

The secret of Ukraine's success

Yes, we did it again: we're so delighted to be working in the 'dream company' with a dream team! This year the British Council Ukraine came 5th in the ranking of top 20 Ukrainian companies – out of 695 companies (78% multinational and 22% local companies). (Read more about the survey [here](#).)

Our success has been possible thanks to our colleagues who shared their thoughts with through focus groups and surveys, and then took an active role in deciding on and implementing improvements. This was all done with the full commitment of our Senior Leadership Team.

In our Wider Europe Regional TACOS, we clearly express what we do in Ukraine to ensure staff engagement and well-being:

"We are committed to foster the most efficient environment where we aspire to attract and keep the best, most professional, motivated and diverse staff available and to ensure that they are happier working the British Council than for anyone else".

Our people priorities in 2016-2017

We realise that people are our main asset and our main focus this year is on:

- Career and talent management, developing professional competences and behaviour
- Staff well-being and engagement
- Life and work balance
- Managing stress at work



Pictured: Staff Development Day, 19 May

How we achieve high results

Engagement

It is a tradition now that we hold an annual Staff Development Day on 19 May, which is also [Vyshivanka Day](#) (more on that in a moment). Our development day is a fantastic team-building event which gives us the possibility to interact with one another, share successes from the previous year, concentrate on what can be done better and learn from our partners!

What's very exciting is how you feel when you realise that you are part of a bigger team, including programmes, the teaching centre and exams. As this is also Vyshivanka Day, many people in Ukraine wear Vyshivankas (see me pictured below) and we are no different in the office. Most of us – no matter where we are from – wear Vyshivankas for our British Council event! On such days the importance of British Council mission and the input of each department and every individual cannot be more clear to us.



Pictured: Victoria Grushina, Head of HR, Ukraine

This year we worked in focus groups using the [world café method](#) and focused on six main topics:

- well-being
- managing changing workloads
- development and self-development
- internal communications
- equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Corporate Social Responsibility
- behaviours and good relationships

Everyone contributed their thoughts to at least three of the topics. Our discussions:

- highlighted what we are good at and where we still need improvement
- brainstormed what can be done to help that improvement
- suggested actions to be taken by the Senior Leadership Team to finalise action plans

As a result we produced a comprehensive action plan and most of the initiatives suggested by our employees have already been implemented.

Well-being and work/life balance

Simon Williams, our Country Director, fully supports the idea of having a good work/life balance. In a recent interview with magazine Noveo Vremy about HR practises he mentioned that British Council team spends lots of time at work but that work is not everything in life. Therefore, we aim to implement initiatives that support our work/life balance and well-being.



Pictured: Simon Williams, Country Director, Ukraine

We've recently introduced a few initiatives, including an eye care policy. As a result eight colleagues

have been able to get prescription glasses for use with visual display units (VDU).

As part of our well-being policy we provide loans for employees and their family members' that support fitness, well-being and non-work-related education and development. The loan can be used to buy a bicycle, pay for a gym membership, for kindergarten, school fees in advance or for a non-work related course.

We have also introduced flexi hours for employees. Everyone needs to be present during our core hours but can then choose to work their remaining hours flexibly. We are all now enjoying discretionary holidays, too. In the past, our three days of discretionary holidays were to be used over the Western Christmas dates. This has been changed so we can choose and celebrate the holidays which are important for us; this may be for religious holidays, birthdays or the start of the school year.

Over the summer we took part in global pilot project on stress at work. A survey was used to identify key stress factors at work and ways of managing them. Factors included demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. We have developed an action plan based on the results to improve areas that were highlighted in the survey.

Social responsibility and equality

Our team is well known in the region for the implementation of EDI policies. We are proud about having one of the best results in the region with a result of nine out of ten for the DAF submission.

British Council Ukraine is regularly praised for our achievements as a sustainable and forward-thinking organisation. We have regular meetings with partners from NGOs which are working on a range of issues including disability and LGBT concerns.

We recently supported a project of our partners to collect money for a Braille printer for people with visual impairments. Donations were given in return for a postcard which you could ask for any phrase or quote to be printed on.



Pictured: postcards with Braille

On 19 July we ran an internal training about communication with people with visual impairments. We learned basic skills of communication with visually impaired and blind people in everyday life and at work and did an exercise on accompanying people with this kind of disability. We discussed stereotypes of visually impaired people and main challenges they face.



Some of the team taking part in the communication skills training

We are proud of our volunteering scheme that we introduced recently. Employees can take two paid work-days per year for volunteering activity of any kind.

Learning and development

As a region we are committed to the learning and development of colleagues. Six colleagues received funding for their professional development through a regional learning and development initiative. The *Future Me* scheme is inclusive and open to all colleagues, including anyone working in the Teaching Centre. The scheme offers more flexibility for colleagues in setting professional

development plans relevant to British Council's business and strategic objectives. In addition to the regional scheme, all colleagues are eligible for locally-run trainings, seminars and presentations to support their professional and personal development.

All of this work helps us to give our employees confidence about their future with the British Council as a people-focused organisation. Social safety, stability, our mission and values, creating an engaging atmosphere and working environment help to make us proud of the organisation we work for and represent. When a company is loyal to its employees it becomes a dream company to work for!

Victoria Grushina

Head of HR, Ukraine