

UK GOVERNMENT SOFT POWER STRATEGY

TEN QUESTIONS FROM DCMS HERITAGE MINISTER MICHAEL ELLIS

Icon response

2018

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?

The Strategy should be **driven by civil society** in recognition of its central role as a driver of soft power. The Strategy should seek to foster organisations and institutes without overt interference as the impact of soft power is dependent on its very distance from official government involvement.

The Strategy should **support the sectors that embody the values the government seeks to promote abroad**. The cultural heritage conservation sector's democratic vision of custodianship and cultural and knowledge exchange is underpinned by values of democracy, diversity and freedom of expression. The sector, however, is under-resourced and under-valued, limiting its ability to make the most of its potential as a soft power resource.

For the Strategy to add real value, it should aim to **create favourable conditions for the UK conservation sector to thrive both abroad and at home**. It should include tangible actions for government and funders to create these conditions.

1. Support for international work
 - Government to **foster existing relationships and networks established by organisations**. For example, Icon (The Institute of Conservation) is already well-connected to the conservation community in Shaanxi Province, China, through its [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with Shaanxi Provincial Museum Association.¹
 - Government and funders to **support international posts** in smaller organisations. The conservation sector is made up of SMEs, which do not have the capacity to devote to international work when it diverts from essential duties. New posts or the backfilling of existing posts when staff are routed to international projects would be beneficial.
 - **Travel bursaries** to help promote people exchanges, e.g. of conservation professionals and students.
 - **Events** to promote and explore international engagement and funding opportunities.
 - **Visa exemptions** for accredited professionals. Low remuneration within the conservation sector does not reflect the skills and education of the workforce. Visas should be based on skills needs, not on salary levels, to ensure the UK continues to attract professionals from around the world.

¹ <https://icon.org.uk/about-us/affiliations>

- Support from funders for **translating learning resources and research**. There is interest in China for the UK's high-quality conservation literature being made more accessible to Chinese conservators and heritage scientists. Icon publishes abstracts of its articles in its *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* in Mandarin. Funders' support for projects to translate full articles would facilitate information exchange.

2. Support at home

The values that the government seeks to promote abroad must be supported and encouraged at home for the strategy to be meaningful and for it to gain the support of civil society. Funding cuts and lack of political support undermine heritage organisations' ability to engage in cultural exchange.

- Government and funders to support a **highly-skilled workforce**. Appropriate education and training pathways are needed to ensure the sustainability of the existing and future workforce. This should include placing arts at the centre of early education to inspire future professionals, supporting diverse routes to employment like apprenticeships, and supporting higher education courses in traditional and conservation skills that are financially unattractive to universities but vital to the workforce and the UK's reputation.
- DCMS to **raise awareness** of the heritage and conservation sector's contribution to soft power, society and the economy. Greater understanding of the sector's value is needed to drive support across government and amongst the public. This is integral to attracting enhanced funding for cultural heritage.

Brexit creates many uncertainties around the heritage sector's ability to thrive at home and abroad in terms of questioning access to required skills, research and funding. The Strategy should consequently also **provide certainty for a post-Brexit UK**.

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?

1. Conservation Sector

The UK's long history of conservation has seen the development of an **independent profession** with its own standards, ethics, theory, education frameworks and notions of practice, which is held in high regard globally.

The sector is immensely diverse, with distinct disciplines and specialisms ranging from textiles to buildings, and employment divided between the private, public and HE sectors. Because of its diversity, there is considerable demand for the sector's skills, expertise and knowledge abroad. For example, Icon's [The "Golden Age" report](#) details the drive in China to collaborate with UK conservation professionals in education, training, consultancy and research.²

The sector is a leader in terms of **conservation standards**. There are around 25 [conservation standards](#) published by the British Standards Institution (BSI).³ Icon, the UK professional body for conservators, champions best practice through professional standards and accreditation. China's interest in developing standards is a key impetus for its interest in UK collaboration. Earlier this year, Shaanxi Province timed the establishment of the region's

² Icon, 2018. *The "Golden Age": Opportunities for UK-China Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Conservation*.

https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_thegoldenageshaanxireport_june2018_fv_1.pdf

³ <https://icon.org.uk/conservation/conservation-standards>

first professional body for conservators to coincide with Icon's visit to Xi'an. This was a tangible demonstration of the UK conservation sector's influence on global standards.

The conservation sector maximises the impact of the **cultural sector**. Conservation enables access to heritage by ensuring the survival of cultural heritage assets for the enjoyment and education of current and future generations. Without conservation, the soft power impact of heritage could not be maintained in the long term. The value of the UK's independent heritage sector, and recommendations for maintaining its excellence is detailed in the Heritage Alliance's [International Report](#).⁴

Despite its worldwide reputation, the conservation sector is challenged by **insufficient understanding** of its value at home. There is little awareness of the profession amongst the public and government policies have focused on the conservation of the built environment or conservation in the context of big national museums. The Strategy should seek to enhance the visibility of the conservation sector in its fullest sense – including the conservation of buildings and sites but also collections and objects cared for by both public institutions and private practices.

