

Publishing Futures

Sharjah Publishers Conference 2026

Terms of Reference

About Publishing Futures

Publishing Futures is the British Council's flagship programme supporting publishing entrepreneurs and future leaders in the trade publishing industry to strengthen international connections, develop new skills and explore innovative business models. By building a global network at publishing events in cities such as London, Frankfurt, Sharjah and Jaipur and at other major industry platforms such as the IPA Congress, the programme creates opportunities for collaboration and professional growth.

The programme champions an inclusive and interconnected publishing industry – one that builds resilience to navigate challenges, protects the freedom to publish, enables the exchange of knowledge and fosters the understanding essential for supporting peace and prosperity. Its impact is already clear: participants demonstrate a deep commitment to building meaningful international relationships and experience the benefits international collaboration brings.

Publishing Futures offers participants access to different industry events and ongoing connection through the fellowship alumni offer, ensuring participants are part the sector conversations which build a publishing industry that is innovative, more equitable and globally connected.

IPA Congress Opportunity

A delegation of six publishers from the UK will be selected via open call to participate in the [**Sharjah Publishers Conference in the UAE**](#), as well as the bespoke **British Council Publishing Futures programme** on the days before the Conference. The Publishing Futures programme will include roundtables and workshops with industry leaders which will offer a deep dive into the Arabic publishing sector as well as topics of specific interest to the selected delegates. The programme will take place from 30 October - 4 November 2026.

The Sharjah International Book Fair's Publishers Conference, held before the main SIBF event, gathers publishers, literary agents, experts, and specialists from over 70 countries. The three-day programme offers a dynamic mix of seminars on global publishing trends, matchmaking sessions, and networking opportunities, allowing participants to explore new markets and establish valuable connections in the Arab and global publishing industries.

The programme offers:

- Opportunities to meet with global publishing leaders and publishers from international markets
- Access to a seminar programme which provides insights and builds knowledge around issues facing publishing
- Support for introductions and bespoke rights meetings during the programme
- Social and cultural engagements in Sharjah as part of the programme
- Relationship with British Council Literature team
- Access to British Council's Publishing Futures Alumni offer which includes invitations to networking events at international publishing meeting points, notifications of grants and opportunities of interest, online skills building workshops

Proposed programme

tbc Oct	Introductions and overview of Arabic sector (1 hour, online)
tbc Oct	Pre-departure briefing (1 hour, online)
Fri 30 Oct	Delegate arrival in Sharjah, Welcome dinner for group
Sat 31 Oct	British Council programme and tour
Sun 1 Nov	Sharjah Publishers Conference Day 1
Mon 2 Nov	Sharjah Publishers Conference Day 2
Tues 3 Nov	Sharjah Publishers Conference Day 3
Wed 4 Nov	Visit to Sharjah International Book Fair; Delegates depart
tbc Jan	Follow-up meeting (1 hour, online)

Participant Selection

Application

Interested publishers should apply to participate in the programme via the online application form. Applications will be accepted between 13 July 2026 and 12 August 2026.

Registration link: [Publishing Futures Application Form – Fill in form](#)

Closing date: 12 August 2026, 23.59 BST

Access: If you identify as disabled and need additional access support to complete your application, please contact us at uk-literature@britishcouncil.org

To be considered for this British Council opportunity you must also register separately to attend the Sharjah Publishers Conference. The same deadline of 12 August 2026 applies for registration. Please use the registration link here: <https://publisherconference.com/>

Registration takes approximately 10-15 minutes. To complete the registration, please have to hand:

- Personal details including a headshot

- Company details including a logo (optional)
- Rights catalogue in PDF format
- Examples of Arabic rights purchased, or specifics about what you are looking for from Arabic

Eligibility

The programme is for future publishing leaders based in **the UK** and applicants must:

- Currently hold an editorial, commissioning or rights buying role at a trade publishing house and have 5-10 years' experience in the trade publishing industry
- Have limited international experience to date and a desire to build connections and explore collaborations with the global publishing sector
- Have the confidence and competence to participate in an English-based programme
- Be fully able to participate in the programme, including spending 5 nights in Sharjah from **30 October – 4 November 2026** and preparatory work in advance
- Have a particular interest in literature in translation and underrepresented voices
- Demonstrate a particular interest in buying Arabic literature rights (desirable)

We particularly welcome and encourage applications from candidates who are underrepresented in the Publishing sector. Applicants with limited international or fellowship experience will be prioritised.

