

Response to UK GOVERNMENT SOFT POWER STRATEGY

TEN QUESTIONS FROM MICHAEL ELLIS

The Heritage Alliance welcomes this opportunity to respond to Michael Ellis' ten questions on the UK Government's soft power strategy. The sector has already begun looking at these issues as reflected in the recent [Heritage Alliance's International Report \(2018\)](#).

The Alliance is England's largest coalition of independent heritage interests. We unite over 130 organisations - more than a third of which are active internationally: in at least 37 countries, across all seven continents.

The scope of our members' international involvement varies, some run country-specific projects, others have global reach. Our domestic organisations also serve as role-models for counterparts abroad.

The international report and [accompanying case studies](#) highlight the work of some of our members and make eight recommendations on how the Government can better support the heritage sector's international work. It should be read in tandem with our response to the ten questions below.

Question 1- Given that the UK has reached Number 1 in the Soft Power Index in the absence of a Government strategy, how can we ensure that any strategy genuinely adds value?

Culture is a key contributing sector to the UK's high rank in the Soft Power Index ranking. However, looking at the culture specific ranking for 2018 we are number 2 behind the US. Nevertheless, our culture ranking is still higher than digital or education at 3, enterprise at 7 or Government at 11. This demonstrates the importance of culture to our ranking and soft power. While the sector accomplishes important work internationally without a Government strategy, (as shown in the case studies within our International Report) a supported, concerted approach would build and allow the sector to make the most of its potential as a key driver of UK's reach on the global stage and reach number 1 in the cultural ranking as well as the overall ranking.

Although the Prime Minister has suggested that austerity will end, the sector remains in a difficult funding situation coupled with the uncertainties of Brexit. This will inevitably focus limited resources on immediate issues close to home. A failure to create a strategy which sets out a supportive framework for international work may put our current leading position at risk. An analysis is needed of what other countries' soft power aims and methods are in order to understand the international competition and ensure that we are not left behind.

The Heritage Statement 2017 committed the Government to support heritage organisations 'to work internationally and create international partnerships and to increase their capacity to do so'. A soft power strategy could serve as a re-confirmation of this commitment, if it contains tangible and practical support.

We note that there are concerns that such a strategy should not be labelled 'soft power', as some considered this concept to be contrary to the culture and heritage sector's values. A Government strategy supporting the international work of third sector organisations would avoid these concerns but also help to support and develop the UK's soft power.

Question 2 – What are the strengths and assets the UK has which we should be seeking to protect or enhance in any Soft Power strategy?

The Heritage Alliance's members have identified three key strengths which a future Soft Power strategy should keep in mind:

- 1) **Government should ensure that UK expertise and skills are retained within the sector and promoted internationally.** Our skills are already in international demand, as set out in our International report (see page. 2 and the Case Studies). However, these skills tend to be provided by small/medium sized heritage organisations which have limited capacities to further market themselves. This could be achieved through, for example, the support of the Government and other funders to backfill posts when senior expertise is diverted from smaller organisations, or possibly through an overarching governmental database of skills within the sector.

Any Government action should recognise the value of international collaboration in the UK, and the work of British nationals and organisations in the EU. This two way exchange of expertise and labour is extremely important and should be maintained as a high priority.

More on this topic can be found in the Heritage Alliance papers on Brexit:

<http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/tha-website/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Brexit-and-Heritage-Briefing-FINAL-with-Royal-Society-Report.pdf>

<http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/tha-website/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/White-Paper-and-MAC-proposal-analysis..pdf>

- 2) **Funding and other support should be available in order to ensure that the heritage sector's remarkable international reputation is safeguarded and developed.** This reputation has been built over time, through collaboration, and is in itself is a great asset in terms of soft power.

- 3) **We need to ensure that we remain at the forefront of conservation and preservation practises.** The UK is fortunate in its number and quality of heritage sites, and our ability to maintain many of them. This is made easier through co-operation and relationships with international organisations, like UNESCO (as noted on page 17 of our International Report 2018).

