

The Future of UK Soft Power: Building a Strategic Framework

Encompassing culture, political values and foreign policies, soft power is a crucial component of a nation's global influence. The UK's deep stock of soft power assets have remained resilient in the face of significant domestic, political, economic and social change. As a result, the UK is in an enviable position in the soft power sphere as an attractive, trusted international actor but we face growing competition from allies and strategic rivals alike and cannot rely on past achievements alone. As the Integrated Review recognises, there has never been a more critical need for a clear plan on how to maintain and promote the UK's soft power strength.

This report seeks to build on the foundations laid out in the Integrated Review, to develop a dialogue and shared understanding between Government and the soft power sector of the full scope of the UK's diverse and dynamic range of soft power assets, their unique role in the country's international strategies, and their value to the UK's success.

With effort to avoid encouraging the overt instrumentalisation of soft power actors by the Government, this report provides an analysis of UK soft power today and suggests practical mechanisms to foster closer collaboration between a diverse independent sector and Government. This would improve communication structures, support better strategy development and enable soft power actors to support wider UK interests through their particular strengths and capabilities.

Recommendations

- 1. Establish a new Government-soft power engagement forum to aid connectivity and strategic thinking between Whitehall, devolved administrations and independent soft power actors.**
- 2. Ensure that the Minister responsible for soft power is recognised as the cross-Government Soft Power Champion, supported by a team empowered to make targeted strategic interventions across Whitehall and beyond.**
- 3. Introduce a light-touch Strategic Relationship Management System (SRM)-style account management system for soft power bodies to enhance connectivity across Whitehall**
- 4. Agree on planning horizons, resources and funding mechanisms, between Government and soft power actors to maximise their contribution to the UK's international objectives.**
- 5. Create light-touch mechanisms to increase connectivity between soft power actors and overseas Posts.**

UK Soft Power Group The UK Soft Power Group (UKSPG) is the leading non-governmental organisation collectively representing soft power organisations in the United Kingdom. We represent many of the UK's most treasured, compelling and active soft power organisations and institutions, with a truly diverse membership spanning the full length and breadth of the United Kingdom. The UK Soft Power Group aims to amplify the voice of the soft power sector and increase its centrality to Government strategic planning, emphasising the value of soft power as a foreign policy instrument. We have established a constructive dialogue with the UK Government, and are recognised by the Government as a reliable source of insight on soft power matters.

Contributing Organisations Academy of Sport, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, Ascot Racecourse, Association of British Orchestras, British Council, British Film Institute, British Foreign Policy Group, British Horseracing Authority, British Library, British Standards Institution, City of London, Coalition for Global Prosperity, Core Cities, Great British Racing International, HALO Trust, Ivors Academy, National Theatre Wales, Premier League, Science Museum Group, The Jockey Club, UK Sport, Universities UK and Wilton Park.

The Growing Value of Soft Power Assets to the UK's Success

Case Study 1: UK Standard Setting

As leaders in the standard-setting and knowledge economy, UK institutions and workers are called on to consult on multinational issues and overseas projects, ensuring strong UK commercial representation and influence globally. For example, in 2018, the Age Verification Providers Association worked with British Standards Institution to develop the international standard for conducting age verification. The model is used across the world and is a major UK export success story. Similarly, in the wake of the Grenfell tower tragedy, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors created an international coalition to promote what became the International Fire Safety Standards Common Principles. In 2021 it was adopted by the UN as the first ever common global standard for fire safety, reaffirming the UK's position as a leader in global standards-setting.

Case Study 2: Economic Benefits of Major Sporting Events

Soft power resources are crucial in fostering economic opportunities and linkages abroad. Hosting major sporting events (MSEs) positively impacts international trade and investment; the UK's 2020–2030 MSE pipeline has the potential to deliver over £7 billion in expenditure-driven economic impacts and £4 billion through trade and investments. Economic benefits can materialise through commercial opportunities - following the London 2012 Olympics, UK businesses secured more than 60 contracts for the Sochi 2014 Winter Games and the Russia 2018 World Cup. They can also emerge indirectly, through improved international perceptions of host localities, which enhance future diplomatic and economic exchanges; over £14 billion of trade and investment benefits were generated by London 2012.

The UK's creative industries contributed an estimated £115.9 billion to the UK economy in 2019, providing over 2 million jobs and accounting for 5.9% of the UK economy.

Premier Skills, led by the Premier League and the British Council, uses football to build skills, challenge stereotypes and provide opportunities for almost a million young people across 25 nations.

The UK is home to four of the top ten universities in the world.

The Science Museum's *Superbugs: The Fight for Our Lives* exhibition reached more than 1.6 million people in seven countries and fostered further projects in China and India.

The Alan Turing Institute has launched a new AI Standards Hub to increase UK contribution to development of global AI technical standards.

241,000 ACCA members and 542,000 ACCA students work across 178 countries.