



British Council APPG

Influence and the Integrated Review: Opportunities for Britain's Global Vision

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Contents:

3	Foreword
4	Executive Summary
5	Introduction
6	The Geopolitical context: increased global competition for influence and attraction <i>Global competition for influence and attraction</i>
7	The UK's soft power assets <i>The English Language</i> <i>Science</i> <i>Universities</i> <i>Arts and culture</i> <i>Sport</i> <i>Tourism</i> <i>UK Institutions and Business</i> <i>Development</i>
11	The opportunities for Global Britain
13	Conclusion: Coordinating soft power assets - strategic alignment and operational independence

About the APPG:

The British Council All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is a cross-party group of Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords who have an interest in the work of the British Council. Its purpose is for parliamentarians to learn more about and better understand the British Council, to communicate the purpose of the British Council to their constituents, and to support the British Council by offering advice and encouragement in both its everyday and long-term work.

The British Council APPG host meetings in Parliament and virtually throughout the year.

It runs a series of inquiries into areas of importance to the British Council's work and the interests of the people of the United Kingdom.

The British Council support the work of the APPG by providing its secretariat and funding. In this role it takes direction from the APPG and the APPG Chair, and organises meetings and events according to the APPG's agenda and priorities.

More information about the APPG can be found at: <https://appg.britishcouncil.org/>

Foreword from the APPG Chair, John Baron MP

The first year of the decade has already proven to be challenging. Yet it is often when under pressure that organisations, nations and people show the best of themselves. The Covid-19 pandemic may be the headline of 2020, but it too is set against a background of shifting geopolitical sands.

A more assertive China with frostier relations with the West; diplomatic changes in the Middle East after years of deadlock; a changing Europe with an increasingly disruptive Russia on its doorstep and a global economic shock from which it will take many years to fully recover.

On many levels it is fortuitous that the UK has chosen this moment to engage in the most fundamental review of foreign policy and defence in a generation, reassessing not only our policy stances on issues, specific nations and themes, but also the capabilities we need to deliver them. The Foreign Secretary has already set out the high-level ambitions: enabling the UK to act as a force for good in the world, equipping it to lead on tackling the grand challenges of our age and to champion open and connected trade and exchange. The Integrated Review is the ideal springboard to level-up the UK's foreign policy assets and provide it with the capabilities it needs.

The opportunities for an ambitious global Britain are exciting and could help pave the way for British leadership and prosperity, while countering the grave threats on the horizon. As ever, in looking to capitalise on these opportunities we will need to use each of the assets available to us, including our considerable soft power capabilities in culture, education, media, sport and tourism.

New technology will allow us to reach more people than could ever have been thought possible in the recent past. Whether it be promoting English lessons on Facebook in Afghanistan, beaming the Premier League onto screens across Sub-Saharan Africa or bringing live performances of Othello or King Lear to our friends across Europe, it is now possible to connect more people with UK flair and creativity than ever before.

However, while making sure that our future strategy uses this new technology to maximum effect, it is also important that we do everything we can to maintain and reinvigorate our traditional strengths. Our world-class universities are one stand-out example, and so are our institutions.

While perhaps sometimes underappreciated in the UK itself, the British Council is cherished around the world as an authentic and effective partner. Established in the 1930s in response to the rise of fascism, it is the familiar and enduring face of Britain around the world. Whether that be teaching English to a young girl in former Yugoslavia who grows up with a lifelong love of the UK, working with Education Ministries in Africa, South Asia and MENA, even against the backdrop of appalling violence, to develop effective teaching systems, or using film to show members of the LGBT community in Russia that they are not alone, the soft power and influence that it generates for this country is considerable. It is an institution whose loss would represent a genuine national tragedy.

As the Foreign Secretary collaborates with colleagues from across Government on the Integrated Review, I urge him, and others, to place the UK's soft power assets at the heart of its thinking. By supporting and investing in our strengths, I am sure that the UK can continue to work as a respected, considerate and authoritative voice on the world stage, guaranteeing the interests of its people and providing inspiration, education, leadership and hope to its friends and partners around the world.

The Integrated Review is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset the UK's vision and strategy for defining our place in the world and the assets and capabilities it needs to deliver that ambition. Such an opportunity needs to be seized upon, particularly when it comes to the UK's soft power and the accelerating global contest for influence.



John Baron is the Member of Parliament for Basildon & Billericay and Chairman of the British Council APPG

Executive Summary

The UK has an impressive array of assets of attraction and influence. These include world renowned arts and cultural bodies, leading universities and research, our sporting prowess and position as an international development superpower and our much respected national and international institutions. The British Council is one such institution, using education, culture and the incredible power of the English language to project our values and ideas around the world.

These assets all come together to build the attraction of and trust in the UK, which produces a considerable soft power dividend, drawing people from around the world to the UK, helping to build understanding of our values and strengthening our voice on the world stage as well as the likelihood of other states listening to and following our lead.

While the UK is among the most respected and attractive countries in the world – in fact, recent British Council research shows the UK to be the most attractive country in the G20 at present – there is intense global competition. Our historic allies have stepped up their investment in soft power, and others too, most notably China, have invested time and money into their soft power and global reach.

