deighton across a counter, it is the resources centre. It is essential, first of all, to our officers to conduct their work properly. It is essential to give a picture of those areas in which Britain excels, those areas which can gain us influence. It is a continually changing concept. In my 31 years with the Council I have seen libraries change in different areas in different ways, and they are changing continuously.”

‘Change’ had been the keyword for the British Council right from its inception. Though the Berrill Report was laid quietly to rest in August 1978, the furore it created remained with the Council. Ever since the 1940s, Council librarians had tended to regard presentations as not, by themselves, a particularly effective way of getting books into the hands of the readers. Another one was the Public Library Development Scheme (PLDS) for which ODA had assumed full financial responsibility in 1972. The basic assumption underlying the PLDS was that the systematic development of efficient library services was an essential concomitant of presentation. Now the Council librarians were forced to take up presentation scheme as one of their major tasks. PLDS could remain solely, ‘public’ but BPP could not be used to assist public libraries but ‘primarily to the libraries of tertiary educational institutions’.

The result of the Berrill Report, remembered as the greatest threat to the British Council in its history, was a sharp reduction in government funding up to the mid-1980s, leading to reduction in activity and closures overseas and in the UK. Ten of the 25 UK regional offices were closed in 1981 and the cut did not spare the Overseas Students’ Centre in Portland Place, London. In the same year, TETOC, which provided
advice on technical education, industrial training, agricultural education, management and public administration, also merged with the British Council.

The degree of overlap between the works of these two bodies had been under discussion for many years, particularly at the time of the Phillips/Thomas Review of the relations between ODA (then known as ODM) and the Council. The Berrill Report also had made recommendations for rationalising the position and had proposed as one opinion that TETOC and IUC should be incorporated in the British Council. Of these two, it was proposed to transfer most of the work of TETOC to the British Council and in some cases to ODA. Concerning IUC, since the CPRS was of the view that its objective had been largely accomplished, it was decided to rationalise support for tertiary education. Ultimately, a new Higher Education Division responsible for Higher Education Links and Exchanges was created through the absorption of the IUC.\footnote{105}

The establishment of the Higher Education Division within the British Council was the outcome of the natural desire of the specialised staff within the merging bodies to escape redundancies. In the case of IUC, the new arrangement made it necessary to envisage special relationship being set up between the universities, polytechnics, other institutions, the British Council, and the establishment of a recognisable unit with staff drawn from both the IUC and the British Council. The British Council officers were to co-ordinate and execute programmes of work. The Board of the British Council also approved the creation of the Standing Committee, answerable to the Board but acting as a link between the Council and the collective body of universities and polytechnics. The Chairman of this Committee was to be a member of the Council Board as well. Negotiations went on and both mergers were completed in 1981.

4.8.3.3 Seebohm Report

It is in this context the Seebohm Report (1981) assumes significance. The report, undoubtedly the most important review of the structure, financial control and administration of the British Council ever undertaken, was also the first major review of
specifically British Council problems, all previous reviews having been of the Overseas
Information Services generally. Its terms of reference were to examine (i) the role and
composition of the board (and its advisory bodies), its relationship with the sponsoring
department of state, and the chief executive of the Council and the extent to which it
should monitor the attainment of agreed Council objectives; (ii) the financial
management and funding of the Council and (iii) the manpower recruitment, levels and
structure and the extent to which they provide for the efficient and economical staffing
of the Council.  

The Seebohm Report touched on various aspects of the Council’s activities like
Books Presentation Programme, PES and also its staffing, salary structure and financial
management. Since these are outside the purview of the subject under study, only those
recommendations that have a direct bearing on the libraries are mentioned here.

Unlike Berrill’s team, Seebohm’s had a clearer and better idea of the British
Council. In fact, the latter was briefed on this by Sir Michael Palliser: “... the team ... should bear in mind that the British Council is an indispensable agent of British cultural
diplomacy and technical co-operation. In our view this places on the Council the
difficult responsibility of maintaining, despite its independence from government, the
ability to respond to changes and nuances in the overall foreign policy (including aid
policy) of the government of the day ... Naturally this is a two-way process. I think that
in the past we have succeeded remarkably well in ensuring a harmonised approach, but
... it is important that we should continue to keep in step.”

The report was presented in March 1981. It made 85 recommendations/suggestions. Of these, 6 concerned the Council’s relations with government
departments, 10, the role and composition of the Board; 5 were on the role of the
advisory committee and panels, 12 on management below Board level, 22 on the
financial management and funding of the Council, 9 on the scope for broadening the
financial base of the Council and 21 on the Council’s manpower. Some of the
contentious passages in the Report occur in the first section, titled “The Council’s
Relations with Government Departments’ and the authors appear to be critical of both the sponsoring departments and the authors appear to be critical of both the sponsoring departments, viz., FCO and ODA. They were of the opinion that FCO did not appear to have any clearly established set of policies for the Council’s work or any clear-cut policy on the contribution to be expected from cultural diplomacy to the government’s overseas representation. As for ODA, it was of the opinion that ODA had gradually ceased to think of its contribution to British Council core budget as a general one to the Council’s professional effectiveness and had become increasingly concerned with whether the spending of their money supported the specific aid programmes laid down for individual countries and by corollary, that (according to ODA) ‘where there is no agency expenditure on behalf of ODA, there should be no ODA contribution to the grant-in-aid’. They recommended pay and grading links to FCO and ODA where these suited the Council but sought freedom from them when they proved inhibiting. 108 The significance of the Report lies in the fact that like the Drogheda and the Duncan, Seebohm gave a firm definition to current ideas and policies. The clarity of their analysis and the wisdom of their recommendations did much to make the later reforms possible and in the circumstances of the time, to raise morale. There was a strong feeling of confidence now in the possibilities of developing financial and managerial structures capable of standing up to the strains continually imposed on the Council. The credit for this goes to Sir John Burgh, the then Director-General.

From the beginning, Sir John Burgh had refused to be stampeded into decision carrying long-term consequences and was determined to institute many of the reforms suggested for the structure and administration of the Council. He paid much attention to clarifying the purposes of the Council, which he re-defined in the following phrases: “To create an enduring understanding and appreciation of Britain abroad through cultural, educational and technical co-operation.” 109

This phase, though it seems simple to the point of obviousness, has nevertheless acted as a touchstone against which to test the appropriateness of any activity and it has
helped to curb the tendencies to expand in any direction and to undertake whatever is asked. The Council adopted this as its working objective in 1981.

