



AAH Policy

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE SOFT POWER REVIEW SEPTEMBER 2018

1.1 Introduction

The Australian Academy of the Humanities welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Soft Power Review.

The Academy's response focuses on the 'soft power' benefits that can be realised through Australia's research, education and cultural assets, specifically:

1. ways to strengthen research cooperation and collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region;
2. how Australia could use its diaspora networks more effectively;
3. the role of institutional brokers including Australia's cultural sector; and
4. the future humanities capabilities we need to underpin soft power initiatives.

Below we address each of the terms of reference. The Academy would be happy to elaborate on any of the comments made in this submission.

1.2 Understanding and benefitting from soft power in changing global contexts [TOR 1]

In the context of globalisation and rapid technological and communications transformations, the nature and operation of soft power is arguably more complex than it has ever been. The ability of any country to "influence the behaviour and thinking of others, through the power of attraction and ideas" is not only challenged by media transformations but the ways in which countries might have formerly sought to institutionalise influence has been undermined by a loss of public trust in institutions. Soft power is therefore subject to volatility in its relation to hard power given that its reliance on reputation can relatively easily be damaged by actions in other spheres.

Culture and cultural activity are at the heart of efforts of those countries that have effectively mobilised soft power initiatives. But this requires "by definition", as Julianne Schultz FAHA recently noted, "a contemporary national narrative". It also requires bipartisan and public confidence in – and support of – the creative and cultural life of the nation, which is one of the aims of [A New Approach](#) independent think tank championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture.

This will require a cross-portfolio effort and confidence in Australia's creative and cultural activity. In developing a contemporary narrative, Schultz notes that "success is more likely to come with input from research, publication and debate of humanities scholars in conjunction with a wide network of others in the arts, business, media, public service and sciences ..." ([Schultz, 2018](#)).

What becomes more important in these contexts is deepening engagements via 'horizontal networks', people-to-people links, civil society and trusted public institutions and brokers –

Australia's public institutions, such as the ABC and SBS, its cultural organisations, and its publicly-funded higher education and research sector. In the world of cultural diplomacy, for example, this means a focus less on "one-way 'projection' and more on mutuality, cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding" ([Smart Engagement with Asia](#), p. 110), and support for a "broad spectrum of initiatives to enhance society-wide cultural relations and people-to-people connections on the ground" (p. 138).

1.3 Identifying Australia's soft power objectives and Australia's key soft power assets and challenges [TOR 2]

Australia's soft power agenda needs to be understood as extending well beyond the realm of foreign policy. Its success will rely on building durable, reciprocal links at individual and institutional level, and building on the credibility and integrity of its cultural, intellectual and educational soft power assets. One of the roles for governments here is to contribute to public good objectives and outcomes – building trust and commitment to Australia's soft power objectives will be contingent on public 'returns' on this investment.

This means looking at a range of initiatives and activities which have long-term soft power effects, such as diaspora engagement and research cooperation. These are the necessary preconditions to realising genuine attraction and influence and building Australia's reputation on the global stage (see below).

1.4 Policy options to build and leverage soft power assets to promote Australia's security and prosperity, and strengthen Australia's reputation in an increasingly networked world [TOR 3]

1.4.1. Role of research diplomacy – strengthening research cooperation and collaboration

An important focus for research diplomacy in the 21st century is the need for international research collaboration in addressing challenges that cross national borders, such as climate change, infectious diseases, ageing populations, or cybersecurity. Working on shared challenges will provide a strong basis for contributing to, and building up, regional relations. This will require multidisciplinary initiatives involving both humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Australia does not have funding schemes and programs directed at building this interdisciplinary effort.

Our international research cooperation agreements are all S&T focused, which is a myopic approach given that this very review, and the aims of soft power itself, rely on an understanding of the cultures, societies, economies and systems of our global neighbours. Our success as a nation will depend on a deep understanding of these societies and of changing global contexts. This is the expertise of the humanities, arts and social sciences. Facilitating international research collaboration in these disciplines will directly underpin Australia's soft power capabilities.