While the UK retains a slim lead, there is a need for urgent action if the UK is to continue as a soft power superpower. In order to do this, the UK should act strategically to ensure proper funding, governance and alignment of its soft power assets. At the same time, however, it must ensure that the operational independence of those assets, so crucial to the mutual exchange of ideas and the ability of our institutions to operate in a range of territories overseas, is appropriately protected.

To these ends, the APPG recommends:

A Soft Power Strategy at the heart of the Integrated Review – in order to capitalise on the opportunities provided by a wholesale look at Britain's foreign policy and defence policies and capabilities, a comprehensive, considered and long-term approach to its soft power assets is needed. This should seek to provide our vital assets of influence parity with other, hard power assets so that they are able to complement one another. Such a strategy should also seek to create the right conditions for the UK's soft power assets to flourish, including:

Operational independence – the UK's assets of attraction and influence are at their most effective when the engagement they deliver has a value for its own sake. By allowing these assets to act independently and authentically, we boost their effectiveness. Therefore, while strategic alignment with the UK's foreign policy objectives and the international strategies of its devolved governments is essential, operationally the Government

should ensure that they are free to develop and implement their own strategies, drawing on their skills, insight and expertise. In return, organisations like the British Council should expect to report regularly to Parliament and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on how they are seeking to align their work with the UK's overarching foreign policy objectives.

A long-term funding strategy that protects institutions from the chilling effects of Covid-19 – the Covid-19 pandemic has struck a heavy blow against many of our cherished institutions. The Government has worked hard to provide the necessary cover for businesses and other organisations to weather the storm so that they can get back to business as quickly as possible. This same approach should be applied to Britain's cultural and educational institutions, including the British Council, so that we can continue to benefit from their expertise and the value they deliver for Britain long into the future.

Longer term, the Government should work with soft power institutions to ensure that they have the resources required to continue operations in both developed and developing countries. This will require provision of suitable levels of both ODA and non-ODA funding where appropriate.

Introduction

When announcing the Integrated Defence, Security, Foreign and Development Policy Review in February 2020, the Prime Minister declared his ambition to hold the largest review of the UK's approach towards the rest of the world since the Cold War. This review aims to produce a strategic plan to define where the UK wants to be and outline the capabilities it needs to ensure that it is properly equipped to get there. This includes rising to meet the global challenges of the future, guaranteeing both the security and prosperity of our country and advancing our core values at home and around the world.¹

The review aims to consider the totality of global opportunities and challenges facing the United Kingdom and assess how the whole of Government can be structured, equipped and mobilised to meet them. The review therefore goes beyond policy levers alone and will also examine the strategic posture of the United Kingdom.

The Integrated Review comes at a time where the global contest for influence is heating up. Across the world, major economies are investing in their soft power capabilities as a means of delivering the trust and attraction required to enable greater engagement, investment and interaction in the future. While the UK has long been a soft power superpower, our position is facing increasing challenge from other nation states. The Integrated Review provides an important opportunity to place soft power at the heart of UK foreign policy and ensure that the UK has the necessary capabilities to compete.

For these reasons, the British Council All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) commissioned an inquiry and report into the role of the UK's assets of influence and attraction – so called “soft power” assets – and the role that they should play in the Integrated Review.

“Soft power” is, at its essence, the power of example and attraction. In its most basic form, it is the power to attract others as a result of a nation's culture, language, political values and broader approach to the world. Therefore, unlike hard power – a state's use of explicit military and economic means to influence the behaviour and/or interests of other states - soft power is often as much a product of non-governmental actors as it is a result of state policy. It is our universities, artists, schools, theatres, musicians and citizens themselves that generate it, making it in many ways a much more complex, subtle and long-term tool of foreign policy.

Given this complexity and the rising use of soft power assets by other powers, both friends and rivals, the UK needs to consider how it uses and enhances its soft power capabilities, empowering those institutions best placed to deliver for the UK to do so, at a time when others overseas are increasingly looking to do the same.

The geopolitical context: increased global competition for influence and attraction

The Integrated Review comes at a time of considerable geopolitical change. China continues to rise and gain greater self-confidence as it flexes the political power it now holds. We see a growing interventionist and disruptive approach from Russia. Alongside this we see the continued growth of India and others across South Asia at the same time as political change is reshaping states in both North and South America. Advanced states are active in each of these theatres of influence.

Added to this, the world continues to try to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. This is bringing into sharp focus both the costs of our increasingly interconnected world, including how our interlinked nature has helped spread the virus to its every corner, as well as its immense benefits, as research into a vaccine and treatment techniques rely on global collaboration and research – areas in which the UK has so far excelled.¹

The United Kingdom and European Union should also complete the Article 218 (3) negotiations to establish the treaty which will define the nature of the future relationship between the UK and the EU's 27 member states and institutions. The work of concluding these negotiations and seeking to conclude new trade deals with third countries is complicated by the nature of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. However, it is desirable that a balance is found which allows the UK and EU to maintain a close working relationship, while making the most of the new opportunities that we are afforded outside of the European Union. The outcome of this process will, in no small part, shape the direction of UK and EU foreign policy in the European neighbourhood for years to come.

Global competition for influence and attraction

The UK remains an undisputed “soft power superpower”. However, this position of pre-eminence is coming under pressure from increased investment and resource allocated to strategic assets of influence and attraction by other states. Our friends and rivals are on the move as they seek to upgrade their international prestige and influence.