However, what strikes one most from this point onwards is the absence, wilful or otherwise, of emphasis on the library work. Things were changing drastically and the Council was moving towards many directions, all at the same time.

4.9.0 Changes in Direction: The Second Phase

A seminal work on the library work of the British Council, “Spreading the Word” is very eloquent on the libraries up to 1970 and after the chapter “A Change of Direction (1954 - 1970)”, proceeds to review the situation from 1970 to 1980 and ends with a question: “Last Steps in Library Development?” The two decades from 1980 have been a period of hectic activities for the Council, but not necessarily for its libraries - changes that occurred everywhere had their impact on libraries also. The Council opened its first office in East Germany in 1982 but had to close down its Argentina office following the Falklands invasion. The Lebanon office and teaching centre were closed following Israel’s invasion of Lebanon. The troubles in Lebanon continued even in 1983. The political turmoil in countries such as Lebanon and Greece even led to the loss of lives - 1 in Lebanon and 2 in Greece, all of whom were British Council staff.

There was also a sharp reduction in Government funding up to the mid-1980s and this was the actual result of the Berrill Report. This naturally led to reduction in activity and closures of offices and libraries overseas. There was tremendous pressure upon the Council to make financial savings and hence the closure of ten Regional offices in the UK. However, the gap created by the closing down of the Overseas Students Centre (London) was filled partly by collaboration with institutions such as International Students House in London but many universities and educational institutions also came forward to take on the responsibility for the welfare of their overseas students.
The continual reductions in the Government grant were, however, compensated for by growth in other areas of British Council activity which attracted its own funding: project management funded by overseas governments, the UK Government’s ODA and multilateral development agencies, teaching of English to fee-paying students, and joint-funded events and programmes.

Teaching of English has always been a marketing as well as winning strategy for the Council, the only difference being the separation of such units from the libraries. From the beginning, teaching of English was a primary responsibility of the libraries but gradually, as the demand grew especially in countries like Hong Kong, Iran and China, they started functioning as independent units but attached to the Consulate or diplomatic mission. In 1982, a validation scheme for English language schools was set up in the UK in conjunction with the Association of Recognised English Language Schools (ARELS) and the Federation of English Language Course Organizations (FELCO). By 1986, the Council was managing the world’s largest international English teaching operation, with an annual turnover of over £20 million. It had 48 branches in 33 countries, with over 1000 teaching staff and more than 53,000 students. Student numbers at the Council centres had increased by 3%, despite difficulties caused by general market recession, notably in the Gulf. Income from the Council’s English teaching centres showed a marked increase from £15.9 million in 1981-82 to £21.9 million in 1985-86, with a surplus of 1.4 m.

It was around this period (1980s) that the possibilities of separately marketing British Education abroad began to be explored by the Council. Even in the 70s, the Education and Science Division (ESD) had believed that they knew better than the allegedly ‘traditional’ librarians did about how to run an active information service and that it was their prerogative to do so. This conviction grew stronger in the years to come and one senior officer from ESD was quite candid: “We in ESD should remember that information resources represent power. As long as the present Divisional structure exists in the Council, I think it would be dangerous to let Books Division, a traditional books/library operation, have power over ESD’s resources.”
The ESD, no longer under that name but very much an integral part of CIS (Central Information Service) which was set up as an aftermath of the Saunders - Broome Review of 1977, did have their dreams fulfilled in 1984 when Educational Counselling Service (ECS) was introduced to advise prospective students wishing to study in the UK.

4.9.1 The Council Libraries in the 1980s

As mentioned earlier, the library work was gradually being relegated to the back. It was no longer libraries alone; it was ‘libraries, books and information’. Information being a generic term, it could be used along with any area - development information, education information and so on. Technology was gaining the upper hand and information provision could no longer be claimed the exclusive property of libraries. Many of the Council libraries had multimedia resource centres by now and some had computerized information retrieval systems.

Managing these services was problematic because they were widely scattered and each had to meet the needs of the host country. These and other problems were considered in a review of all aspects of the Council’s work in libraries, books and information that was undertaken in 1985.

Services were centralised. Books in all the Council libraries were now catalogued centrally by computer and the records were sent to individual libraries on microfiche. Monthly lists of books suitable for most of the Council libraries were produced centrally and these were used by individual libraries to help selection. Library materials were also designed in a way that the issue system in each library reflected the Council’s design style. In 1987, the Council’s library network had more than 140 libraries abroad, contained over 2 million books as well as newspapers and periodicals, and formed a worldwide lending, reference and information service. It was also an essential part of Britain’s educational aid overseas, not only in encouraging people to read British books but also in providing a mechanism for the transfer of knowledge and an important
access point to British resources in a wide variety of specialisations. In 1986-87 over 6.5 million books issues were made to over 410,000 library members. The Council’s largest library operation was in India where there were 13 libraries with 5000 users on a daily basis.\(^{117}\)

The libraries provided information services on Britain and British education; many stocked British films and other audio-visual materials and computer-linked information systems that provided on-line access to British databases were introduced. Some libraries possessed software demonstration equipment and the Council opened software promotion centres in six of its overseas offices from 1986, with financial backing from the Department of Trade and Industry. Video libraries were installed in 25 countries including India.

As for book promotion work, the Council was now responsible for administering two ODA-funded schemes - Books Presentation Programme (BPP) and Low-Priced Books Scheme (LPBS). During 1985-86, the BPP funded books worth £2.5 million and the LPBS put approximately 1 million books, mainly technical, in the schools and universities of the developing world. A computerized system to simplify and speed up orders between booksellers and suppliers was introduced by the Council in 1987.

The decade that began on a sour note thus ended with a spurt of growth caused by a long-awaited funding increase and saw new or expanded officer and programmes in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, China and the Caribbean.

