

British Council Chief Executive visits Bangladesh

Mahdin Mahboob

MARTIN DAVIDSON, the Chief Executive of British Council came to Bangladesh on a two-day visit on 14th September. His trip also consisted of visits to Nepal and Pakistan. Other than monitoring the current activities of the British Council in Bangladesh, Davidson also ventured on the future scopes of the organization. He has met different officials, academicians, students and teachers related to the British Council in this visit.

Martin has been working for the British Council for over 23 years now and took up the role as Chief Executive in April 2007, having been Deputy Director General since September 2005. He has worked in different parts of the world including Hong Kong and China. Martin's commitment to international relationships has been a constant feature of his career, since as a young English graduate he went to Hong Kong as Administrative Officer, taking the high-level decisions on the running of a town of a million people. When he joined the British Council as Assistant Representative in Beijing in 1984, British Council China was an operation of 6 people working in a converted bicycle shed at the British Embassy. In those days it was illegal for a Chinese national to speak to a foreigner. Martin played a pivotal part in building this fledgling presence up to its present strength of more than 230 people in four state-of-the-art offices. He has also held various posts in the British Council's Geographical Directorate with responsibilities that have included South East Europe, in a particularly troubled time in the region's history, the Middle East, East Asia and the Americas.

Martin Davidson promises a British Council that will work quickly and effectively on its core business of building the relationships that are a critical component of UK foreign policy. Rebuilding damaged trust in the Middle East, assisting the international conversation on climate change and linking the creativity and innovation of the UK to the world are the three areas where Martin feels the contribution of the British Council is critical.

An Iftar Party was arranged in honour of Davidson in the residence of Dr. June Rollinson, the Director of British Council. Many dignitaries, including the High Commisioner of UK to Bangladesh, His Excellency Anwar Choudhury were present in the occasion. There, in an exclusive interview with Star Campus, Martin talked about the missions of his current trip and the future plans of the British Council.

Martin emphasized on the role the British Council is playing in strengthening the relationships between UK and Bangladesh. He thinks that the cultural dialogue is a very important aspect in determining the relationship between two countries and that is exactly what British Council is trying to strengthen.

He feels that the current involvement of the British Council, that of conducting the GCSE O'Level and A'Level Examinations from different English Medium schools reaches out to too small a number of people, so the British Council is planning to get associated with different programs of the mainstream public education system. The training programs for the English Language teachers is meant to standardize the English that everyone is learning.

'We bring expertise in working internationally, a global presence and 70 years of reputation to bear, to help vital conversations to happen between UK arts and educational institutions and the rest of the world,' says Martin. 'Where we are delivering ourselves, we will be focusing on a smaller number of larger activities in areas of the world where we can make a real difference.'

Later in the program, a survey report by DFID Bangladesh and the British Council 'Through Bangladeshi Eyes' was launched. It gave an idea of how young Bangladeshi students and professionals see the UK and how much they know about the country.