While a nation's attraction and influence can be enhanced using various means, including through commercial, diplomatic and developmental routes, the APPG believes that national cultural institutes play a key role in building trust in their home states. Evidence supports this – research shows that participation in a UK cultural relations activity with the British Council increases the proportion of people who say they trust the UK by 26 percent.²

The ability of cultural institutes to act as the principle engines of a nation's soft power is reflected in the levels of investment of other states and their prominence within their respective foreign policies.

When it comes to governance, a recent British Council study of analogous organisations shows a common approach between many countries. For example, there is often a strategic role for each country's Foreign Affairs Ministry, frequently with simultaneous lines of accountability into other government departments. This allows for appropriate alignment of priorities and objectives between the cultural institute and their government. Indeed, this is the model upon which the British Council currently operates.

Table 1: Income analysis of cultural institutes in France, Germany, Japan and the UK

Income of Cultural Institutes ⁵	Total Income (£m)	State income (£m)	State income as % of total
France	994	478	48%
Germany	890	550	62%
Japan	154	100	65%
UK	1,250	184	15%

However, there are varying degrees of control held by different Foreign Ministries, with differing effects. The light-touch approach of HM Government towards the British Council does appear to be more effective in building trust and attraction in the UK than the overtly state-controlled and directly-managed approach of some other nations, in particular China. This effectiveness is borne out in the levels of attraction each country achieves and the amount of investment they receive, most clearly evidenced by the UK's soft power pre-eminence despite much lower levels of direct state funding.

The funding models of cultural institutes vary considerably, although in some instances it is challenging to find accurate income data for some countries – most notably Russia and China. Nonetheless, it is possible to assess the funding models for France, Germany and Japan, all of which are relevant comparators for the UK.³

While the Japan Foundation is of a significantly smaller scale and uses a different operating model, the income and scope of activities for French and German cultural institutes is roughly equivalent to that of the British Council.⁴ However, as shown in **table 1** the proportion of income that comes from the state is markedly different in the UK when compared to our French and German counterparts; there, public grant funding accounts for 48% and 62% of total income respectively for France and Germany, compared to just 15% for the British Council.

The evidence of the investment of both allies and

strategic rivals in cultural relations also underscores the importance accorded to "soft power" by others. The UK has had a head start due to our historic reach and global leadership over the twentieth century and earlier.

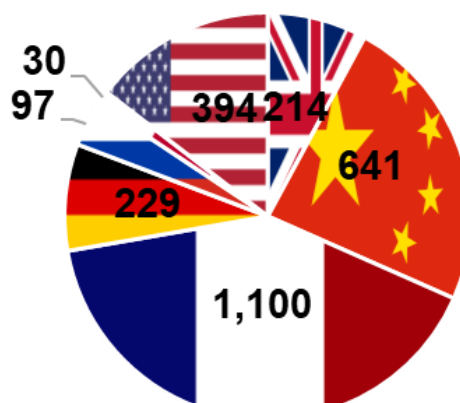
However, complacency is not an option as others close our lead; Germany and Japan are now within striking distance of the top spot according to the research contained in the British Council's recent report, [Sources of Soft Power](#).

While the British Council has been engaging in a process of significant digital transformation, moving a great number of its courses online and generating interest in a number of their Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), presence also plays an important role in its activities. By being physically present in a country, particularly at a time of hardship, long-lasting bonds are formed which can be of great use later. For example, our continued presence in MENA throughout the Arab Spring or in Ukraine following recent instability has made us a partner of choice for these countries because of the commitment we maintained to them throughout challenging times.

Analysis of the total number of cultural institute offices reveals that France operates 1,100 offices across its Institute Français, AEFÉ and Campus France platforms. As **table 2** shows, there are also 641 of China's Confucius Institutes worldwide, 394 American ECA offices and 229 offices delivering Germany's cultural relations efforts. By way of comparison, the British Council currently operates from 214 locations.

Table 2: Number of offices from which cultural relations activities of different countries are delivered

Country	Number of offices
China	641
France	1,100
Germany	229
Japan	30
Russia	97
UK	214
USA	394



The current geopolitical landscape means that there is a contest for presence in each global region among the major states equipped with cultural institutes. The concentration of this physical presence also points to a number of countries and regions where all major actors are vying for influence. For example:

- The USA has, by quite some margin, the highest number of overseas cultural institutes on its territory
- Europe is the most competitive area for influence and attraction in terms of the density of cultural institute offices located there
- There are significant presences in Latin America
- There are growing networks in Africa and, to a lesser extent, Central Asia
- China has a comparatively low presence of overseas cultural institutes on its territory

The UK's soft power assets

Cultural institutes are an important convenor of a country's soft power assets and help make them more than the sum of their parts. However, the UK benefits from a wide range of assets of attraction and influence, all of which play an important role in boosting the ability of the UK to serve as a global leader. These are often independent and entirely separate of government, yet are vital in building an educational and cultural offer that is globally attractive.

English Language

The pre-eminence of English as the lingua franca of global diplomacy and business ensures that the UK has a route into every open, global market. The British Council represents the gold standard in English language learning. The reach of the English language has also helped popularise British cultural output, with a global desire for our culture and artists' works – from Shakespeare to the Stones, Banksy to the Beatles and Elton John to Idris Elba.