Other activities of the Council are highlighted in this study in order to give an insight into the diversified operations of the Council. In its attempt to move along with and in most cases move ahead of, the times and to meet the financial challenges / threats that appeared from time to time in the form of budgetary cuts, the British Council became more and more cost conscious, though cultural diplomacy can never be judged by cost benefit analysis. By the end of 1980s, the Council, together with the External Services of the BBC, was in the vanguard of ‘alternative diplomacy’. Despite its heavy
dependence on government funding, the Council was being recognised throughout the world "as a non-political body which offers our partner countries services of high quality in education and training, the teaching of English, the arts and the sciences and books and libraries." 118 All its efforts were to prove that the Council’s work was vital to Britain’s interests overseas and that by conveying a knowledge and understanding of Britain, by creating a lasting attachment for Britain and its values, the Council’s was a never-ending quest to exploit opportunities to secure Britain’s future prosperity.

4.9.2 Moving with the Times: The Changing Face of the Council & its Libraries

Underlying all this was the Council’s conviction that Britain’s educational constituency needed to adopt a co-operative approach to marketing overseas. The Council acted - it still does - as a consultant and coordinator, using its ‘tubal memory’ of countries, institutions and the people who ran them, to make sure that Britain seized opportunities and avoided pitfalls. The Council also worked as an educational consultant to many bodies, including the World Bank, UNIDO and the European Development Fund. The biggest client however was ODA, for whom the Council was running a high proportion of projects in education, science and technology. There was a particularly marked increase in consultancies by TETOC119.

The overwhelming success of all these activities brought in earnings and in 1987, the earnings exceeded the government grant for the first time. Finance for the British Council’s activity still came from the British government and from what it earned from its projects and English teaching programmes. The government’s source was through the FCO. Each Wing of the FCO - the Diplomatic wing and the ODA - provided two forms of money: a contribution to the Council’s principal government grant and other funds for specific British government programmes which the Council administered, which were increasing in real terms since 1979120.
In 1988 came the announcement of the first increase in the government grant for 13 years, with planned expansion in Western and Eastern Europe, the USSR and the Pacific Region. Expansion of activity in Western Europe included new academic research programmes in France, Germany and Ireland. The year 1989 witnessed the biggest expansion of overseas work in over 25 years, including a return to the Caribbean and new offices in Africa and the Republic of Ireland. There was smaller grant, narrower options, but progress despite problems and morale was kept fairly high all the time. The Council could continue to increase its efficiency and make some savings without damage to the body as a whole. For the Council it was now barely possible,
after the heavy cuts of the last four years, to respond to the new opportunities that were arising all the time for extending British influence overseas.

4.9.3 Education Counselling Service (ECS)

Britain, which once had the highest per capita overseas student population in the world, had slipped to the fifth place in the league table of receiving countries and gaining all the time were America, France, West Germany and the Soviet Union. In 1983, the Council stepped up its promotion of British education. There was another reason: to counter the sharp decline in student numbers due to the increased fees in Britain and the successful marketing by other countries. Market research by the Council led to improved promotional material and the setting up of Education Counselling Service (ECS).

Within one year of its creation, the ECS was operating in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore and was promoting the services of 80 British universities and polytechnics. The three units between them handled 17,000 enquiries and nearly 600 students were offered places in Britain\(^1\). The first exhibitions on British education were held in Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong, attracting a combined 100,000 visitors.

Other initiatives ranged from the basic to the sophisticated - teaching English at the simplest level and attracting international, intellectual elite at the end of the spectrum. An ‘invitation only’ Senior Fellowships Scheme was successfully underway. The market for the PhD was studied carefully and the option of splitting research between Britain and the home country was presented as one of the main selling points. Several kinds of bridging courses - to bridge the gap between the overseas student’s education level and the British equivalent - were developed by the Council to bring overseas students more easily into the British system.
4.10.0 The Last Decade of the Millennium (1990s)

Sir John Hansen, the then Director-general wrote, “A new world role for Britain is not something that the Council can control by itself. It will be partly determined by government policies and will be influenced by economic factors and other global trends. The Council however, does have a duty to say what it thinks Britain ought to be doing to make its international relations more effective. This presents huge opportunities. I believe there is a climate of opinion in Britain genuinely favourable to British Council work ... In addition, the Council has never been in better shape to respond and our geographical coverage has never been greater.”

The new Memorandum reaffirmed the Council’s objectives as laid down in the Charter. Above all, it underlined the independent role that the Council had in contributing to the FCO’s own objectives. An overall aim of both organizations was the promotion of Britain’s standing and influence overseas and this was not done for its own sake, but to protect and advance Britain’s interests.

The Council had its share of problems as well. There was, as always, financial pressure on the Council due to the cash cuts imposed because of the 1994 budget and a decline in the value of the grants-in-aid caused by inflation. This meant that by 1998-99, there was a gap of about £17 million between what the Council expected to receive and what the Council needed to spend to meet its existing commitments. It was expected that the Council would seek to maximize its non-grant income. On the contrary, there was a decline in the income from some non-grant sources like the Council’s DATS (Development and Training Services) work for ODA, which was started in 1994.

4.10.1 New Council Initiatives & the Diminishing Importance of Libraries

The succeeding years - the period from 1990s to the 2000s - show a diminishing importance of the libraries though they also have benefited from the stride technology has been making in all fields of human endeavour.
The fall of the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s led to a huge demand for English language teaching and for training in areas such as management and law. The British Council responded by expanding its activity across the regions and by helping the UK government to develop its Know How Fund for Eastern Europe which was launched in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in 1990. The Fund’s Joint Industrial and Commercial Award Programme (JICAP) was launched initially in Poland and this was jointly managed by the British Council and the Confederation of British Industry.

The end of the Soviet Union was a similar pattern Further East by 1995, with new offices, projects and English teaching centres being set up in most countries of the former Soviet Union and a big expansion in Russia itself. There was a launch of the Chancellor’s Scheme for Young Russian business people, set up by UK Chancellor Norman Lammant following discussions with Russian President, Boris Yeltsin. New British Council centres were opened in Russia, Latvia and Ukraine.

