

Enhancing Academic Cooperation between the UK and Israel

Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Scheme (BIRAX)

Technical Proposal

May 2008

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1. Introduction

- 1 This proposal sets out the preferred option for strengthening academic cooperation between Britain and Israel identified by the Pears Foundation in discussion with the British Council in March 2008.
- 2 It is based on recommendations from a consultation visit to Israel undertaken in October 2007 by officials from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and senior members of Universities UK (UUK) where the material and societal benefits to the UK and Israel of enhanced academic cooperation were explicitly recognised.
- 3 It offers a practical response to recent calls in the UK for an academic boycott of Israel by advocating for a new, broad-based research and exchange scheme that will deepen institutional links between Britain and Israel in the higher education sector and that will build longer-term understanding between the academic communities of both countries.

2. Executive Summary

- 4 The British Council is pleased to propose a new Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange scheme (BIRAX).
- 5 The new scheme aims to strengthen academic links between universities in the UK and Israel through the awarding of grants for the purpose of scientific research. In doing so, the scheme will contribute towards the wider goal of supporting the development of the UK and Israel's respective knowledge economies.
- 6 The outputs of the scheme will be either distinct pieces of collaborative research for publication and wider dissemination or robust new research proposals that have been collaboratively developed and ready for onward submission to other national or multi-lateral research funding bodies.
- 7 To achieve this we will adopt a practical and collaborative approach working in partnership with the two umbrella bodies representing the UK and Israel's universities, UUK and VERA.
- 8 BIRAX will target junior academics by providing research and exchange opportunities to early to mid-career researchers and lecturers. It will focus activity at the institutional level around university departments and this will allow for research teams to also include postdoctoral students among their members.
- 9 New international collaborative opportunities will position early career academics for "tenure track" and encourage postdoctoral research students to develop a career in academia. In addition to supporting career progression it will also build institutional links and forge new and exciting networks for the future.
- 10 Focussing a new scheme around the junior academic cadre will also "plug a gap" in the market between those senior professors at one end of the spectrum who are already internationally networked and leading well-funded research and those junior academics at the other end of the spectrum who, apart from "first contact" activities such as small-scale networking events, are benefiting less (or not at all) from new international opportunities. Supporting the most able now, on a team/departmental level, is expected to lead to the building of strong institutional links in the future.
- 11 BIRAX will be weighted in favour of the exact sciences though it will include some provision for the social sciences as well. By encompassing all the sciences, it will ensure the widest possible inclusion and broad support. This support is vital for the scheme to be able to attract additional funding from other partners in government and the voluntary sector.

- 12 Dialogue has already commenced with other potential funders to secure their support and thus increase the reach and impact of the scheme. Provisional support has been signalled from a number of sources including the FCO, DIUS, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA). This includes suggestions of matching contributions from the British and Israeli governments which, if secured, would boost the scheme both financially and symbolically (in terms of their commitment to support academic freedom).
- 13 The new scheme will be managed by the British Council in Israel through the establishment of a Research Management Unit (RMU). This will be the first point of contact for all enquiries and will have responsibility for overall programme management including advertising and support to the selection process, alumni activity and financial management and reporting. The unit will be led an experienced project manager with appropriate support from finance and administration staff. To remain manageable and assure quality the new scheme will be focussed on universities only i.e. full member institutions of UUK and VERA.
- 14 To aid monitoring and strategic oversight a steering committee made up of representatives of the British Embassy, UUK, VERA and the British Council will be established. This committee, representing the scheme's high-level stakeholders will be responsible for providing guidance on overall strategic direction, advice on membership of the Academic Selection Board and it will also take on a reviewing role. The committee shall not take the place of the funder(s) but will help provide important strategic inputs to the scheme and strengthen buy-in from the wider academic community.
- 15 Beneficiaries for the scheme will be selected via a rigorous paper and points-based exercise. This exercise will be undertaken twice a year by the Academic Selection Board and will initially feature a face-to-face meeting which will then be followed later in the year by a video-conference meeting. The Board will be made up of at least four academic experts from UUK and VERA member organisations, two from Israel and two from the UK, to ensure credibility and transparency. The Board will be fully supported by RMU staff and meetings will be chaired by the Director or Assistant Director of the British Council.
- 16 A learning process approach will be adopted in our management of the scheme in year one and we therefore recommend an initial 12-month pilot phase to check on the effectiveness of the scheme and to build the most appropriate delivery systems. This phase will have specifically targeted components to allow us to exploit possible "one-off" government seed money, leverage additional funding, develop sustainability and extend networks.
- 17 BIRAX is expected to run for up to five years in the first instance in order to give new institutional partnerships the time they need to grow, develop and deliver.

