



GRANT CALL FOR SOUTH AFRICAN AND UK HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM TO ENGAGE IN THE DELIVERY OF SPECIFIC CAPABILITY STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES, UNDER THE STUDENT WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME (SWEEP), IN COLLABORATION WITH THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND UNIVERSITIES SOUTH AFRICA (USAf).

Date: 07 November 2025

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1 Overview of the British Council and Universities South Africa (USAf)'s Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Programme

1.1 The British Council builds connections, understanding, and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education, and the English language. We work in two ways - directly with individuals to transform their lives, and with governments and partners to elicit a bigger impact over a longer term, creating benefits for millions of people all over the world. We help young people to gain the skills, confidence, and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

1.2 British Council connect the best of the UK with the world and the best of the world with the UK. These connections lead to an understanding of each other's strengths and of the challenges and values that we share. This helps build trust between people in the UK and other nations which endures even when official relations come under geopolitical pressure/s. We work on the ground in more than 100 countries. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. Further information can be viewed at www.britishcouncil.org.

1.3 Universities South Africa (USAf) is a non-profit membership organisation representing all 26 public universities in South Africa. Guided by a Board comprising university Vice Chancellors and the USAf CEO, the organisation advocates for a thriving and inclusive higher education sector that contributes meaningfully to South Africa's social, cultural, and economic development. Through advocacy, capacity building, and strategic collaboration, USAf strengthens the sector's ability to operate effectively and to influence national and global higher education discourse. Central to this mandate is the Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) programme which is one of USAf's

flagship initiative designed to address the pressing challenge of graduate unemployment and to embed entrepreneurship as a core function within universities.

1.4 EDHE advances a three-pronged approach focusing on staff development, student entrepreneurship, and curriculum transformation. Within this framework, the Student Women Economic Empowerment Programme (SWEEP) plays a critical role in promoting gender-inclusive entrepreneurship by equipping female students with the skills, networks, and confidence to participate meaningfully in the economy. Together, these efforts position entrepreneurship not merely as a response to unemployment, but as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth, innovation, and social transformation. Further information can be viewed at <https://edhe.co.za/>.

2 Introduction and Background to the Programme

2.1 The British Council and Universities South Africa (USAf) partnership began in 2018, with the ambition of supporting entrepreneurship development in the South African higher education system and to directly tackle graduate unemployment. Through the British Council's Going Global Partnerships (GGP) Programme, and USAf's Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) programme, the partnership has also sought to strengthen institutional links between South Africa and the UK, improving the quality and effectiveness of higher education systems and enhancing graduate outcomes by fostering student entrepreneurship, academic entrepreneurship and creating entrepreneurial universities. This creates opportunities and access to skills development for young people, promoting the internationalisation of higher education.

2.2 During Phase I (2018 to 2021), the partnership focused on the development of a draft South African Policy Framework for Entrepreneurial universities, as well as supporting the broader internationalisation of the higher education objectives of the partners. During Phase II (2021-2024), the partnership focused on advancing entrepreneurial universities by providing training and advocacy engagements for university leaders. Additionally, during this phase, the partnership focused on tackling gender inequality and promoting greater economic inclusion by empowering female students with an entrepreneurial mindset through the Student Women Economic Empowerment Programme (SWEEP). The London School of Economics joined the initiative and took the lead in planning and delivering capability-strengthening interventions for SWEEP chapter leaders and university coordinators, as well as curriculum development to support participation in entrepreneurial activities in public universities with a focus on employability, entrepreneurship and relevant soft skills.

2.3 In the current third phase of the partnership (2025-2028), the British Council and USAf will continue to focus on women's economic inclusion by strengthening institutional partnerships as well as enhancing the capabilities of SWEEP chapters across all 26 public universities in South Africa. While there are already established Communities of Practice (CoPs) to support entrepreneurship development within the South African higher education landscape, there is a need to further improve these capability-building activities. The initiative will involve a Consortium of various universities and

education support organisations in South Africa and the UK. Their efforts will aim to foster an international community of practice dedicated to promoting women's economic empowerment. The collaboration will lead to the design and delivery of initiatives that equip female university students and coordinators with essential skills and access to opportunities that promote entrepreneurial activities.

2.4 The call to the South Africa and the UK Consortium aims to strengthen and amplify the impact of the SWEEP programme. We are seeking a consortium of South African and UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) and intermediary (education support) organisations to join forces to submit applications under this call. The consortium should comprise two Lead applicants based at a South African and a UK institution, and a minimum of three and a maximum of seven South African and UK-based partners. This is an opportunity for the partners to enhance their international engagement, share their insights and learnings on how we can collaboratively contribute to female student economic empowerment.