2. Education

Education is a key driver of the UK's soft power. The UK's **conservation education sector** has an international reputation that is second to none, contributing to the education of the domestic and global workforce and developing the subject and discipline.

International students and researchers are attracted to the leading centres of conservation training, like the UCL Institute of Archaeology, the Hamilton Kerr, University of Northumbria, West Dean College and Camberwell College of Arts. In 2008, it was reported that more than half – 57 percent – of all European conservation training takes place in the UK's HEIs.⁵

This international reputation is at risk with **leading education centres being forced to close** due to the costs of conservation courses not fitting within universities' economic frameworks. Most recently, Camberwell College of Arts announced the suspension for recruitment for its MA in Conservation.

The infrastructure of conservation education and expertise needs to be protected through support for alternative entry routes like apprenticeships but also through vocal backing for higher education conservation courses.

3. Heritage Science

The UK is a world-leader in the cross-disciplinary field of **heritage science**, with its expertise and technology routinely sought internationally. Heritage science is the application of science and technology to cultural heritage to improve understanding, management and engagement. Heritage science research and innovation is carried out in research institutions, heritage institutions, universities and by business.

The UK has an opportunity to establish a wider, more global reach for its heritage industry, particularly with Anglophone countries, given the high level of cultural connectivity that exists.⁶

⁴ The Heritage Alliance, 2018. *International Report 2018*. http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/tha-website/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/THARReport2018_Final_Pages.pdf

⁵ Jones, S., and Holden, J., 2008. *It's a Material World: Caring for the Public Realm*. Demos. <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Material%20World%20-%20web.pdf>

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

The government should show **conspicuous support** for the values derived from cultural heritage and conservation to enhance recognition and support within and outside of the sector.

It could consider developing a new post or council to facilitate and explore collective activity across sectors.

The conservation sector would welcome the opportunity to host visiting VIPs and to accompany official delegations on missions relevant to its specialisms.

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

No comment.

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

We should build on existing partnerships in Europe and elsewhere, establish new contacts and projects in countries that are developing or from whom we can learn (e.g. China, India etc.) and work with countries, which need support (e.g. in the Middle East and Asia).

China is appropriately identified as a priority for cultural engagement and the UK should be expanding its collaboration in conservation with the country. Icon's China report details the considerable demand in China for the UK's conservation expertise. However, the UK is falling behind other countries in collaborative engagement with the Shaanxi Province conservation community.⁷ Shaanxi is the most significant Province in terms of cultural heritage conservation in China. Deficient engagement with the Province represents a lost opportunity to increase the UK's international standing, to influence conservation standards in China and to contribute to the protection of global heritage.

Activity should be **tailored according to the target country** in question. For example, the United States may be more interested in developing accreditation for conservators whereas a country seeking to preserve its heritage with little infrastructure to do so may prefer advice of a different nature, such as assessment skills / practical conservation skills / conservation training and advice.

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 may also lead to the benefit of wider understanding and acceptance of other cultures. The Cultural Protection Fund has been enormously successful, but it is based on one-off projects. More long-term funding streams would be welcome.

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?

⁷ Icon, 2018. *The "Golden Age": Opportunities for UK-China Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Conservation*. https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_thegoldenageshaanxireport_june2018_fv_1.pdf

The global network could promote the conservation sector's work abroad and broker partnerships.

The **British Council** should be protected as an important asset of soft power and its support for the cultural sector enhanced. Icon has built a valuable network of contacts with Shaanxi Province in China due to the encouragement and backing of the British Council China and GREAT Britain campaign.

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?

The government should ensure that the cultural exports it promotes are of the **highest quality**. For example, accreditation should be encouraged to guarantee people exchanges include professionals who abide by high standards of practice and ethics. Icon Accreditation is used as a benchmark for quality within the conservation sector. Icon accredits conservators (Accredited Conservator-Restorers) who have reached a proficient level of practice, judgement and ethics across Icon's professional standards which they maintain through on-going professional development. As discussed in Question 2, these professional standards are valued globally.

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?

Culture trade missions focussed on the conservation of cultural heritage would be welcome and professional conservators and heritage scientists should be an integral element of such missions. The aims of the participating organisations or individuals should be compatible with the objectives of the missions. Missions should be promoted widely across the sector, not just to large organisations.

Establishing international partnerships and increasing engagement is a challenge for SMEs with limited resources. The British Council, DCMS and national lottery distributors should use their knowledge to broker relationships and develop funding mechanisms that support the full breadth of the conservation sector.

Support could also include: promoting awareness of funding opportunities, assistance and guidance with applications, sharing of best practice examples and events for individuals and organisations to meet and discuss mutual interests and potential partnerships.

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?

The government could promote the Culture Diary more widely and broker relationships between the GREAT Britain campaign and the culture sector.