3. Goal, Purpose and Outputs

Scope and Aim

- 18 BIRAX aims to promote the development of scientific cooperation and links between UK and Israeli Higher Education Institutions by providing grants to support academic exchange for research purposes. The scheme will be weighted in favour of the exact sciences though there will be opportunities for social sciences as well in order to keep the appeal of the scheme broad and inclusive.
- 19 Scientific research is a dynamic arena which should encourage creative and innovative collaboration between individuals and institutions at an international level. BIRAX will create opportunities, encourage mobility and internationalism amongst early and mid stage academic researchers and lecturers for the exchange of information, ideas, knowledge and long term relationship building. To ensure sustainability and lasting

partnerships we expect high level institutional support from relevant senior academics through the mentoring of younger staff.

Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To contribute to the longer-term development of the knowledge economy in the UK and Israel.
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen academic links between universities in the UK and Israel through the awarding of grants for the purpose of scientific research. To improve understanding between British and Israeli academics by encouraging constructive engagement through new research opportunities.
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinct pieces of collaborative research completed for publication and/or wider dissemination. Quality research proposals collaboratively developed for onward submission to other national or multi-lateral research funding bodies. Active bi-lateral alumni network mobilised and supported.

4. Activities

Advertising and Marketing

- A specific advertising and marketing strategy will be drawn up in consultation with the funding organisation and implemented by the RMU. This strategy will meet British Council standards for diversity by ensuring that minorities or under-represented groups are made aware of opportunities offered by the scheme.
- All advertising activities will exploit existing links, including British Council and HMG offices, internet pages and existing Israeli contacts; EU Researchers Portal; British Council Science team websites and publications where relevant; existing institutional contacts for British Council UK's HQ divisions specialising in training and development for higher education institutions (HEIs).

Selection

- 20 An Academic Selection Board made up of high level academic experts from Britain and Israel shall review and grade all applications submitted to it (see Annex 2: Proposal Evaluation Matrix). Advice as to the make up of this Board shall be sought from the Steering Committee. In addition, the Steering Committee shall be consulted on the final criteria for evaluation and selection of grant applications. It is envisaged that all applications received shall be reviewed by the RMU against Section 1: Proposal Compliance. Only those proposals deemed to be compliant will be forwarded to the Selection Board. (NB all applicants will have sight of the evaluation matrix as part of the Guidance Notes for Applicants.) The Board will be responsible for all funding decisions and the Board's decision will be final.
- 21 Decisions will be made using a rigorous paper and points-based exercise.
- 22 The Selection Board will meet twice a year with at least one face-to-face meeting, supplemented by telephone and video-conferencing as necessary, to discuss applications and agree final decisions. The RMU will be responsible for sending all applications, including guidance notes and selection paperwork, i.e. evaluation matrices, to Board members at least one week before the Board is due to convene to allow sufficient time for individual consideration and review.

- 23 The RMU shall be responsible for collating final scores and informing applicants of the outcome of the Selection Board. The RMU will provide feedback to applicants based on the comments of the Board as requested.