Key objectives:

1. To provide opportunities for higher education institutions to undertake projects that focus on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills development amongst female university students in South Africa.
2. To deepen the awareness and understanding of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities as a means of economic participation amongst female university students in South Africa.
3. To create opportunities for the active participation of women in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities in universities with a focus on creating businesses that have a positive societal impact.
4. To foster sustained SA-UK university collaborations that explore the commonality, as well as the diversity, of entrepreneurship issues, all while drawing on and sharing learning, good practice, and experience from both countries.
5. To leverage significant industry networks to connect female university students with SA and UK entrepreneurship mentors with the skills and knowledge needed to guide them in creating businesses that have a positive societal impact.

2.5 The purpose and scope of this Terms of Reference (TOR) is to explain in further detail the grant requirements of the British Council.

3 Specification

Background and objectives

As a response to the realities of women's under-representation in entrepreneurship and gender-based violence (GBV), which perpetuates inequality and is a barrier to women's economic empowerment and societal participation¹ capability-strengthening interventions improve the representation of women in entrepreneurial activity² and offers a low prevalence of GBV by empowering women with financial independence and increasing their social status, leading to decision-making power within communities³. The SWEEP programme was designed by USAf's EDHE programme to equip student women and graduates across public universities in South Africa for entrepreneurial activities. The programme empowers female university students and graduate entrepreneurs to achieve success in the world of entrepreneurship and to create businesses that have a positive societal impact. In addition, SWEEP is an impactful initiative that aligns with the UK International Education Strategy's focus on empowerment of women and girls and the British Council's commitment to supporting gender equality in higher education. The proposed intervention will be implemented within the SWEEP governance structure that includes coordinators and executive committee members of chapters based at public universities.

Overview of grant scope

We are seeking a Consortium of university and education support organisation partners who will lead on the planning and delivery of specific capability strengthening initiatives, under the Student Women Economic Empowerment Programme (SWEEP), in collaboration with the British Council and Universities South Africa (USAf). The Consortium will support the development of structures and tools for innovation and entrepreneurial development within SWEEP chapters and engage to tackle the barriers to entrepreneurship that female university students face. Preferred consortium would be the one that can demonstrate the capacity to integrate diverse forms of mentoring, training and perspectives, including insights from industry and the private sector. This multidisciplinary approach is essential in fostering a comprehensive support system for female university students engaged in entrepreneurship.

Below are the proposed interventions.

¹ Mphatheni, MR, "The Impact of Gender-based Violence on the South African Economy: A Literature Review," E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Vol.5 No.16 (2024) pp.2789-2800 <https://noyam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/EHASS20245168.pdf>

²<https://usaf.ac.za/a-research-study-highlights-key-impediments-to-student-women-participation-in-entrepreneurship-at-sa-universities/>

³ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_in_higher_education_report.pdf

- Capability strengthening

This will include the design and delivery of a Training of Trainers (ToT) capability workshop(s) to SWEEP coordinators and student representatives who will be equipped with skills and techniques needed to become effective trainers within their own university chapters. The training will cover capabilities in the following areas: entrepreneurial skills, soft skills, addressing gender-based violence, and promoting green, social, and digital enterprises, including artificial intelligence (AI). The curriculum and content that were developed by LSE in the previous SWEEP phase will be contextualised, including incorporating additional materials. This stage will also involve identifying a strategic partner to host the contextualised curriculum and training content online. The train-the-trainer workshop(s) will contribute to the strengthening of a sustainable entrepreneurship training infrastructure for SWEEP chapters within universities.

- Mentorship Programme

To leverage significant networks to connect the female university students with UK and SA entrepreneurship mentors and leaders, the 6 months mentorship programme will focus on pairing female university students (mentees) with more experienced individuals (mentors) from academia, business and the private sector in South Africa and the UK to transfer knowledge, skills, and guidance for business/professional and personal development. The consortia will design the programme, including matching, guiding participants to create clear objectives, structured support for both roles, and methods to measure success. Due to the large size of the proposed group and its diverse needs, multiple mentorship models will be considered to provide a more holistic experience. For instance, exploring peer mentorship versus group mentorship, which can be further categorised into leadership mentors, business mentors, communications mentors, and others. The consortium will create viable platforms for greater exposure of female university student entrepreneurs to the SA and UK entrepreneurial ecosystems, and for connecting these students with UK and SA entrepreneurship mentors/coaches.