The English language connects over 2.3 billion people worldwide, and makes travel, study, work and relationships across borders and cultures easier and more fruitful. Spoken by around a quarter of the world's population, the English language is perhaps the most powerful UK export. It has helped to carry and communicate our values across the world, powered the dissemination and exchange of ideas and research, and helped to drive collaboration and innovation right around the world.

Sharing the English language is a significant driver of trust and connection between peoples of different countries, and its spread has always been at the heart of the British Council's mission. Since its establishment in

1934 as a key asset in the struggle against fascism, hundreds of millions of people have learnt or improved their English language skills with the British Council.

While the English language is truly now the property of the world, there is indeed considerable cachet for the UK as the home of the world's global medium of exchange and interaction. British Council research has made clear that English will continue to be the lingua franca for business in Europe and English tuition and proficiency examinations are therefore big business for the UK, worth an estimated £2.1bn.¹ The British Council is a key player in teaching and examining English, paving the way for further cultural, economic and political engagement for the UK, while also opening up new opportunities for those who learn and who will come away with a greater understanding of and affinity for our country.

Science

The UK has a higher level of foreign direct investment in research and development than any other G7 nation and benefits from a highly international and mobile R&D workforce. Two-fifths of the UK's academic workforce in science, technology and engineering are non-UK nationals. The UK's historic openness to the rest of the world and the relative ease with which researchers have been able to enter the UK has therefore paid tremendous dividends, helping to build on existing British scientific leadership.²

The UK's position as a scientific and research powerhouse not only creates jobs and opportunities for people in the UK, but also brings about material benefits both at home and around the world. It is helping us to lead efforts on the great challenges of the twenty-first century and is therefore central to the notion of the UK as a global force for good.³ This can be seen clearly in the UK's role coordinating research into treatments and vaccines for COVID-19, the leading role we are playing on climate change as we prepare to host COP26 and in tackling the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

Far from serving as a "brain drain" to other nations, the UK focus on collaboration sees the UK act as an enabler and coordinator for scientific innovations of universal benefit. This serves to greatly enhance UK soft power and global influence, as others look to us as a genuine partner, committed to scientific rigour. This brings about considerable soft power dividends, and attracts the best and brightest to the UK, particularly when contrasted with competitor nations who seek to use science in a more instrumental manner.

The British Council plays an important role acting as a convenor for scientific collaboration, while also helping establish the basis for this work through their work on English proficiency and to attracting international students. According to the Science Museum, the British Council's role as a "convenor... pays dividends in these future in terms of improved coordination and efficiency". The British Council is viewed, by UK science, as a soft

power asset which helps to add value and enable others.

The British Council was, for example, pivotal in the Science Museum's Cosmonauts exhibition in 2015, being able to make use of individual-level relationships which allowed collaboration while reaching beyond the Government of a state with which UK diplomatic relations are strained.⁴ Similarly, the British Council role in supporting scientific scholars from developing nations – the Newton Fund – has seen tremendous scientific developments ranging from research to help reduce metals in drinking water to research into green agricultural innovations to research into vaccines for Dengue fever and COVID-19.⁵

The coming years present further opportunities for UK scientific leadership, both in the battle against COVID-19 and with the possibility of regulatory innovations following the conclusion of UK-EU treaty negotiations. The APPG believes that there is scope to build on the leading role of the FCO Science and Innovation Group to both drive on research and more broadly disseminate scientific findings and innovations to ensure evidence based policy making across Government. The APPG further urges the Government to ensure that the soft power dividends of our global leadership in science are factored into the Integrated Review, so that we not only maintain our position but seek to capitalise on it even further in the years ahead.

Universities

Almost a third of the top ten universities in the world are in the UK, and in 2018/2019 the UK recruited more international students than any other country in the world, overtaking the USA for new recruits.⁶ UK universities act as ambassadors for the UK and their respective cities, regions and nations, not only helping to drive scientific collaboration, R&D and the common good and serving as a vital pipeline for the UK research base, but also helping to embed our shared values both at home and around the world.⁷

The global networks created by both international student alumni (and increasingly mobile UK alumni) help to spread the UK approach to academic rigour, our values and goodwill towards the UK. Most international students who study in the UK return home with a better understanding of our country and our values, as well as a positive disposition towards the UK. This engenders greater trust in and attraction to the UK, thereby not only creating future opportunities for the UK but also enhancing our nation's global influence.

In addition to the soft power benefits arising from the UK's position as a leader in higher education, it is the profound relationships which our universities foster, based on shared experience and collaboration, that are arguably among the strongest sources of UK soft power. The alumni and research networks developed by our universities are vital not only in driving forward research, but also in generating understanding and goodwill

towards the UK. As the Association of Commonwealth Universities put it, these networks “represent one of the most effective forms of diplomacy” and allow the UK to hold important and influential relationships within other countries, even if the bilateral Government-to-Government relationship is strained.