4.10.2 English Language Promotion

Demand for English teaching continued to grow worldwide, with many new teaching centres set up in Western Europe, East and South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. It was providing courses in English language and other skills through its 94 teaching centres in 47 countries by 1995. It also helped to develop curricula and teacher training courses in state education systems around the world, benefiting teachers and students alike. Projects included in-service training in Zambia, establishment of self-access centres in universities throughout Mexico, supporting the development of new textbooks for the Sudan, curriculum development in Ecuador and support for initial teacher training in Colombia. In 1995, the 94 British Council teaching centres, from Qatar to Quito, Athens to Azerbaijan, provided focal points for developing new language skills for over 120,000 learners worldwide. Many courses were tailor-made to suit the requirements of local and regional companies and government departments and the Council staff offered professional consultancy advice.
on developing training programmes. Realising the importance of English language promotion, the Council initiated a project ‘English 2000’. Launched by the Prince of Wales in London in March 1995, ‘English 2000’ was a five-year collaborative project drawing on the expertise of Britain’s English teaching and publishing profession. The project’s objective was to research demand and the existing provision and to plan and implement new teaching and learning programmes. Initial research focused on Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and East Asia and the Pacific Rim. In the same year, Network English, CD-Rom - based interactive English language learning material, was launched and made available in British Council teaching centres.\(^1\)\(^2\)

4.10.3 Education and Training in the 1990s

The Council’s expertise extended beyond the conventional courses to the new and diverse forms of delivery that were vigorously developed during the 1990s. Distance learning, overseas campuses, twinning - all provided new opportunities for co-operation between UK and overseas institutions. The Education Officers in British Council centres worldwide could guide choices with well-informed advice. Over 107,000 students came to Britain to study each year and in over hundred countries, the British Council deployed its in-depth knowledge of the British educational system to respond to an enormous range of demand. By 1995, the ECS was operating in 10 countries: Brunei, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and Turkey and was expanding into China, India and Thailand.\(^1\)\(^2\)

ECS also organised highly successful British education exhibitions, where prospective students could talk directly to university and college representative and get a real flavour of course content and student life in each institution. The British Council handled over 800,000 enquiries about British education worldwide in 1994-95 and the number of students studying in British from countries where ECS operated had increased by 63% in 10 years.
4.10.4 Examinations Work

Working in partnership with the various UK examination boards, which are responsible for setting, organizing and marking the exams and with universities and professional organizations, the British Council started administering examinations in various countries and the figure touched 350,000 in 90 countries by the end of 1995. Although English language exams were the most popular, there was a growing demand for competencies-based vocational qualifications. It also worked closely with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and the International Development Programme (IDP) Education, Australia in administering the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS), a test to assess the English language proficiency of prospective students. In 1994-95, about 23000 people took the IELTS test at Council centres. It was 400,000 (including other professional and academic exams) in 1995-96.

4.10.5 The Higher Education Links Scheme

The Higher Education Links Scheme, which had been running since 1980, underwent numerous changes in the 1990s. The ultimate purpose of the scheme, in compliance with the Department for International Development (DFID), formerly ODA, was to contribute to sustainable development with the focus on improving the quality of life of people in poorer countries and reducing poverty and suffering. DFID, HEIs (UK Higher Education Institutions), overseas HEIs and funding agencies and the British Council were - and still are - the fair principal contributors to the scheme. It aimed to achieve this by promoting collaboration that will increase the capacity of HEIs through the application of knowledge and skills and this provided an opportunity for HEIs in UK and overseas to work together on issues of mutual interest and for their mutual benefit.

Previously the purpose of the scheme was less clearly defined and the links were established in almost any area of mutual academic interest. This changed with the...
publication of the DFID Policy Paper in 1997. A full list of the objectives in the white paper is under four heads:

- Policies and actions that promote sustainable livelihoods.
- Better education, health and opportunities for poor people.
- Protection and better management of the natural and physical environment and
- managing globalization in the interests of poor people, creating faster progress towards the international development targets.

This clearly shows a diversification of the Council's activities. The Links Scheme also aimed to bring overseas HEIs into a wider network of international partnerships, develop British educational excellence and make British expertise better known abroad. The Higher Education Links Scheme aimed to increase the capacity of the overseas institutions through a number of strategies, which contribute to individual, departmental, institutional and wider development agendas:

- Professional development of academic, technical and library staff.
- Course and curriculum development.
- Research collaboration
- Training of administrative staff and improving management systems.
- Focus on women

The Library had also become a part of the initiative only because it was realised that 'the continued development of appropriately qualified staff is regarded as essential for effective teaching and research and will also provide opportunities for localising more consultancy services.'

The anticipated duration of an individual link is 6 years and mid-term Review after the completion of funding for the final 3 years. In 1998, the UK Higher Education
Links Scheme facilitated more than 460 academic links between British and 48 less developed countries. A cost effectiveness study conducted during this period suggested that the value of the outputs from the links was at least 80 times their cost - an average of less than 7000 year for each link - and concluded that there was probably no other DFID interventions which produced such high multiplier effects.

More details of the Higher Education Links Scheme are not delved deep into since it does not have a direct connection to the Council libraries. A broad outline has been given to emphasis the multi-directional activities of the British Council and the shrinking of the conventional library work. The libraries indirectly help propagate the Council’s agenda since in most countries, like India, they are virtually the torchbearers and visible entities of the British Council in their respective regions.

By the mid 1990s, the tensions of the cold war had been replaced by new groupings and new equations were replacing the older ones. As for the British Council, it was working more closely with the FCO than ever before. At the same time, the Government understood the great value to Britain in having aspects of its international relations carried out by an organisation known and trusted abroad for its independence. In January 1995, the Foreign Secretary and the Chairman of the British Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the FCO. It was an important statement of the Council’s role in cultural relations and in the UK’s diplomatic and aid effort. According to this, the Council would support the FCO’s objectives in five key areas:

- extending the world position of English
- Supporting overseas development
- Promoting partnerships in cultural, educational and scientific fields
- demonstrating the excellence of British arts and sciences and
- promoting the use abroad of British goods and services education and training.
In each of these areas, the Council was to make a distinctive and independent contribution to Britain’s international position.

4.10.6 Impact of Information Technology

Another important area during this period was the application and benefits of new technology, especially information technology. The British Council launched its website www.britishcouncil.org in 1996, as the start of a move towards internet-based provision of information. This naturally had a great impact on the Council libraries. By now internet-based and other electronic forms of communication had become increasingly important, both as information resources and in developing new types of teaching and learning materials. By 1997-98, the libraries had become automated and by the early 2000s, this had led to an increasing number of British Council Services being available online. British Council’s virtual campus website was launched in 1998 and the ‘Learn English’ website, in 2000.

