Expression of interest: **Wales and the soft power of sport**

The British Council is seeking expressions of interest (EOIs) from suitably qualified and experienced suppliers to undertake a high profile research project that will examine the role sport can play in Wales’ approach to international engagement.

The research will form part of our *Imagining Wales’ Global Future* series, which is exploring Wales’ soft power potential. Since its launch in April 2018, the series has featured two new research commissions, the [Wales Soft Power Barometer 2018](https://www.britishcouncil.org/wales-soft-power-barometer) (British Council / Portland) and a report on the feasibility of an [International Showcasing Strategy for the Arts of Wales](https://www.britishcouncil.org/international-showcasing-strategy-arts-wales) (British Council / Visiting Arts). Our intention is for the research on sport and soft power to be a focus of the series in summer 2019 as Wales looks forward to the Rugby World Cup in Japan.

### 1. Context

#### 1.1 The soft power moment

Foreign policy and international affairs have traditionally been the responsibility of nation-state level governments. For the UK, this has meant that all policy decisions of international consequence have been taken in Westminster and Whitehall. But the days of Downing Street, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence dominating every aspect of foreign policy across the UK are over.

The UK Government still leads on articulating international priorities, security and defence, overseas aid and broadly setting the tone for the UK’s foreign policy. But the realities of globalisation and the autonomy afforded to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland through political devolution, mean that the respective governments in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast all now have an important role to play in the development of their own set of unique international priorities.

While ‘sub-state’ or ‘regional’ governments now have more space, autonomy and tools at their disposal to influence and engage with global events, they need to remain focused on where they can effect change, and avoid areas where they cannot. This means avoiding issues pertaining to defence, war and international security and instead concentrating on areas like trade, investment, tourism, culture, education, environment, people-to-people exchanges and sport.

A regional government’s international remit exists, therefore, almost exclusively in the context of soft power.

This is increasingly reflected in the approach of the Welsh Government, whose growing network of international offices is consistent with the vision - set out in its current programme for government, *Taking Wales Forward* - of a Wales that is an ‘internationally-focused, ambitious country’.

As Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, puts it in his vision for the future of culture in Wales, *Light Springs Through The Dark*:
In post-Brexit Wales, soft power will have an increasingly important role to play... If our soft power can be deployed effectively, there are huge potential benefits in terms of developing trade, helping to attract inward investment and encouraging more tourism from overseas.

The recent creation of an International Relations portfolio within Welsh Government and the new Minister’s clear focus on providing greater coordination and strategic direction to Wales’ global engagement, through the development of an international strategy, are further timely developments.

1.2 Wales and the soft power of sport

Our Wales Soft Power Barometer 2018 report detailed the findings of the first Regional Soft Power Index. The Index, which was designed by the creator of Portland’s annual Soft Power 30, combined over fifty objective metrics and international polling data.

The ten regions selected for the index were chosen according to approximate criteria, rather than a rigid formula, including: their level of devolved government authority, GDP size, population size, geographic spread, level of development and history of international ambitions and engagement. Wales placed 6th overall among the ten regions in the index, which was topped by Quebec.

Wales performed best in those objective and subjective measures associated with sport, polling second only to Catalonia in terms of the favourability generated by the appeal of its sporting culture.

This will come as no surprise to anyone with even a passing interest in sport.

Geraint Thomas carrying Y Ddraig Goch along the Champs-Élysées in the final, processional stage of the Tour de France; Dame Tanni Grey Thompson being proposed by the BBC as one if the ‘icons’ of the twentieth century; the Welsh men’s football team setting records and making friends during a memorable summer at Euro 2016. These are just some of the recent examples of the hugely positive, truly global profile generated for Wales through its sportspeople and sporting culture.

But it is not clear that Wales is making the most of sport as a way of building international engagement. Professor Laura McAllister, a former Wales football captain and senior figure in multiple sporting bodies, including Sport Wales, UK Sport and the FAW Trust, has written about the opportunities generated around the world through Wales’ footballing successes that have been largely missed. Wales, McAllister argues, needs to ‘harness [the profile of Welsh football] in an altogether more strategic and trenchant way than presently or miss another opportunity to ‘sell’ Wales to the world’.

2. Project brief

We are inviting EOI’s for a research project that will:

1) Undertake an audit of Wales’ sporting soft power assets.
2) Undertake a review of the academic and policy literatures on soft power and sport (and ‘sports diplomacy’), including national and sub-national strategic approaches to sport and international engagement.
3) Critically examine Wales’ current approach to international engagement through sport, using relevant global comparator countries to provide context.
4) Recommend realistic, practical and sustainable ways that Wales can incorporate sport into its emerging international strategy, building on an understanding of international best practice.

3. Methodology

We anticipate EoIs will propose a mixed methodology. This may include: a detailed literature review; semi-structured interviews with key sport, political and government stakeholders; round-tables or focus groups in different parts of Wales; surveys, if appropriate; case studies of international best practice.

We are particularly interested in learning from efforts to apply a strategic framework to international engagement through sport that may have been developed (and tested) elsewhere in the world.

4. Outputs

The principal output will be a detailed research report of 12-15,000 words that can be used to inform the British Council’s (and, as appropriate, the broader sport sector in Wales’) contribution to the debate now underway on Wales’ future international strategy.

The report will make a series of sustainable, practical and realistic recommendations and the supplier will present the research findings and recommendations at events in Wales.

5. Qualifications and experience

The supplier will be able to demonstrate a strong reputation as an expert on sport and international affairs, with evidence of working across the sport and government sectors in the UK and overseas.

Previous experience of advising major sports bodies and national or regional governments on strategic approaches to international engagement through sport will be essential.

The supplier will have advanced research design and data collection and analysis skills and a track record of producing high quality, influential written outputs.

6. Timeline

- We are seeking EoIs by 1pm on Monday 8 April 2019.
- Interviews with shortlisted suppliers will take place in April 2019 and contracting with the successful supplier will take place shortly thereafter.
- The literature review, fieldwork and data collection phases will take place April-August 2019.
- A draft report will be made available to the British Council at the end of August 2019.
- Publication of the final report and any associated events, which the researcher(s) should be available for, will take place in September 2019.

7. Submission
EOIs not exceeding 4 pages of single-spaced, 12 point text and setting out a project vision, detailed methodological approach, timeline, defined outputs and project budget, should be send to Chris Lewis (christopher.lewis@britishcouncil.org) before 1pm on Monday 8 April 2019.

Interested suppliers should also contact Chris at the same address if they wish to discuss the opportunity informally before submitting an EOI.