- 4) **Preserve our heritage as an international attraction.** Heritage is a key part of the UK brand and tourism. Heritage is a strong product driver for most overseas markets, the GREAT campaign has identified heritage as one the UK's 12 'unique selling points'. In 2015, the UK was ranked 5th out of 50 nations in terms of being rich in historic buildings and monuments). In 2011, 48% of international visitors holidaying in the UK visited a castle or historic house during their stay (VisitEngland, 2011). This figure is more than: Museums, art galleries (43%) Theatre, musical, opera, or ballet (14%) Only shopping, visiting parks or gardens, or going to the pub were as, or more, popular activities among inbound visitors and much of this could be said to involve heritage in some form.

Question 3 -How do we best deploy the convening power of Government in supporting collective activity across and beyond the Culture sector?

The sector already provides mechanisms such as the Heritage Alliance or other forums, for cooperation within and beyond it, but Government's support is essential for facilitating the sector's messages at the international level. It should promote and champion the sector's activities and involvement, e.g. on trade missions, by working more closely with existing sector organisations in relation to international work. We welcome the Heritage is Great campaign but there is more that could be done to build on this in practice beyond a general promotion of heritage.

However, given the small scale of many organisations, Government should play a brokering role, identifying opportunities from which the heritage sector might benefit, when they are carrying out international work, for example on trade missions. Some bodies do this well, for example the British Council. But a wider awareness of this should be extended across actions undertaken by Government. Small pots of money can go along way in this respect.

Question 4 -Are there other Governments which have policies which are successfully enhancing the Soft Power of their countries?

Our members report that:

Italy has a range of heritage-oriented exchange programmes through international institutions, which gives international students or professionals the opportunity to contact Italy's conservation community. Examples are:

- www.villafabris.eu : European Centre for Heritage Crafts has 3-month courses on conservation skills with translators on site (a detailed report, in German, is here <http://www.berufsreport.com/europaeisches-zentrum-fuer-berufe-in-der-denkmalpflege-themen-italien-wo-handwerker-zu-restauratoren-werden/>)
- The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) www.iccrom.org in Rome attracts conservationists worldwide.

Germany has many trade fairs which display German expertise to the world. The biannual DENKMAL is the main heritage trade fair, in Leipzig, is a high-level meeting point with international participation and foreign "guest countries" (yet, not the UK).

China is aware of a skills gap in its approach to Heritage, particularly in industrial and intangible heritage. This was highlighted to the Heritage Alliance through the Cultural Exchange Tour to China undertaken by ICON (HA member) alongside Oxford Preservation Trust (HA Member), Historic England and two UK world heritage sites (City of Bath and Hadrian's Wall). Government should be aware of the steps China is taking concerning this issue, as a similar skills gap can be seen opening within some sub-sections of the Heritage sector in the UK (for example, Mobile Heritage and archaeology).

Question 5 - Should we prioritise our activity towards specific countries, and if so, on which countries should we focus?

Activity should not be prioritised towards specific countries, but rather where there is the most need, and or where the UK's efforts will have the greatest impact. The sector's skills are already in demand (as discussed on page 15 of our International Report).

The Government should focus on encouraging the introduction of international standard practices and parity in terms of skills. Encouraging other countries to work alongside our international experts will help us grow as a sector.

Question 6 - Given our commitment to continue to invest 0.7% of Gross National Income in Foreign Aid, should we do more to align the Culture and Development agendas, in partnership with DfID, for example by growing the Cultural Protection Fund?

Yes, this is a key opportunity for the sector. The Cultural Protection Fund has already hugely aided Alliance members to have a global impact, for example WMF's (World Monuments Fund Britain) Syrian refugee project (see the case study on page 4 of our International Report). This project would not have been so successful without this funding. The growth of this fund would not only benefit the sector but really have an impact in foreign countries on topics where the UK expertise is highly approved.