IT influenced the way the libraries functioned. In 1995/96, the Council’s global network had 185 libraries and in many countries, the traditional lending libraries using modern information technology had become key access points for information about Britain. For instance, in Korea, the refurbished Council library had become a one-stop shop for information. It represented the Council’s ECS that marketed British higher education, the British Tourist Authority and the commercial section of the British Embassy. It also housed a reference section of books, video and audio materials with facilities for viewing and listening, CD and British media publications.

The Council’s Electronic Information Centre in Munich was opened by the Prince of Wales and it was equipped with state-of-the-art hardware and software, online databases, the Internet, multimedia dictionaries and online journals. By the end of the century, it had become the first choice for those who wanted information about British
life, education, institutions and literature. Visitor numbers had increased sharply within a short period of its opening and was in fact a model for other centres in Germany\textsuperscript{133}.

4.10.7 The Dual Role of Council Libraries

All this was making it more and more difficult to differentiate between a Council office and a Council library. Wherever possible the library stepped in to assume the role of the promoter of Britain, especially if the region lacked a Council office. They were valuable information providers in their communities. While the particular subject focus of each library depended on local needs, all carried a wide selection of books and periodicals on the areas in which the Council worked: English language, education and training, science and technology, including engineering, agriculture and medicine and health, development topics, including good government and gender issues and the arts and literature. When the Beijing Conference on Women was held in 1995, the Council acted as a facilitator and all the libraries had a separate ‘corner’ devoted to books, posters and other materials related to women’s issues; the arts and literature. Video and audio materials were also available on loan. In addition, many libraries had CD-ROM databases, interactive CD and access to UK and European online and electronic databases.

In the countries of central and Eastern Europe, the focus was on English Language teaching. Here the centres provided lending services and information banks. As well as providing self-access study facilities, they supported seminars and other training opportunities for teachers. Management theory and practice, and British studies (history, literature, system of government, etc.) were additional specialisations.

In Africa, the libraries provided specific information services for local NGOs and consultants working in priority fields such as the status of women, economic reform, support for human rights and open and accountable government. The Management Information Centre in Harare was designed as a centre of excellence for use by both management trainers and fast-track managers wishing to update their skills and thinking.
on a wide range of management topics. Elsewhere the priority was specialist commercial data, enabling local business to obtain essential knowledge about British companies or up-to-date information on higher education institutions and language schools in Britain.

Besides assisting visitors, answering queries and lending materials, the libraries provided a variety of additional support services. Training was given to library staff in other institutions. Information of British books, periodicals, reports and videos on development topics were compiled for NGOs and government departments who were assisted in the selection of required materials. Touring exhibitions of new books and periodicals in subject areas of special interest or relevance were the order of the day. Book exhibitions were organized to promote British books and information products.

On behalf of the Council, the libraries were taking interest in other related areas along with the Council’s keen interest in librarianship. In 1995, the Council supported a major conference in Strasbourg on library and information development in Central and Eastern Europe. More than 50 library experts came together to debate common issues and problems. In China, a Council-sponsored symposium on information policy was organised and it examined issues of information provision, new technologies and copyright. In Zambia and Sierra Leone, there were projects to develop reading skills in primary schools, advising on textbook selection and the use of supplementary readers. Educational work had also become an essential feature of the Council libraries. Change was the buzzword.

Along with the change, came the doubts about direction. In his Report to staff, Sir John Hansen says: “... I said ... that we needed to step back from change in the Council and think more about what we want to achieve in the outside world. Change will continue - we will be initiating it and also responding to it. ... But in the end the Council will be judged not by its ability to make internal reforms, but by what it delivers for Britain.”
4.10.8 Voices for a Vision

The same concern about the Council’s direction was in the mind of David Drewry also when he became the Director General. Six months in office was enough to make him decide on one thing: “One of my priorities has been to build a picture of where we want to go as an organisation: a strategic vision”. He therefore launched a consultative vision programme in 1998, drawing together the Council’s vision.

The exercise was carried out between March and June and the result was unofficially published in July 1998. Titled “Voices for a Vision”, the Vision Document took account of various views collected through over 150 vision workshops around the world, interviews in depth of 96 people inside and outside the Council, 4600 vision questionnaires distributed among the Council staff worldwide and over a hundred direct contributions via e-mail. The Futures Group, the Council’s ideas-generating group of staff and external members, met five times.

The result “of all the talking, listening and analysis” was a vision that was more than simply a distillation of all the contributions received. A number of key themes emerged. There was no doubt in the mind of the majority about the Council’s standing: it was respected, was better known and better understood outside the UK than at home; it was full of energy but felt that the Council was not always close to the people it served. In contrast, the response to the questionnaires suggested people are clear about who their customers are and thought the Council was meeting their needs. But they were divided, confused and overstretched over the question of purpose and direction of the Council. A majority believed that the Council was being led in the right direction. But only half of them believed that the Council had a single overall purpose. However, one positive thing emerged that the Council’s informal links were good though communication did not always work well. There were some who even wanted to know “why a new vision” because “people at the Foreign office like us the way we are.” The staff wanted a degree of continuity.
Half of the respondents opined that the Council itself should come across as international: “our vision should be bigger than a vision about Britain.” In all, the vision had to address four overriding problems:

1. The Council is not always close to the people it serves.
2. It is hard for the Council to prioritise, so it becomes over-stretched.
3. Within the Council, there are divisions.
4. The Council’s communication concentrates on detail rather than the bigger picture. We see the trees but not the wood. 137

For the most part, people were not looking for a radical reinvention of the British Council. But there was a demand to sharpen things up: to get more in tune with the people it served and to become more selective about what it took on.

Ten components were identified for the vision. One of them was that the Council’s reach would be defined extending beyond narrow elites but without becoming as broad as to be ineffective. It was decided to draft the vision and to present the consequent strategic choices before the Board. Strategy 2005 and Strategy 2010 are all offshoots of this exercise.