The international community of HASS scholars is a pool of international collaborators who are generally overlooked in their role in disseminating 'soft power' through a range of organisations and institutions both within and outside of the higher education sector. These experts, and their networks, are a rich resource that should be recognised and more effectively utilised by government.

Australia's has world-leading expertise in areas including Asian studies, archaeology, cultural heritage, media communications, and philosophy and ethics. We have a unique contribution to make to global networks if we invest in areas of growth and opportunity in the humanities –

many centred around the digital future. One area of note is in the human dimension of AI – ensuring that AI development around the globe provides a benefit to humanity, rather than threatening it. Australian humanities researchers are world leaders in the ethics and equity of AI but their expertise is largely under-recognised and under-utilised. They are exceptionally well-placed to build Australia’s reputation as both a leading nation and a broker/ negotiator in the ethical application of AI and new technologies.

Another area with potential to strengthen Australia’s global reputation in the region is with digital cultural heritage. The lack of investment in national research infrastructure for cultural projects and research has meant unrealised potential for international cooperation with major infrastructures in Europe, for example, such as DARIAH and ARIADNE, and ambitious culture infrastructures such as Europeana.

The New Colombo Plan is an example of the sorts of far-sighted initiatives needed, which will deliver over the longer term. The same applies to building people-to-people links via international research – creating more durable bridges, connecting younger Australian researchers with international knowledge networks is crucial for developing research workforce capacity.

1.4.2. Role of diaspora networks – untapped potential of research and business diasporas

ACOLA’s [Australia’s Diaspora Advantage](#) (2017) report found that Asian business diaspora have significant potential to further Australia’s economic links with Asia. Work conducted as part of the [Smart Engagement with Asia](#) report showed that Australia’s engagement with China is led by diasporic researchers (p. 97).

The term diaspora captures a significant and growing population of migrants, Australian-born descendants, those of mixed-parentage, and temporary residents in Australia for work or study. Business diaspora are those involved in transnational business, trade and investment and include a greater proportion of educated and highly skilled individuals engaged in the new economy.

These Australians are uniquely placed to use language skills, cultural understanding and global networks to accelerate the circulation of ideas, opportunities, people and capital for business purposes. The diaspora advantage is currently under-recognised, and under-utilised.

1.4.3. Australia’s role in the Indo-Pacific region and cultural diplomacy advantage

There are opportunities to increase strategic effort and leverage existing activities across the cultural sector. Australia’s national cultural institutions (galleries, libraries, archives museums – (GLAM) sector as well as independent cultural sector) play a leading role in the Asia-Pacific region via innovative regional cultural networks and infrastructures. GLAM institutions occupy a unique role in society with high degrees of public trust and confidence in their collective institutional remit. They are important actors in our region and internationally.

We have world-leading expertise on Pacific and South East Asia, significant cultural and data collections, and world heritage and languages expertise. We do not have a comprehensive account of the level of international engagement and cooperation happening across the cultural sector; there is a need to map the gaps and priorities for the future.

ACOLA’s [Smart Engagement with Asia](#) report found that the “depth of Australia’s linguistic and inter-cultural competence will be a determining factor in the future success of developments in innovation, science and technology, research capacity, international mobility, trade relations and economic competitiveness”. Australia’s “relationship with Asia, however, is

overwhelmingly characterised by cultural distance. This has resulted in a soft power deficit in Asia, with cultural relations operating at a comparatively thin and instrumental level”. Research for the [Smart Engagement with Asia](#) report highlighted the role of a range of small to medium institutions, players and brokers – in particular on innovative regional cultural networks and infrastructures, which have been established by independent cultural sector and civil society players, including Asian and Pacific diasporas in Australia (see [International Cultural Engagements Among Australians of Pacific Islands and Asian Descent](#) report, 2014).

1.4.4. Cultural capabilities

Australia needs to urgently review its soft power capabilities and whether they are sufficient to meet its aspirations. The Academy’s [Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia](#) report (2014) found that fluctuations in student demand have put pressure on areas of low enrolment, risking loss of expertise in areas of national or strategic importance. The state of Australia’s cultural, linguistic and political historical capabilities with regards to Russia, as well as in its regional cultures and languages, should be areas of particular concern.