However, the Cultural Protection Fund aims to protect cultural heritage at risk due to conflict. There is a huge opportunity to work with DfID in relation to heritage at risk from other issues such as natural disasters, or place heritage as the focus of placemaking and economic development. This could open up opportunities for more commercial heritage construction specialists or conservators for example.

Question 7 - How can Government's global network, by which I mean our Ambassadors and High Commissioners, and their FCO teams working in tandem with DIT and the British council, support you more effectively in your international engagement?

Ambassadors and High Commissioners etc are a vital resource and should be used to help create collaborative heritage projects between nations. Heritage projects, which are widely popular and uncontroversial, and where the UK's expertise is highly appreciated, will benefit all. There could also feedback to the sector on projects issues where the sector's input might be helpful.

The Heritage Alliance model has been an inspiration to other countries, with some resources and support we could export our expertise in this space to show England as world leading.

Question 8- How can we most effectively grow cultural exports, contribute to the Trade agenda, cultivate corporate and philanthropic investment and thereby strengthen your financial resilience?

Our views are set out in detail in the "Recommendations" section of our International Report (p. 22-24):

- Support for backfilling posts
- Visa exemptions for experts
- Small grants for translations. Two of our members have noted the importance of translations of training resources when working internationally, ICON in China and SPAB (the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) in France and Germany.

- Travel bursaries. We are pleased that we are working with the British Council on the pilot of such a scheme and hope funding can be found to ensure it is extended.
- Integration of heritage resp. heritage NGOs to the international work of the British Council, Historic England, Heritage Lottery Fund and the Foreign Office. This might work with, for example the Heritage Alliance, as a funded delivery partner.
- Provide better evidence on the impact and potential of the independent heritage sector internationally.

However, the Government should be aware of the danger Brexit poses to skill exchanges between countries. Some of our members have experienced problems with gaining visas for their international collaborators. As recommended on page 23 of the International Report, **any visa system should be based on skills required, not salary levels**, and work both ways, so that the sector can grow both through importing and exporting skills.

It is also worth noting that Government should not focus on growing cultural exports but high quality cultural exports to ensure our world leading reputation is preserved. Accreditation of professionals can help ensure quality.

Question 9 - How can we best support the cultural equivalents of SMEs to grow their international relationships? I want to continue to support our London-based flagship institutions, but I also want to ensure we support new entrants and those outside London. Would more culture-focused trade missions be useful to you, or do you need more tailored support?

Funding is vital to support cultural SMEs internationally. We should follow other countries, for example France, Spain and Italy who follow a strategic approach and offer funding. If not, the UK eventually be left behind and lose our soft power ranking and opportunities. It should be noted that there are also smaller organisations within London who, due to funding, struggle to create/maintain an international profile, or cannot even consider creating one despite their exceptional expertise.

Ways in which the Government can increase its support of smaller heritage organisations are noted on page 22 of our International Report. These recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Travel bursaries to help promote exchanges of heritage professionals and students, which would circumvent the rising issue of some UK charities being reluctant to fund overseas research and study.
- Consider how best to fund UK Heritage organisations, which are increasingly expected to bring funding as well as expertise to international projects.

- A similar initiative to the Artists' International Development Fund, which was until recently run by the British Council and Arts Council, should be created within a heritage context in order to facilitate international exchange.

Question 10- How can we build a mutually supportive relationship between the culture sector and the GREAT Britain campaign, and ensure the Culture Diary works as a global asset for the whole of the culture sector?

Heritage is, for a good reason, part of the GREAT campaign. But its role in it could be better connected to the sector's more recent approaches to heritage, e.g. highlighting its importance for the creative industry, for well-being, for building communities, and enhancing diversity, or how an international audience can access heritage (whether UK sites on a visit or UK based skills for use overseas). More specification is needed on what the Culture Diary, which appears very much UK-focussed, really means on the international level. Support based on expertise rather than events might ultimately be more valuable.