4.10.9 The Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI) 138

Soon another important event took place that was to have a great impact on the Council’s activity. On 18 June 1999, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched a drive to attract more number of international students to the UK. Known as the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI), it was the start of a worldwide campaign to promote British Universities and the colleges overseas by which the UK Universities, already second only to US universities, were to aim to increase their market share to 25% by 2005, which meant extra 50,000 students. The Further Education colleges were to double the number of international students by 2005, an extra 25,000 students.
In a UK-wide departmental effort, a package of changes was agreed to remove unnecessary delay in international students applying for study in the UK, which included

- streamlining visa arrangements for students in countries where there were problems;
- reducing the need for international students to reapply for leave to remain in the UK while studying;
- putting better information in the hands of potential students on screen and through personal advice; and,
- making it easier for students to combine study with work on campus and in vacations.

It was decided to expand the prestigious Chevening Scholarship Scheme from the then 2200 to 2700 with funding from government, universities and business.

The British Council also had a role to play in this. It was expected to lead a 3-year global marketing campaign starting in January 2000 in key countries around the world. This was to brand British education as the first for quality and choice, using the best marketing strategy and with the funds of around £5 million from the government. Baroness Helena Kennedy, the Chairman of the British Council, said: “We want to support the effort of British Universities and Colleges to market themselves professionally with an image and standards of service which reflect our high standards”. 139

The British Council already had ECS in its overseas offices and UK education and training providers to increase the UK’s share of the international education and training market. Now it was decided to develop a UK Education Brand by which the ECS would work not only its subscribing members but with all UK Further and Higher Education Institutions and other organizations such as the English language colleges. The overall
aim was to provide a competitive edge for the UK product with in an increasingly crowded market place and to make it even more attractive to international students considering study abroad. The Brand was to provide an umbrella under which all educational institutions could market themselves and their products more effectively. The British Council selected McCann Erickson Manchester, the world’s largest advertising agency as their professional partner to develop the brand. The research phase was to involve UK institutions, British Council offices overseas and students studying in the UK, US and Australia and to explore the attitudes, motivations and experiences of students who had chosen to study overseas, together with the problems of opportunities faced by the UK institutions seeking to attract these students. The end result, it was hoped, would provide a platform for the development and evaluation of the brand work.

For those unfamiliar with the Council work, it would appear a deviation to discuss ECS in the context of the Council libraries. But a careful inspection of the library work would prove that the libraries are the invisible but inevitable presence in all Council activities. Once the Council takes up a work - even if it were to have no apparent link to the libraries - it becomes the responsibility of the latter to execute it in the best way possible. The success of ECS and examinations in India bears testimony to this and the role of the libraries in promoting such educational activities is dealt in detail in the next chapter.

4.10.10 Through Other Eyes: A Survey

The same year, 1999, had one more survey to its credit. Titled “Through other Eyes”, the survey was carried out by Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) for the British Council in two phases in 1999 and 2000. It was an ambitious programme of research to find out what young people in certain countries thought about the United Kingdom. The goal was to challenge outdated perceptions and to project an image of the UK as a creative and innovative society with much to offer the world’s
In all, 28 countries were surveyed; 13 countries in the Phase I and 15 in Phase II. In addition, independent surveys were also carried out in Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates. The survey was carried out among professionals aged between 24 and 35 years and about 200 to 400 professionals were interviewed in each country. It highlighted the dramatic differences in how people around the world saw Britain. The survey revealed that tradition was seen as both strength and weakness. But across the countries, there was a common belief that the British were cool, aloof and seldom smiled and this made it very difficult for foreigners to get to know them. The US was the most popular destination for education for many, especially Indians. The UK was recognized for its much strength, especially its strong economy and stable institutions. However it was still seen as rather old-fashioned and stodgy. The challenge for Britain now was “to retain the best of their traditional reputation while finding creative ways of showing that they were a modern and innovative country.”

The outcome of this survey was that the British Council used the results to inform their policy making and put together programmes that would capture the interests of young men and women rising in their careers. There was a change on the priorities: the target audience was no longer only the ‘key posts’ and occupational groups, it was the successor generation.’ The precise way the Council defined this group varied slightly from country to country but it was generally understood as ‘men and women, aged between 24 and 35, well-educated, with above-overage incomes and likely to rise to positions of influence in their society’.

4.10.10.1 The Survey & the Libraries

The libraries also changed. Children’s Sections, which were closed years back in the 1980s, were soon revived. Information centres for the young with computers and multimedia soon become part of overseas libraries and these centres went on to become
numero uno in attracting young professionals with families into their fold. There were plans to integrate the Children’s Section with the cyber centre and the Direct Teaching English activity. Inaugurating the Junior Junction at the British Council Library, Chennai in 1999, Jasper Utley, First secretary, Cultural Affairs, pointed out how many still thought of the British Council in terms of the library facilities it offered though it had a larger aim of bringing about cultural ties between Britain and other countries. He said: “Through the libraries, one enters a world of knowledge, entertainment and imagination.”

4.11.0 The New Millennium

The same sentiment was carried over to the new millennium. The idea was to establish contacts where they did not exist. Offices/information centres were re-opened in Tehran after 20 years and in Tripoli, after 28 years. By the early 2000s the increasing importance of IT led to an increasing number of British Council services being available on-line and also to new ‘Knowledge and Learning Centres (KLCs) designed to combine the best of virtual, distance and personal interaction. The first such centre was launched in Delhi in January 2002.

4.11.1 Knowledge & Learning Centres (KLCs)

The KLC is an initiative by the British Council to create a global network of enhanced conferencing, learning and knowledge opportunities. It aims to (1) make use of up-to-date technology (2) engage with younger audiences (3) integrate services offered overseas by the British Council (4) give access to the latest UK-based knowledge and learning products (5) encourage new ways of working and (6) provide evidence of increased impact for the UK in overseas countries. Building on tried and tested methods of face-to-face interaction, this network will be a combination of physical and virtual services, with much of the initial investment going into technical platform, electronic content and service.
The KLC provides access to a range of products and services through the following components:

- Video conferencing zones
- Learning zones, where target groups can pursue a range of UK education programmes, including English language, either by distance-learning or in-country knowledge and information zones, which will vary in size and provide information relevant to the needs of the Council's target audiences in country, viz., young professionals.