Please note that climate conditions in UAE can be extremely hot and the contrast of outdoor temperatures compared to indoor air conditioning can be taxing. There will also be some walking from venue to venue in the programme and this can also be difficult in the heat. While we will make as many accommodations as possible for specific requirements, it is not always possible given the particular infrastructure in the city.

Questions about eligibility can be directed to Rebecca Hart at uk-literature@britishcouncil.org

Assessment

All applications will be assessed against the eligibility criteria and application responses evaluated as follows:

- 20% Relevance and eligibility:** Applicant meets criteria (relevant role at publishing house based in one of the eligible countries, 5-10 years' experience) and publishes literary work of high artistic/creative quality.
- 45% Motivation:** Applicant clearly articulates their motivation and aims for participating and demonstrates a readiness and vision for continued international collaboration with specific outcomes and future plans. Applicant demonstrates a genuine interest in building connections, learning and curiosity about new markets and literatures. Applicant's participation has the potential to benefit their wider community and publishing house.
- 35% Opportunity:** Applicant has a clear personal and professional development goals they wish to achieve and is at a suitable stage in their career to maximise the opportunity. Applicant demonstrates commitment to participating fully in the programme. Applicants with limited international or fellowship experience may be prioritised.

Expectations for the programme

The British Council's Publishing Futures programme provides a framework for individual participant's personal and professional development. Individual participants gain the most from the programme by using it as a springboard for their own growth: considering in advance their own personal objectives, preparing for the visit with pre-reading and research, and engaging deeply during the programme.

It is expected that participants will:

- Attend two one-hour online briefing sessions before departure to get to know the group, learn about the local context and run-through the programme in detail
- Prepare ahead of time by reading programme documents, suggested reading and/or research, setting individual meetings as appropriate
- Attend the entire programme and approach all meetings and events with generosity and an open mind
- Complete a baseline survey before the programme, an endline survey after the visit and a follow-on survey (one year later) to help us to monitor impact
- Pursue connections, leads you make during the programme, continue to build relationships and engage with British Council via the Alumni offer
- Participate in one one-hour online follow-up meeting to reflect on the programme and share updates about potential collaborations and personal development

Practical and Logistical Arrangements

Participants are responsible for:

- Providing accurate information in a timely manner for Sharjah Book Authority and British Council to make travel bookings, including signing a Visitor Support Contract
- Researching and purchasing your own comprehensive travel insurance and any travel immunisations or medications
- Notifying Sharjah Book Authority and British Council immediately if you are travelling on a passport other than British (and therefore may require a visa)
- Advising British Council on any access requirements and accommodations you may have
- Making your own arrangements for your airport transfer between home and your home airport (British Council will reimburse costs for public transportation for those who need to travel a significant distance to the nearest airport)
- Covering all costs for personal incidentals and meals outside of the official programme and during travel days
- Covering all costs for accommodation, expenses, transfers and other incidentals if you extend your trip before or after the official programme

Sharjah Book Authority is responsible for:

- Booking and purchasing return economy flights (or local travel) from the participant's nearest airport to and from Dubai
- Booking and purchasing hotel accommodation in Sharjah for 5 nights.

- Providing meals and local transportation during the Sharjah Publishers Conference

British Council is responsible for:

- Providing meals and local transportation during the time of the British Council programme (before the Conference)
- Providing pre-departure briefings and joining instructions documenting all relevant programme information