Applications

- 24 Applications shall be submitted from Heads of Departments or the equivalent from both UK and Israeli HEIs and must indicate:
- How the exchange / research collaboration will strengthen academic links and improve understanding.
 - How sustainability will be developed beyond the initial period of exchange / research collaboration
 - What commitment and importance the participating HEIs attach to the proposed exchange / research collaboration.
- 25 The programme shall have two specific application deadlines of 5 December 2008 and 8 May 2009 in the initial phase.
- 26 Applications may be submitted to the RMU at any point during the year: applicants will be notified of the timeframe for the decision making process following submission.
- 27 Application forms and guidance notes for applicants will be available from the RMU

Eligibility and Compliance	
<p>Applications will only be accepted from Heads of Departments or equivalent and must contain, in English:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed research proposal from the lead (or sending) institution. • Evidence of support from the receiving institution • Timeline for activities • Understanding of how the overarching aims of the scheme will be achieved • Information on the nature of link and how this meets the aims of the scheme • Evidence of other funding, e.g. flights, accommodation costs, etc * • Details of the research exchange recipients, i.e. CVs, proof of education and qualifications, confirmation of contractual status and citizenship, NB research team may include postdoctoral researchers not employed on a full time basis • Specific activities/expenditure the research grant will cover • References, e.g. from VCs, Research Councils etc <p>* priority will be given to those proposals indicating additional funding</p>

Monitoring and Evaluation of Exchanges and Research Collaborations

- As part of the award all successful applicants must agree to submit a progress report and/or a final report outlining the outcomes of their activities supported by the scheme: a progress report will only be required where the exchange is longer than 12 weeks
- The RMU shall be responsible for ensuring receipt of and collating all progress and final reports

Client Reporting

- 28 The RMU will be responsible for all client-reporting, including financial reporting
- 29 Bi-annual updates will be provided outlining applications received, research undertaken, visits made, new links established, research papers published, consortia created etc

Additional Activities	
<p>To support the creation of new networks, encourage sustainable development and attract additional funding, additional activities will be included as part of this programme. Such activities will encourage the growth of an active and engaged alumni network.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online newsletter to update alumni members on latest developments. Pre-departure briefings for those travelling to either the UK or Israel, allowing for networking across subject areas. Invitations to British Council events and receptions in the UK and Israel Seminars/talks by sector specialists to alumni groups Subject to additional funding, research workshops to explore areas of specific interest or an annual conference to promote further networking between alumni members
<p>The development of a BIRAX 'corner' on British Council's Israel website will also be instigated. This will allow promotion of the programme and its activities, dissemination of information to participants and help to further strengthen alumni activity. A password protected members' area for alumni will be introduced.</p>	

5. Project management

Steering Committee

A steering committee will be established to represent the scheme's high-level stakeholders and to aid monitoring and strategic oversight. It will be made up of representatives of the British Embassy, UUK, VERA and the British Council. Committee members will also provide advice on membership of the Academic Selection Board and it will also take on a reviewing role. The committee shall not take the place of the funder(s) but will help provide important strategic inputs to the scheme and strengthen buy-in from the wider academic community.

British Council Management

- 30 A Research Management Unit (RMU) will be established at British Council in Israel and supported by British Council in the UK and will be the first point of contact for all enquiries. Its duties will include:
 - Design and production of all relevant paperwork, e.g. application forms
 - Management of all in-country advertising
 - Coordination with British Council in the UK to assist with UK advertising
 - Management of all financial transactions, including payments
 - Coordination of progress and final reports, including research publications shall be held at the RMU
 - Liaison with other agencies and all marketing activities shall be managed by the RMU in Israel
 - Management of a database of successful applicants, participating higher education institutions and relevant research shall be set up and managed by the RMU

British Council Staff	
The RMU and its activities will be managed by experienced British Council staff and overseen by British Council's [REDACTED]	
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	

Pilot Year

31 A pilot year for this new scheme is highly recommended. This will allow for systems to be tried, tested and challenged and communication lines to be established. It will help us incorporate learning into the future implementation of the scheme and improve quality and levels of uptake in the scheme. (see Annex 3)