The ultimate aim is to provide

- Access to knowledge, selected and shaped for target audiences (e.g. websites, portals, databases, electronic, journals)
- Flexible learning opportunities (e.g. taster modules, certificate courses, full distance learning award bearing courses, delivered through the British Council offices)
- Conferencing facilities including video conferencing (for seminars, workshops, conferences, student recruitment, alumni activities)
- Exhibition and display space (for showcasing of products, virtual exhibitions of creative arts and design).

The idea is to focus more on the sharing and creation of content and knowledge rather than providing access to existing UK knowledge. A network of 8 successful KLCS has been established till 2004 - in Delhi, Belgrade, Kuala Lumpur, Paris, Cairo, Tokyo, Accra and Ankara.

There was one important event, which was behind all these initiatives - the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. Much as the Council would
like to deny it, there was political fallout after this and it brought renewed attention of
the world to the importance of building understanding across countries and cultures and
the disastrous effects when this does not happen. In the US and elsewhere, people
recognized the importance of the work of organizations such as the British Council in
building the necessary bridges of understanding and trust. The British Council itself
gave new priority to its work in predominantly Muslim countries through its new
project, ‘Connecting Futures’ to bring together young people from the UK with those
from 10 other countries in the Middle East, South East Asia and Africa.

In his speech on the role of the British Council Post - 11 September at the British
Tunisian Society on 22 March 2002, David Green, the Director-General of the British
Council, said: “... As events around the world have shown, dialogue is more important
than ever. For anyone who saw culture as soft - a welcome but ultimately optional aspect
of life- then those events more than anything showed just how wrong they were.
Cultural relations are of paramount importance.” With a wide network in 218 centres
across 109 countries around the world and with deep range of contacts, the British
Council, he felt, is a powerful instrument in the conduct of international cultural
relations’. The Council had come full circle - from cultural propaganda in 1934 to
cultural relations in 2002.


The Council has appreciated, from its first beginnings in 1934, the unique
contribution with books, periodicals, librarians and libraries would make to its work
throughout the world. Still, it was not until late in 1943 that a Special Books
Department was established and the Annual Report for 1944-5 is the first in which
‘library services’ are included as a separate activity. This indeed was the turning point
and from 1945 onwards the policy of concentrating the greater part of the book grant
upon building up British Council libraries began to be implemented upon a substantial
scale, especially in liberated Europe. The decision to establish Council offices headed
by a Representative as cultural centres and housing a library influenced the library
development in lands where the British Institute of the Anglophile Society had always been characteristic.

Through many articles on the British Council Libraries and various annual reports, the growth of British Council Libraries can be traced and it shows, as the years go by, the qualitative and quantitative growth and also the wider outreach of these libraries. Table 4.2 illustrates this point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Libraries</th>
<th>Memberships</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950/51</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/63</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>4 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>5,255,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977/78</td>
<td></td>
<td>342,000</td>
<td>5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985/86</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3,70,000</td>
<td>6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>5,00,000</td>
<td>10m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>3,50,000</td>
<td>8m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Growth of British Council Libraries 1950-2003

In a span of 50 years, the number of libraries seems to have almost trebled, from 95 to 229 (Table. 4.2). The membership appears to have more or less stabilised and the fall in the number of members may have been fallout of the 9/11 attack. The British Council, through its initiative ‘Connecting Futures’ has already set the ball in motion to attract more Muslim countries into its fold.

The book promotion activities also exhibit an upward trend up to the late 70s, travelling book exhibitions and book presentations being the two successful marketing ventures of the British Council for promoting British books abroad (Table 4.3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Exhibitions</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>110,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>89343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.3 Book Promotion Activities of British Council Libraries, 1945-1977**

All these show that the 1960s had been the Council’s most successful decade.

English language teaching is another area of Council activity, which has shown immense potential and ever-increasing demand. The following figures for the period 1985-2003 prove this (Table 4.4):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Centres</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985/86</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1,20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1,20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>1,30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.4 English Language Promotions of British Council Libraries, 1995-2003**

In spite of the increase in the number of teaching centres, the number of students learning English from 1995 onwards has remained more or less static (Table 4.4). This has prompted the Council to tap the potential elsewhere in countries like Japan and China. In all these activities, the libraries play a supportive role by providing space and materials.

This role takes forms which shade into one another and at their most developed, can assume an importance in their own right. The Council libraries tend to satisfy multifarious objectives and it is next to impossible to confine an activity to one particular objective.
4.13 The Finances

All these activities have not been without their financial implications and the financial cuts now and then naturally affected the Council’s work as well. The grant for books fell from 81,000 in 1947/48 to 20,000 in 1951/52 and was restored to about 45,000 in 1954/55. Similarly the grant for periodicals, which was 54,525 in 1947/48, was only 31,000 in 1954/55. As for the Books Department, it had a budget of 32,956 in 1950/51 and 17,601 in 1951/52, which rose to 87,000 in 1958/59 and 171,000 in 1959/60.146

Only one seventh of the total Council budget for 1964/5, of just over 10.5 million, was set aside for the provision of books and periodicals, for the running expenses of British Council libraries and of home-based departments concerned with the printed word and for the subvention of public libraries overseas. In 1977/78, £9,240,000 was to be spent in 40 developing countries: £1,063,000 for the Ministry’s BPP, £1,179,000 for Low Priced Books Programme and £349,000 for library development programme147.

By 1986/87 the source of funding was by way of Principal government grant, British Government programmes and the Council’s own earnings that included revenue from English Language Teaching (ELT) and library subscription. The last accounted for, together with consultancy changes, 22.1% of the total budget (48.9m out of 221.2m). In 1986, it was 50 m. In 1994-95, government grants accounted for 33% of the funding, revenue from services to clients and customers and also from library memberships fees, 27% and revenue from agency work was 40%, as compared to 32% from FCO (12.6m), 25% from ODM (9.6m) 35% from the 1974/75 figures of ODM agency (13.6m), 5% from Council earnings (1.8m) from library membership, teaching, etc. and 3% from UN agency (1.4m). The share of the government grants (FCO-ODA) shows a decrease whereas the revenue from libraries and ELT is increasing gradually. In 2000-01, the British Council earned revenue of 170 million from clients and customers worldwide. The 2002-3 figures show total incoming (1,750,000) and admission costs (1.750 m). The figures grant and Central Bureau grants - i.e., the government grants - estimated at 171.2m for 2003-04, 176.2m for 2004-05 and 186.2m for 2005-06. The
income earned (by way of ELT, exams, library fees) is 38m each for all (Council’s earnings) the 3 years. The total income is estimated at 209.3 m 224.3m respectively whereas the expenditure is expected to be 170.5m, 176.5m and 184m for the corresponding period.\textsuperscript{148}