Deliverables and Milestones

Below are specific deliverables expected from the Consortium:

- Train-the-trainer workshops delivered; 35 SWEEP coordinators and 175 student representatives equipping them with facilitation and coaching skills for sustainable replication within their universities
- Co-design and delivery of a university curriculum/short course on soft skills for female students, focusing on communication, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, teamwork, and professional confidence.
- Online platform to host the contextualised curriculum and training content identified and onboarded.
- Mentorship network of UK and SA entrepreneurship mentors and leaders established, including matching processes, objective setting, support frameworks, and success measurement methods.

- Mentor/Mentee pairings where specific female university students are paired with mentors from academia, business, and the private sector.
- Monitoring and evaluation reports, including lessons learned.
- Support dissemination of project outcomes, narratives and lessons learned
- Reporting-the drafting and submission of progress and post initiatives narrative and financial reports.

Outcomes

Short term:

- SA-UK university partnerships deepened, and institutional efficiency to support employability, entrepreneurship, and relevant skills for female students improved.
- Female university students and coordinators upskilled with employability, entrepreneurship, and relevant skills for student outcomes and the development of businesses that have a positive societal impact.
- Contextualised curriculum/capacity strengthening content to support training and capacitation of South African women entrepreneurs in Higher Education to support their role in entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Medium term:

- Open access to contextualised curriculum and training content for any students from South African institutions for improved youth employability and the creation of jobs.
- Strengthened mentorship and peer-support ecosystems, fostering collaboration between UK and South African institutions and mentors.

Long term:

- Improved employability and economic participation outcomes for female students and graduates, and contribution to SA and UK higher education systems that support positive societal impact.
- Establishment of a replicable model for cross-border short course collaboration and women's empowerment within higher education.

British Council & USAf EDHE will

- Share tools for establishing equitable and sustainable partnerships
- Share details of the [SWEEP-EDHE initiative](#) (current and new).
- Supply details of all key South Africa stakeholders and participants.
- Supply promotional materials and brand guidelines.
- Supply documents and details for local activities.

- Supply and coordinate event logistics related to hosting the train-the-trainer workshop(s) (e.g. main workshop/meeting venue, accommodation and flights for participants e.t.c).
- Coordinate the onboarding of the partner to host the contextualised curriculum and training content

The consortium will:

- Providing a detailed proposal and work plan for the project.
- Develop a detailed breakdown of potential costs to be incurred.
- Plan regular project check-in meetings with all relevant stakeholders.
- Leverage relevant networks and expertise in support of the overall project objectives.
- Ensure alignment and complementarity with current and existing components of the SWEEP initiative.

4 Project Timeline

The deadline for submission of proposals by the partners is **10 December 2025**.

5 Budget

In this phase of the project, one grant is available for a consortium, not exceeding GBP 60,000, to cover direct project costs and expenses aimed at strengthening the partnership.

6 Intellectual Property

- Unless otherwise agreed, the activities and any content associated with the project will be the intellectual property of the British Council and USAf.

7 Submissions and brief project Timescales

We encourage applications from diverse higher education institutions in South Africa, including historically disadvantaged universities and universities of technology, as well as from the UK, including universities in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Subject to any changes notified to potential partner institutions by the British Council and USAf and in accordance with the Proposal Conditions, the intended timescales applicable to this process are as follows:

Activity	Proposed Deadline/s
Call to UK and South Africa partners for participation in the SWEEP Capacity Enhancement activities/initiatives	7 th November 2025

Clarification Questions Deadline	14 th November 2025
British Council response to clarification questions	21 th November 2025
Deadline for submission of Proposals by potential partners	10 th December 2025
Contracting Successful Institutions	19 th December 2025 to 19 th January 2026
Roll-out of programme	Mid-February 2026 onwards
Launch of the mentorship programme	End of February 2026
Train the trainer workshops	End of March 2026

8 Payment and Invoicing

4.1 The British Council will pay correctly addressed and undisputed invoices within 30 days of the Invoice Date. General requirements for an invoice for the British Council include:

- A description of the services supplied is included.
- British Council will request additional personal documents to assist with processing the payment e.g. bank confirmation letter.
- The British Council reference (i.e. Purchase Order number) is included.
- It is sent electronically via email in PDF format to BC.Invoices@britishcouncil.org, keeping in copy Olipa.Ntawanga@britishcouncil.org