A recent report by the [British Council on global education](#) rated Australia highly on almost all measures to the extent that Australia ranks equal first alongside Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Malaysia and the UK on indicators such as openness of higher education systems, quality assurance and degree recognition, and international student mobility. However, Australia underperformed – placing 30 of 38 countries – on measures relating to “outbound scholarships and foreign languages provision”.

In the UK context there have been strategic investments by its research councils into building languages and cultural capabilities – and a similar approach is needed in Australia to strengthen the chance of soft power success. In its submission to the UK Soft Power Review, UK Research Councils said “Research into other cultural traditions, and the language expertise that makes this possible, are a key part of sustaining the UK’s openness to the global world, and therefore, the UK’s reputation as a country that is open to other ideas and perspectives”. And it cited a number of Language Based Area Studies (LBAS) Centres, established with funding from the Research Councils, HEFCE and the British Academy, which have built “considerable international profiles in the regions that they are concerned with”. The Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy are currently supporting the LBAS Developing Funding scheme to extend the impact of the work undertaken by the centres: The British Inter-University China Centre (BICC); The Centre for the Advances Study of the Arab World (CASAW); The Centre for East European Language-Based Area Studies (CEELBAS); The Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies (CREES); and The White Rose East Asia Centre (WREAC).

In Australia, long-term strategies to build language and cultural capabilities are needed. While the emphasis is always on visits and exchanges and collaborations, this will only go so far if future generations do not have the language proficiency to communicate in the region. If soft power is to be seen as a long-term aim, language proficiency in Asian and non-Asian languages needs to remain a focus in schools and universities.

1.5 New and more effective partnerships with other governments, the private sector, development partners and civil society, drawing on examples of best practice [TOR 4]

The Australian Academy of the Humanities’ role in promoting the work of Australian humanities here and overseas is part of the broader ‘soft power’ ecosystem. We have invested in a range of projects and initiatives that support this broader agenda, many of which we

referenced in [our submission to DFAT's Foreign Policy White Paper consultation](#). Here, we draw attention to three current areas of focus:

- > [New Approach to Arts and Culture](#): an independent think tank championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture. Its ambition is to strengthen bipartisan, business and wider community support for arts and culture through a research and advocacy program, and ensure opportunities are seized for the better realisation of the economic, social, cultural and personal benefits that Australian arts and cultural activities provide.
- > An ARC-funded study on the [Humanities in the Asia Region](#) which has mapped the range of collaborative work underway in the humanities and how this contributes to wider efforts in research diplomacy and multidisciplinary collaboration, with implications for future policy and program design.
- > Early career researcher (ECR) strategy development. A well-trained and internationally connected research and teaching workforce will enable Australia's access to the vast amount of knowledge discovery which takes place outside our borders, and provide us with the skills to take advantage of new discoveries. There is a role for government in research workforce development, in particular researcher mobility programs, which have the potential to build our national capacity.

The Academy believes that much more effective use could be made of a range of 'SME' collaborative organisations and brokers including Learned Academies.

Other governments – most notably the Chinese through their (for some, controversial) Confucius Institutes and the UK's British Council – have more effectively invested in establishing and funding centres whose core aim is unashamedly 'soft power'. Other governments have entrenched expertise within their foreign policy portfolios, for example with regard to archaeology and heritage (e.g. US State Department, The German Archaeological Institute in their Foreign Affairs Dept).

Mechanisms are needed to promote Australian scholarship/business abroad to foster stronger collaboration, connections and links. The Australian Studies Centres are currently minimally funded but have the potential to be a locus for larger scale research exchange and build the profile to attract connections.

1.6 References

In preparing this submission the Academy consulted with its Fellows and drew extensively on research we led through the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) Securing Australia's Future (SAF) program, namely the SAF03 report [Smart Engagement with Asia](#) (chaired by Professor Ien Ang FAHA) and the SAF11 report [Australia's Diaspora Advantage](#) (co-chaired by Professor Fazal Rizvi FASSA and Professor Kam Louie FHKAH FAHA). The Academy also consulted submissions to the [UK's Soft Power Review](#) (2013) and the British Academy's report [The Art of Attraction and the UK's Role in the World](#) (2013).

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