Statistics of money spent, libraries established and materials purchased and circulated tell only a part of the story of British Council libraries. The quality of service offered has always been of more importance to the libraries than the quantity. By 2005-06, its information network is expected to be combination of physical access and virtual provision, bringing together the best of Britain’s present public access service with enhanced access to the with effect from, customised proactive services and a network of virtual communities. The British Council’s aim is to create a worldwide network of customers who access information, share knowledge and experience and use the information centres/ libraries as a platform for learning and creativity with concepts such as Knowledge and Learning Centres (KLCs) as the building blocks for its future information services network.

It is envisaged that the network will relate closely to the needs of country operations and there will be a far greater differentiation of services between countries. There will be more delivery of web-based information services like portal services, multimedia and personalization and correspondingly, fewer lending operations. Lending services will be retained only in situations where the British Council provides a unique, highly targeted service for which there is a large demand and need among its target audiences.\textsuperscript{149}

The Council’s overall and total contribution to the global need for books and library services has been generous and of a consistently high calibre, especially in developing countries where there is a hunger for books. In these countries, the British Council's assistance over the long term perhaps has been most effective, as the following section will illustrate. In many parts of the world, the Council library is still the best local library, freely available to all who want to use it.
The British Council has indeed succeeded working in so many different cultures. But it cannot be denied that the Council has flourished through the currency of libraries at the heart of its offer worldwide and the most familiar aspect of the British Council to many people around the world is a library of information centre. The reference services in most of these centres and the lending facilities in many provide access to the latest printed and electronic resources. In addition, the enquiry service specialises in providing information about studying and living in the UK, British publishing and numerous other activities the Council has undertaken to promote Britain abroad, though the services provided may vary from centre to centre. Every day across the world, there are literally hundreds of activities going on in the arts, in science, in education and in governance through which the Council tries quite simply to bring people closer together. All this has been made possible because of one of the greatest strengths of the organisation - the engagement of locally appointed staff.

In her paper, “Valuing difference - the British Council experience of connecting cultures”, Grace Kempster says: “...one of greatest strengths ... which we are only recently appreciating to the full - the engagement of locally appointed staff. They are simply our greatest asset ... they are inspiring people and most of all highly skilled in intercultural communication, living the connections and translations and dual understandings which this involves every working day.” This speaks for itself.

When the British Council began nearly 70 years ago, it was also in troubled times with the shadow of Second World War looming large. With a strap line of “Truth will Triumph”, it sought to simply tell the truth about British culture and values - though as a cultural relations organisation at arm’s length from government. The Council could do this when both medium and message mattered so much, through their libraries, which, by their presence and very functioning as the self-select recyclers of knowledge, live all the values and essence of inclusion and of knowledge for all, free to help oneself.
When we look back at the history of the British Council, we find that the libraries have had a profound and enduring impact on lives and even on generations of the same family. Whether they were havens, whether they were places of self-improvement, they were, and still are, cherished by people, not just because of the content but also in the way they carried some very important messages about core values of justice and fairness which, at that time, were considered British traits.

One outstanding feature of the Council has been that it is prepared to change its stance when the occasion demands it. If we examine the statements of objectives from 1934 through 1977 to 2004, given elsewhere, a very striking omission is that of library services, though the emphasis on cultural relations and educational co-operation still continues. This omission does not, in any way, diminish or belittle the importance and relevance of the British Council Libraries worldwide. It is only that it has become very difficult to draw the line between the libraries and the other activities of the Council. Demarcation is a tough task because the libraries do most of the work of the Council and are the most visible face of the Council. The history and the development of the Council libraries show how they have contributed to the attainment of the objectives—strategic or otherwise stated or implied—set down by the British Council when it was first conceived in 1934. In the late 1990s, when it was found that books on the Council’s priority subjects like good governance, and poverty alleviation had very little demand even in developing countries, the book selection policy was changed to include much-in-demand subjects like information technology thus exhibiting practical book selection, without sacrificing clarity and coherence. This emphasizes that the distinction between ‘integral’ and ‘optional’ subjects do not involve dictation of priorities and that a flexible approach is needed.

There have been changes but many aspects have remained unchanged. British Council presence is no longer a surrogate for a country’s own public service and instead, the focus is on how best it can reflect in its presence, its offer, its role as a cultural relations organization. But there are still over 40 lending libraries across Europe.
and by the renewed focus on young professionals, the libraries seek to have a more targeted presence, focusing their collections on support for those studying English and developing their professional skills. The libraries, on behalf of the Council, also offer events and activities which will build strong and enduring relationships in a digital age and try to find a niche for them in a world where it is increasingly easy to connect globally with like-minded people, despite the tyranny of distance or the difficulty of geography.

Still the question, ‘Why the British Council’ remains: Why was the British Council created and what is the purpose of its work today? Is it just a way of imposing a British view on the rest of the world, or does it have a broader purpose? Is it simply cultural propaganda, cultural invasion or cultural imperialism? Or, is it simply tying to sell the UK in the 21st century?

The answer to these questions can be found in the words of Sir John Reith in 1940. Lord Lloyd, the Council’s third Chairman, exchanged letters with the founder of the BBC, Sir John Reith, on what the wartime role of the organization should be. Despite the crisis then enveloping the world, Lloyd was uneasy about placing the Council in the hands of propagandists. In reply, Reith Wrote: ‘Who can say where cultural activity ends and propaganda begins?’

4.15 Conclusion

A historical evaluation of the British Council confirms that it did succeed in its stated task of promoting Britain in every way possible. Nevertheless, when other activities grew and flourished, the libraries were the losers. They are now only one of the activities of the Council. But throughout almost 70 years of activity, the Council has proved that cultural propaganda, sensitively managed, can help to create international understanding and with it, a more peaceful world. How successfully this has been done by spreading the word is best illustrated by the British Council libraries in India.
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