International students bring a net value of over £20bn to the UK, with each UK Parliamentary Constituency seeing an average of £31.3m net economic benefit from these students.⁸ International students, whose fees are uncapped, also subsidise both the cost of educating UK students and carrying out vital research. The value of this cross-subsidy for research is estimated to be around £1.4bn per year.⁹

The British Council plays an important role in supporting the recruitment of international students to UK universities through managing Study UK, the international student recruitment arm of the GREAT Campaign. British Council research shows that 67% of international students had heard of the British Council before enrolment at a UK university. The British Council also plays an important role in helping UK students study overseas, both as the UK's joint National Agency for Erasmus+ (along with Ecorys), and through programmes to help British people study abroad such as Study USA and Study in China, further adding to the UK's next generation of global networks.¹⁰

However, as MillionPlus noted to the APPG, the greatest threat to UK soft power is complacency arising from a “colossal under-appreciation” of our assets of attraction and influence in the higher education sector.¹¹ The APPG notes the Government's willingness to support UK universities through the COVID-19 pandemic, and highlights that further support may be required to ensure that the UK Higher Education sector not only survives the pandemic but is in a position to thrive again in the future. The rationale for doing so is not only economic, given the sheer scale of our higher education exports, but much more wide-ranging. It will help us lead the world in solving the great challenges of our age, such as finding a vaccine for Covid-19 or addressing the obstacles to growth posed by an aging population. In doing so, it will also further secure our international relationships and maintain the UK's soft power standing.

Arts and culture

The UK has some of the greatest museums, galleries, libraries and theatres in the world; our festivals welcome visitors and artists from all across the world; British film and TV is enjoyed in homes right across the planet, and there are few countries in which British music cannot be heard on a radio, record player or phone throughout the day and night. In addition to our brick and mortar assets, what really makes the difference, and delivers the soft power dividend, is our nation's commitment to create opportunities for artists to develop their craft, experiment, innovate and create.

Our cultural output serves as a powerful attractor because it is a strong consumer product which is also an expression of British values. It serves as an intimate and non-threatening way of disseminating UK values, and of building the connections, networks and goodwill that we need to succeed. Recent British Council research has highlighted the importance of the perception of the UK as an open and democratic country in fostering attraction towards and trust in the UK, with British cultural output found to be a central to the spread of awareness of these values, and therefore of attraction towards the UK.¹²

One of the great strengths of our culture is its diversity across the four nations.¹³ This supports a vibrant and varied cultural sector, with which the British Council works with both National and Devolved Governments, to promote internationally. By linking up artists and cultural practitioners in the UK with their peers both here and overseas, we help develop lifelong collaborations that, in turn, create further innovation, often spanning different nations and time zones. The focus of this work is on mutual benefit and it is this emphasis on authentic exchange that perhaps explains why the UK is generally seen as more attractive and trustworthy than the USA and other P5 powers.¹⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many of the UK's leading cultural assets to adapt rapidly. With reduced footfall due to the need for social distancing and fewer international visitors, UK institutions have increased digital innovations across the arts, theatre, music and other key sectors.¹⁵ While often conceived of as a Covid workaround, this works is already creating new opportunities for international collaboration and helping to maintain collaborative links with key partners, for example in Europe as we approach the end of the UK-EU Transition Period. These partnerships demonstrate the continued desire for collaboration and the economic and social benefits it brings among the creative industries on both sides of the Channel.¹⁶

Sport

In most towns in Africa, villages in Europe or cities in Asia you would have little trouble finding someone who could name at least half the starting eleven for the Liverpool or Manchester City men's football teams, such is the reach of our leading sporting exports. While we cheered on Team GB in 2012, the world joined together to cheer Mo Farah and Usain Bolt, just as the cricketing world couldn't take its eyes off last year's World Cup. The UK is a leader not only in elite sport and major events, but also around governance, grassroots development and anti-corruption.¹⁷ These assets not only create attraction towards the UK, but they also provide us with an opportunity to use sport to build new relationships and act as a catalyst for global change – be that within global sporting institutions or within societies.

British Council research has found that, unique among the G7, sport is the single biggest driver of an intention to

do business or trade with the UK.¹⁸ Sport is universally accessible in a way many other cultural exports are not, as it does not require any language skills or translation. The Premier League is a key driver of this, with research from the British Icon Index finding that 68% of those polled said the league made them feel more positively about the UK (rising to 87% among the 32% of respondents who described themselves as interested in the Premier League).¹⁹ We also saw the 2012 Olympics help the Government reach the Games four-year trade and investment target in just fourteen months, with hundreds of millions of High Value Opportunity sporting contracts signed in since the Games. Added to these “mega” events, the UK sporting calendar – from Wimbledon to the Open – provides multiple opportunities to build diplomatic and commercial relationships, as well as engaging in linked cultural exchange. The UK's position as the “home” for many global sports further boosts attraction to the UK.²⁰ Sport is therefore an important but underutilised vehicle for broadcasting to the world the values we hold dear, and doing so in a way that neither patronises nor alienates the audience.

The British Council is a vital partner for global UK sporting institutions, delivering the International Inspiration Programme with UK Sport and UNICEF, and Premier Skills with the Premier League. The International Inspiration Programme delivers on the legacy promise of the 2012 Games and has reached 26 million children and young people (more than double the 12 million target) around the world, helping to improve their health and life chances through inclusive sport. The programme served to enhance partner countries views of the UK, and boosted UK missions engagement, while also helping create broad coalitions of agencies, charities, sporting organisations and so on, behind a single UK led vision.²¹ The Premier Skills programme, the Premier League's global grassroots coaching and referee programme, delivered with the British Council, has trained over 30,000 men and women. This programme, which according to the Premier League relied upon the British Council network and connections to find the right partners, has gone on to work with over 1.6million young people around the world.²²

However, as both UK Sport and the Premier League note, a more strategic and coordinated approach to maximising the use of sport as a tool of soft power would be beneficial.²³ The APPG therefore believes that the strengthening of relationships between key agencies, government departments and sporting bodies would allow HMG to better identify upcoming events and opportunities which may result in a soft power dividend for the UK.