6. Timeline

Activity	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Final comments sought from stakeholders	■													
Client agreement given	■													
Contract signed		■												
Steering Committee Members identified and co-opted			■	■	■									
Selection Board Members identified and co-opted			■	■	■									
Design and agreement of application and selection documentation			■	■	■									
Design and agreement of M&E material for pilot yr				■	■									
Marketing Strategy agreed			■											
Marketing Strategy implemented				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Additional Funders approached		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
RMU established		■	■	■	■									
Website designed and initiated				■	■									
Design of Alumni activities										■	■	■	■	■
BIRAX official launch						■								
Applications submitted						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Application deadline								■					■	
Selection Board meets									■					■
Steering Committee meets						■				■				■
1 st exchanges / research collaborations										■	■	■	■	
1 st client report											■			
Presentation of Pilot report											■			
1 st alumni event													■	

Annexes

Annex 1 – British Council Experience

Academic and Education Programme Management

Selected Examples: Current

Chevening Scholarship Scheme: 1994 – ongoing

- 32** A prestigious postgraduate scholarship scheme funded by the British Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and managed globally by the British Council. The scheme offers mainly taught Masters programmes plus some PhDs in UK universities to candidates from overseas. A number of awards are administered in Israel each year to candidates with exceptional leadership potential selected through open competition.
- 33** Currently includes the following joint funded awards: Clore Foundation Award Scheme, Tel Aviv University Award Scheme, Lewis Medical Scholarships, Leonard Sainer FCO Scholarship, FCO Lord Goodman Scholarship for Research or Study in the Environment
- 34** Previous joint-funded awards in Israel included: Anglo Jewish Association Award Scheme, Haifa University Award Scheme, British Council – Ministry of Science Scholarships, British Council – Volcani Centre Scholarships, British Council – Nature Reserves Authority Scholarships, British Council –Barclay Family Cancer Research Foundation Scholarships.

Researcher Exchange Programme (RXP): 2007 – ongoing

- 35** This global British Council programme promotes the development of research cooperation and contacts between the UK and other countries by encouraging mobility and internationalism amongst postdoctoral researchers for exchange of information, ideas and knowledge and for long term relationship building.
- 36** Awards support new links between young researchers within an institution by funding short term exchange visits – either a single visit of between two weeks and three months duration or multiple visits. Research can be in any area including science, engineering, technology, social sciences and humanities. Maximum award is £5k and covers the costs of travel and subsistence.
- 37** British Council in Israel managed 3 awards for Israelis going to UK in 2007 and we have 4 awards pending for 2008 (2 Israelis going to UK and 2 UK researchers coming to Israel).

Science Networking Development Scheme (SNDS): 2001 – ongoing

- 38** This is a joint initiative originally promoted by the UK Office of Science & Technology and the Israel's Ministry of Science. Its purpose is to encourage bi-lateral co-operation between delegations of professional scientists in both countries through first contact initiatives that take the form of surveys, workshops, conferences. The Scheme is managed by the British Council in partnership with the British Embassy and Israel's Ministry of Science, Culture and Sport.
- 39** The scheme focuses on "hard sciences" only and supports proposals in Natural and Engineering Sciences, Life Sciences, Exact Sciences and Information Technology. Awards cover travel and subsistence costs (maximum of 12 participants, 6 from each country per event). SNDS does *not* provide funding for individual visits or exchanges. It is due to end later in 2008.

Skills @ Work: 2007 – 2010

- 40 A new multi-country initiative in technical and vocational education run by the British Council across 20 countries of Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, including Israel. The programme is supporting closer relationships between education and industry especially in the area of policy development and system reform in order to equip young people with relevant, transferable skills for employment in a global market place.
- 41 Programme features include enterprise and technology awards for young people to use their skills in innovative ways and the sharing of experience through a college partnership scheme to allow participating countries to develop industry-led occupational standards and curricula.
- 42 In Israel, we are working with the ORT network of technical schools, the Manufacturer's Association and the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour and Ministry of Education.

