Can I first of all welcome you to tonight's reception for what is in reality a celebration of the cultural and educational links between the United Kingdom and Brazil? This is my first trip to São Paulo. While you can learn a lot from statistics – and, needless to say, all of them are superlative – I have to say that only a visit here can really bring home to you the fantastic dynamism and energy that this city generates. I now know why this is the economic hub of Brazil and of South America.

I've also learned that it was a Briton, Charles Miller, who brought football to São Paulo. It seemed a good idea at the time. Perhaps all I can say is that the word "Penta" is unlikely to enter the English language for some decades to come - even though we still have the dubious advantage of four separate national teams to just one for Brazil.

As well as a passion for football, São Paulo is also a city that, historically, has strongly embraced modernism. From the Week of 1922 through to the founding of MASP [Museum of Art in São Paulo] and the Biennal, of which we are regular enthusiastic participants, the city has been in the vanguard of modern art.

So it is highly appropriate that it should be the location for the Tate Gallery's first overseas exhibition in Latin America.

This really has been an excellent opportunity for us in the British Council to be involved in bringing a major exhibition to Brazil. Through the efforts of our staff here, and of the various partners involved in the project, we have been able to show a broad range of work from the Tate collection from 1960 onwards – from David Hockney, Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon through to the Young British Artists movement represented by Damien Hirst.

I should particularly like to express my thanks to Brasil Connects, our principal partner in bringing this exhibition to São Paulo – their enterprise and commitment to the project has been inspiring. Can I also mention the Tomie Ohtake Institute, our other partner in the exhibition, where the video works of artists such as Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood and Mona Hatoum are being shown.

Today, I visited the Brazilian British Centre in Pinheiros, where the British Council is located. I am sure that most of you will know this wonderful building created three years ago by our long-term partners, Cultura Inglesa.

We are proud to have played a part in encouraging and supporting this project, which reflects the importance we attach to our work in Brazil and in São Paulo in particular.

But, while the Centre symbolises the UK's commitment to links with Brazil, what is even more important is how we shape partnerships with Brazilian individuals and institutions.

Our two countries have a long-shared history, largely of mutual affection and regard, but peppered also with misconceptions in both directions.
One of our main tasks is to challenge the stereotypical images that abound of the UK as a cold, hierarchical society – and tell people about how it has developed into a hub of creativity and diversity, where the stifling formality of decades gone by has been replaced by a more open and welcoming manner.

At the time when Charles Miller was introducing football to Brazil, international relations generally boiled down to a combination of commercial interests and diplomatic alliances between governments. In the hundred years or more since then, links between institutions and the civil societies of differing countries have become increasingly important.

That's why the role of cultural relations organisations like the British Council is of increasing importance. Our task here is to nurture and develop long-term, sustainable partnerships between the UK and Brazil.

To do so, we need your participation in creating more joint projects in the arts, in education, in the sciences and – not least – in the area of social development, where we have much to learn from each other.

So, please do keep in touch with us.

May I end by thanking you all for coming, and I would invite you all to enjoy the exhibition.