Tourism

UK tourism also serves as a real soft power asset. When the world comes to visit, we provide a platform for our other assets of attraction and influence. The best way to understand the UK's role as the worlds meeting point for

science, or to see the connectivity of our global cities like London or Manchester and appreciate our cultural and arts output is to come to the UK.²⁴

By working to promote the UK as a destination we can help build people-to-people contacts and show the world what the UK is about. While the British Council is committed to helping showcase the best of Britain, and forge connections with the world, from overseas the UKs appeal as a tourist destination helps to do this at a different level when we have visitors. Crucially, by seeing how the UK is so “open and welcoming to international business and leisure visitors” the attraction of the UK is enhanced, which in turn helps to create networks of influence for the UK.²⁵

UK Institutions and Business

UK institutions are held in great esteem internationally. Recent British Council research shows that the single strongest driver of trust in the UK and our people is the perceived openness of the UK, followed by our contribution to development and confidence in our free justice system.²⁶ Globally, the UK was rated first by respondents for perceptions of a free and fair justice system. Such strong, independent and respected institutions not only drive trust in and attraction to the UK, which increases the propensity for trade with and travel to the UK, but it also serves to enhance our global influence as we are seen as an example for others to follow.

Among these institutional assets of soft power, the British Council is one of the most prominent and effective. Research has shown that, on average, those who have engaging in cultural relations activity with UK bodies report an average increase in levels of trust in the British people, our government and institutions of 20%. This is significant, however, when that cultural engagement comes through the British Council levels of trust in the UK Government increase by 82%, in the British people by 73% and in our institutions by 73%.²⁷

This shows how effective the British Council is as a medium for cultural engagement. By being strategically-aligned but operationally-independent of Government, the British Council is able to strike a golden balance: independent of and sufficiently distant from Government to be credible, but strategically aligned and close enough for much of trust and attraction benefits to be accrued. This brings about a number of vital benefits for the UK: increasing the propensity to trade with and seek to visit or study in the UK; increasing goodwill and understanding of the UK, thereby avoiding the development of hostile attitudes towards the UK; and helping highlight how the UK works as a force for good in the world, projecting our values and constructive approach to others, which in turn increases the propensity for others to listen to and follow the lead of the UK.

The UK is respected around the world “as a pragmatic and innovative place to do business, with high standards and integrity”, which makes a tremendous contribution

not only to the UK economy, but also to our cultural life and global reach.²⁸ The power of the City of London, for example, gives the UK considerable financial leverage on the world stage, but the reputational benefits it brings and the way in which it helps project UK values helps to boost the UK’s ability to attract further opportunities, and to influence global affairs. The City of London itself also boosts UK soft power. Not only through the numerous trade delegations and international visits it helps organise, but also through the cachet of state banquets and its ability to convene global leaders in the UK.²⁹

Development

The UK’s soft power has always depended in large part on perceptions of the UK as an open, free and democratic country that is a benevolent force in the world. The UK has generally been perceived as acting for the common good rather than out of narrow self-interest, as exemplified by the UK’s response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, our current work into treatments and a vaccine for COVID-19, the UK aid programme and the work of the BBC World Service and the British Council.³⁰ Other states have been willing to give credence to the UK’s point of view, to listen to and even follow the UK’s lead on key global challenges because it is trusted to act for the common good and is recognised as a leading proponent of the rules-based international system. If the UK steps back from this role it risks a loss of influence and becoming less attractive and trusted by others. This could have real, tangible costs, including economic disadvantages - for example, from falling flows of FDI into the UK.³¹

The UK’s maintenance of the 0.7% target has been heralded around the world as a sign of its commitment to helping those most in need and has generated significant soft power dividends for it. Moves to modify or compromise on this commitment may affect the UK’s international standing and its overall attractiveness. Changes to the ODA rules need to be considered in a way which understands the benefits the UK gains from fulfilling its commitment in full and how other actors may adapt the rules to their own benefit too.³²

The recent announcement of the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, in line with the approach of other key allies, has been criticised by some for potentially negatively impacting on UK soft power.³³ The coming months and years will determine the success of the merger, although it is likely that the source of the UK’s soft power linked to development stems primarily from the approach, content and nature of our development work rather than the structures which deliver it.

In taking the merger forward, the APPG calls on the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to ensure that it capitalises on the wealth of expertise now available to it across both departments and their

agencies and the historic heft of the Foreign Office to ensure that UK efforts in the development space are both authentic and strategic and continue to build on the UK's positive global reputation in this area.

The opportunities for Global Britain

The Government has set out high-level ambitions for Global Britain and the role the UK will seek to play over the coming years as a force for good in the world. To achieve this ambition we must make use of our soft power assets, building the attraction and influence of the UK, and helping the UK to forge its place in the 21st century.