Britain-Israel Arts Training Scheme (BI-ARTS): 2000 – ongoing

- 43 BI-ARTS is a professional development and exchange scheme for UK and Israeli arts practitioners which is managed by the British Council and supported by a tripartite partnership between British Council, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Science, Culture and Sport. The scheme provides £100K per year to fund workshops, study tours and exchange visits in the UK and in Israel to develop skills and build institutional capacity in the arts.
- 44 Recent examples include the development of Israel's first Master of Fine Arts programme at Bezalel Academy with support from Goldsmiths, Slade and Glasgow Colleges of Art, support for political theatre involving Queen's University Belfast and Al-Medan Theatre Haifa and master classes in new digital music production with disadvantaged youth from Jaffa and southern Tel Aviv with London's CDR group of DJ's and music producers.
- 45 20% of all new BI-ARTS awards are targeted towards minority community participation from Israel

Beautiful Science: 2007 – 2009

- 46 An innovative regional science project which is providing a creative platform for science communication in 10 countries of the Balkans, Turkey, Israel and the South Caucasus. It links science, education and the arts through competitions, public debates and lively exhibitions in order to encourage young scientists to communicate more effectively with the public, inspire young people to consider a career in science and promote science as part of popular culture.
- 47 Partners in the UK include the Cheltenham Science Festival and Science Made Simple and in Israel the Bloomfield Science Museum, the Technion and the Weizman Institute.

Education UK: ongoing service

- 48 British Council provides a global advisory service for overseas students who are interested in pursuing further and higher education opportunities in the UK either self-funded or with scholarship support.
- 49 Specialist counsellors provide tailored advice to satisfy individuals' aspirations for self development and help them make informed choices about undergraduate and postgraduate options open to them.

- 50 In Israel this service is supplemented by periodic UCAS workshops, targeted information provision, UK education fairs and exhibitions at local colleges and universities.

PMI 2 Connect: 2006 - 2011

- 51 This awards scheme is designed to grow high quality research co-operation between UK institutions and partner countries. The awards aim to strengthen research links, raise profile of the UK, and contribute to capacity building in institutions, build effective and sustainable partnerships and trial models for future research co-operation.
- 52 Project Leaders must be at least postdoctoral level. Projects funded between £10k and 40k and last up to 2 years. Must demonstrate value for money, clearly defined outcomes, deliver outcomes in most effective way and have support of respective heads of institutions.
- 53 Funding is for mobility of staff, research and research student exchanges. Travel and accommodation costs of Internships and Placements (up to 24 months), Working Attachments by research students (up to 24 months) and attending small workshops with clearly defined topics (max of 5 days).

Selected Examples: Previous

Atlantic Fellowships in Public Policy

- 54 Funded initially by FCO's North America Department, the Fellowships were established to commemorate the 50th anniversary of US assistance in Europe and were open to US mid-career Public Policy practitioners. The US researchers were supported to come to the UK for 9 months to undertake research with matched relevant organisations and professional mentors, e.g. ACAS, Inland Revenue, NICE. The Fellowship was also intended as an introduction to the UK and its devolved administrations: mandatory seminars were arranged for all researchers in the 3 devolved administrations throughout the 9 month period. All research papers were required to be submitted and presented prior to departure.

UK – Israeli Science and Technology Research Fund

- 55 Established in 1995 for initial period of 3 years. Jointly funded by UK Office of Science and Technology, Israeli Ministry of Science and two charitable foundations (Wolfson Charitable Trust and Yad Hanadiv). British Council in Israel together with Ministry of Science administers the fund. 20 projects funded in areas of Biotechnology, Molecular Biology, Electro-Optics and High Performance Materials.

British Council International Seminars

- 56 Medical and allied health staff from three Israeli hospitals, Hadassah Hospital (Ein Karem & Mount Scopus), Sha'are Zedek Medical Centre and Tel Hashomer Hospital, attended British Council's international programme of medical and scientific seminars in the UK.