By deploying our soft power assets into high-growth economies such as Brazil, Colombia, Malaysia, Mexico and the UAE, we can help deliver the right conditions for mutually beneficial trading relationships with real economic benefits for the UK. A focus on trade and prosperity should also mean using our assets of influence to engage into trading relationships with other developing economies, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, where a commercial partnership will not only mean mutual, economic benefit, but may also play a role in lifting some of the world's poorest out of poverty.

Our soft power assets are vital in paving the way for trade. British Council research shows that engaging in cultural relations activity results in a 21% increase in trust in the UK, rising to a 73% increase in trust when that activity is through the British Council.¹ In turn, those who trust the UK are almost twice as likely to seek to visit, study or do business with the UK.² This effect is particularly pronounced in key markets for Britain the coming years. In both China and Turkey, those who trust the UK are almost three times as likely to intend to do businesses or trade with the UK; in the USA and South Korea trusting the UK doubles the likelihood of intending to trade or do business with the UK, with similar trends found in Australia, France, Saudi Arabia and Italy. Trust in the UK increases the propensity of those surveyed in India to trade with or invest in the UK by almost 45%.³ Added to this, there is a direct link between the number of cultural institutes a nation has around the world and the FDI it receives such that a 1% increase in the number of UK cultural institutes would have been worth £1.3bn in 2016 alone.⁴

Our assets of influence may also have a role to play in shaping the UK's stance towards China. While the Chinese government has been the source of a great deal of debate in recent months, the British Council and our educational and cultural institutions provide a means of speaking to and engaging directly with the Chinese people. By continuing to teach English and exploring the shared values that exist between us, it may prove possible to de-escalate recent tensions, promoting constructive non-governmental dialogue and new narratives about the relationship between the people of our two countries.

A similar approach may prove fruitful in Russia where, despite a freeze in political relations, the British Council has continued to connect UK and Russian academics and cultural leaders, and introduce the Russian people to our culture – with over 33million Russians, the vast majority under 30, having engaged with the *UK Russia Year of Music* in 2019. Longer term, this continued dialogue may help to develop connections with a new generation of leaders in Russia which can help both the bilateral diplomatic relationship, as well as the wellbeing of the people of both nations.

Our educational pre-eminence provides us with opportunities to help developing nations construct effective national education systems. Through programmes such as Connecting Classrooms, the British Council not only links up young people in the UK with their counterparts overseas, including across the Commonwealth, but also connects teachers and school leaders and encourages them to share ideas and innovations, as well as to implement the policies needed to make schooling a success. The work of the British Council in helping to train teachers and design curricula also plays a role in helping the UK act as a force for good, while also enhancing our security. By supporting inclusive education which equips young people with the skills they need to build a prosperous future for themselves and their communities we can enhance global stability and therefore our own security, while also building goodwill towards the UK.

Education also has a role to play in fragile or conflict-affected states, where the disenfranchisement of entire generations is often one of the root causes of tension and fighting. By providing new skills and international connections using the UK's soft power assets, there are opportunities to steer young people away from violence and division and towards the sense of collaboration that the UK is known for. Working with the Premier League, the British Council and the Premier Skills programme has helped teach more than 1.6 million young people in 29 countries English and other skills through the vehicle of football. The Cultural Protection Fund has also supported Syrian and Jordanian refugees to learn the art of stonemasonry, with which they can rebuild their war-torn homeland and local economy when they return.⁵ Crucial to its effectiveness, however, is the ability to utilise local partners for delivery, which both allows training to be embedded and for UK investment to go further than if external bodies are used. The British Council's deeply embedded relationships, on the ground, are vital to the effectiveness of this model, as recognised by DCMS in electing to partner with the British Council on the Cultural Protection Fund.

The creation of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Integrated Review create an opportunity for the Government to outline clear strategic priorities to UK aid, cementing the reputation of the UK as a force for good. Research has shown that the number

one driver of trust in the UK globally is our contribution to international development.⁶ Other states have been willing to give credence to the UK's point of view, to listen to and even follow the UK's lead on key global challenges because it is trusted to act for the common good and recognised as a leading proponent of the rules-based international system.

If the UK steps back from this role we risk a loss of influence and becoming less attractive and trusted by others.⁷ This could result in both a loss of global influence, but could also result in reduced foreign investment in the UK. The APPG therefore believes that the maintenance of an international aid target has a role to play to ensure the UK continues to enjoy the resulting soft power dividend. The soft power dividend resulting from UK aid is a happy coincidence, but one that the UK should embrace. As such, the unified approach to both foreign, defence and development policy could, provided there remains a considerable degree of operational independence to the delivery of UK aid, create great opportunities for the UK to do well by doing good in the world.

Closer to home, we can use our valuable cultural assets to maintain and enhance relationships with our friends, allies and neighbours in Europe. Collaboration through the Edinburgh International Festivals, through the Venice Biennale, or with European universities will help strengthen the historic bonds that exist between us and our French, German, Spanish, Italian, Irish, Polish, Turkish and other neighbours. Simultaneously the deep connections between the UK and CANZUK nations, for example demonstrated by the upcoming UK-Australia seasons supported by the British Council, provide opportunities for even more effective economic, political and social bonds.