Annex 2 - Proposal Evaluation Matrix

Research Title:

Applicant Institution(s):

Receiving Institution(s):

	Yes	No
Section 1. Proposal Compliance: does the proposal contain and represent the following?		
1.1 A detailed research proposal appropriate to the sectors supported		
1.2 Evidence of support from receiving institution		
1.3 Timeline for activities		
1.4 Evidence of other funding		
1.5 CVs of all named individuals		
1.6 References/high level institutional support		
1.7 in English		
TOTAL		
<i>NB if proposal has scored 'No' for any of the above it is to be rejected and no further evaluation is required</i>		

Section 2. Innovation in Design: evidence of understanding of how the overarching aims of the scheme will be achieved		
	Rating	Maximum Score
2.1 Represents scientific or technical innovation		40
2.2 Represents a new opportunity, i.e. a new piece of research or subsequent phase		25
2.3 Leads to the development of high quality research that might not otherwise take place		25
2.4 Information on the nature of the link		10
TOTAL		100%
<i>Minimum Threshold for Section 2</i>		<i>60%</i>

Section 3. Sustainability and Mutual Benefit		
	Rating	Maximum Score
3.1 Likely to strengthen departmental or institutional links		25
3.2 Likely build deeper understanding between academics		25
3.3 Potential for longer-term sustainability eg. mentoring from senior academics, other financial sources, supports strategic/policy priorities etc.		25
3.4 Demonstrates mutual benefit		15
3.5 Commitment to and mechanism to engage with alumni activity		10
TOTAL		100%
<i>Minimum Threshold for Section 3</i>		<i>65%</i>

Section 4. Professional Experience and Delivery Plans		
	Rating	Maximum Score
4.1 Researcher(s) fit target audience, i.e. early and mid-stage academic researchers and lectures: where postdoctoral students are included evidence of mentoring/support		20
4.2 Proven research ability and rationale for inclusion where grant supports a research team		20
4.3 Quality of CVs who will design, undertake and support research activity		30
4.4 Evidence receiving institution has appropriate facilities		10
4.5 Mechanism to feedback to donor		10
4.6 Mechanism to secure further support/funding (where applicable)		10
TOTAL		100%
<i>Minimum Threshold for Section 4</i>		<i>65%</i>

Annex 3 – BIRAX Pilot Year

Pilot Year

- 57** A pilot year for this new scheme is highly recommended. This would allow for systems to be tried, tested and challenged and communication lines to be established. It would help us incorporate learning into the future implementation of the scheme and improve quality and levels of uptake in the scheme.

Monitoring and Evaluation of pilot year processes

- 58** We recommend a pilot year in the first instance to allow us to test procedures, processes and communication lines and to ensure that following the first tranche, the scheme is meeting its objectives.
- 59** At the mid point between the Selection Board meetings the following areas shall be reviewed and a report submitted to the Steering Committee for comment and advice:

Selection Board

We shall contact all Board members for feedback on:

- Effectiveness of evaluation matrices and guidance notes
- Composition of the Board
- Efficacy and time management of Board meetings
- Logistics of Board meetings

Advertising

- 60** The RMU shall review the advertising strategy and shall pay special attention to:
- Effectiveness, i.e. are we reaching the right sectors, at the right level
 - How many applications have been received Vs enquiries and is the balance as expected
 - How does the Israeli advertising and subsequent application numbers compare to the UK strategy and effectiveness?

Application Forms

- 61** Feedback shall be sought from a representative group of applicants on scheme literature.
- 62** Feedback shall also be sought from the Selection Board, i.e. is relevant info being captured by form; how well are the forms being completed etc

Final Reports

- 63** All final reports received by this time shall be reviewed to ascertain if they contain relevant information, e.g. activity meeting researchers' and scheme objectives; activity leading to sustainability; has further funding been granted or applied for etc

Grants

- 64** RMU staff and recipients shall be asked for feedback on the logistics of grant payment, e.g. have grants been paid in good time for start of exchange/research activity etc