While the APPG believes that the Government should provide a strategic direction for the focus of our soft power assets, their operational independence must be maintained if they are to remain effective. While, technically speaking, the BBC, RT, CCTV and Press TV are all state-owned international broadcasters, it is only the BBC World Service that has any real credibility, which is because of its operational and editorial independence. The instrumentalization of soft power assets renders them impotent. And as is the case with the World Service, so it is for the British Council, where its operational independence is the reason that it can continue forging person-to-person links even in hostile states, allowing the UK and the Government to enjoy a real terms soft power dividend. As the APPG heard, if soft power is "overly instrumentalised... it risks becoming irrelevant" and little more than propaganda. Soft power "only works when it arises from genuinely held – and demonstrated – beliefs and values", and to this independence is vital to the authenticity required to see a soft power dividend arise.⁸

If the British Council were to become an overt and explicit

instrument of state policy it would lose much of its efficacy: not only in terms of the programmes delivered and networks built, but also in terms of the soft power dividend enjoyed. The UK is a soft power superpower because we are seen as a trustworthy force for good in the world, with respect for independent institutions.⁹ Just as the BBC has trust and credibility in the eyes of others because it is known to be independent, so it is for the British Council. If a state sees cultural diplomacy purely for its instrumental rather than intrinsic value it shows, eroding both the efficacy of the cultural engagement undertaken as well as any soft power dividend. In short, if we start to act like China or Russia then we will see similar outcomes, and our relative soft power standing will inevitably decline.

The opportunities for a truly Global Britain are endless and HM Government already possesses a number of tools and assets through which it can use its considerable soft power to great effect and mutual benefit. As it considers these options through the strategic lens of the Integrated Review, Government must be prepared to use the levers it has, particularly through its cultural institute, the British Council, in order to ensure that these assets are used to their greatest possible effect.

Conclusion: Coordinating soft power assets: strategic alignment and operational independence

A Soft Power Strategy: Soft power must be at the heart of the Integrated Review

An attractive, trusted UK will find it easier to make trade deals and build the necessary international alliances to respond to global challenges like COVID-19 and climate change. It will be listened to, respected and sought out as a strategic partner. It will be the destination of choice for foreign direct investment, international students and tourists, with all the economic advantages that these bring. In short, an attractive UK is a more influential UK.

The Government should provide clear strategic objectives for the UK and our national approach to the world. This should involve a clear articulation of the geographical and policy areas in which the UK wishes to focus its resources.

The UK soft power strategy should see the strategic alignment of our national resources, but the operational independence of bodies like the British Council. To be effective, this strategic alignment must remain light touch, allowing for innovation and dynamism in the pursuit of strategic objectives, and as a way to maximise the soft power dividend – as an overbearing approach risks being self-defeating and undermining of the ultimate strategic objectives

The APPG therefore calls for soft power to be placed at the heart of the Integrated Review, given parity with considerations around hard power and a clear and strategic approach about the role of our soft power assets in enhancing the security of the UK. By building mutual understanding we can more easily find diplomatic solutions to security challenges and tackle the kind of alienation that leads societies towards instability and people towards extremism.

Operational Independence

The UK's assets of attraction and influence play a vital role in enhancing the UK national interest. However, this is only truly effective and sustainable when this service to the national interest is the by-product of engagement which has value for its own sake. By permitting our soft power assets genuine operational independence, we allow them to act authentically and using their own expertise, generating greater influence and connectivity for the UK.

The success of bodies like the British Council rests in the fact the they are authentic, a direct result of their arms-length status and ability to make their own strategic decisions.

A long-term funding strategy that protects institutions from the chilling effects of Covid-19 – the Covid-19 pandemic has struck a heavy blow against many of our cherished institutions. The Government has worked hard to provide the necessary cover for businesses and other organisations to weather the storm so that they can get back to business as quickly as possible. This same approach should be applied to Britain's cultural and educational institutions, including the British Council, providing them with the necessary emergency funding so that we can continue to benefit from their expertise and the value they deliver for Britain long into the future

Longer term, the Government should work with soft power institutions to ensure that they have the resources required to continue operations in both developed and developing countries. This will require provision of suitable levels of both ODA and non-ODA funding where appropriate.

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Bunting Photo by [Edson Rosas](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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The Opportunities for Global Britain

1. Taking part in a UK cultural relations activity raises the probability of reporting higher levels of trust in the British people, the UK Government and UK institutions of 21%, 19% and 21% respectively. For cultural relations activities involving the British Council, these figures increase to 73%, 82% and 73% respectively.
The British Council (2018), *The Value of Trust*, Available from: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_value_of_trust.pdf
2. Those who rate the UK in their top three most trusted nations are more likely to visit the by a factor of 2.6, do businesses with the UK by a factor of 1.8, study in the UK by a factor of 2.1, and engage in further UK art and culture by a factor of 2.4.
The British Council (2018), *The Value of Trust*, Available from: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_value_of_trust.pdf

3. The British Council (2018), *The Value of Trust*, Available from: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_value_of_trust.pdf
4. University of Edinburgh have shown a 1% increase in the number of cultural institutes results in a 0.66% increase in FDI received. In 2016 the UK received a total of £197bn in FDI. An 1% increase in cultural institutes could also have seen an additional 3,000 international students come to the UK.
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