



SPORTS
DIPLOMACY
ALLIANCE

The Fiercest of Friends

Sports Diplomacy in the Australia-UK relationship

The world's first bilateral Sports Diplomacy Dialogue

Post Event Report, August 2022



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Despite the obvious role that sport plays in the relationship between Australia and the UK, we are only beginning to understand its diplomatic power.

This unique event – the world’s first bilateral Sports Diplomacy Dialogue – brings together players, diplomats, and scholars from both countries to map the relationship across many different areas such as sports tech diplomacy, strategy, gender, and commerce.

Stuart Murray, Co-Founder Sports Diplomacy Alliance



Sport is an extraordinary lens through which to examine how we see ourselves and present ourselves as nations. It unifies us in shared experience and celebrates some of our finest human qualities. I am delighted to see this vital part of our culture celebrated in the UK/Australia Season

Helen Salmon, Season Director and Director of the British Council in Australia



Sport has long been a part of our close relationship, and our sporting rivalry is both fierce and friendly and a vital part of our respective cultures, societies and values. Sport brings countries and communities together in a shared love of competition and camaraderie — a tradition Australia and the United Kingdom have enthusiastically practiced for centuries.

Stephanie Brantz, Chair, Australian Government Sports Diplomacy Advisory Council

Executive Summary

Sport represents one of the oldest relationships between the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. The competition it inspires is fierce, and yet sport also reflects the enduring bonds of friendship between the two nations and their peoples.

The fiercest of friends: Sports Diplomacy in the Australia-UK relationship, the world's first bilateral Sports Diplomacy Dialogue, offered the chance to explore a connection forever bound to the major sporting and diplomatic events of our time.

Bringing Ministers, Olympians, High Commissioners, professors, sportspeople and business leaders together, the Dialogue honed in on the history, contemporary relevance and potential of sport in the Australia-UK (AUK) relationship. Hosted by Sports Diplomacy Alliance the one-day event brought a unique sporting dimension to the 2021/22 UK/Australia Season (Who are We Now?) and built multistakeholder partnerships with the British Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Griffith Asia Institute, and the UK Government's GREAT campaign and Department of Trade and Industry.

Key themes addressed a range of priority issues including those of relevance to the Australian Sports Diplomacy strategy, Sports Diplomacy 2030 – including an emphasis on community building, facilitating trade and investment through innovation, empowering women, connecting cities, and delivering legacies within and beyond sport.

The AUK Sports Diplomacy Dialogue provided a useful engagement platform for participants to share the best elements of knowledge and practice on Sports Diplomacy. Key findings to emerge from the event highlighted the potential and benefits of 'AUK Sports Diplomacy.' If done strategically, Sports Diplomacy could:

- Advance shared bilateral interests and opportunities
- Articulate the foundations for success
- Support, celebrate and engage a network of champions and role models
- Generate investment in the ecosystem
- Share detailed insights of case studies and programs in sports diplomacy
- Grow mutual expertise in sports diplomacy
- Plan for shared legacy
- Create a bilateral strategy to grow, guide, and evaluate AUK Sports Diplomacy

The 2022 AUK Sports Diplomacy Dialogue was not intended as a standalone event, but rather the beginning of an ongoing conversation. Sports Diplomacy Alliance recommends that the time to start planning a 2023 UK series is now, and is already working with the Australian and UK Governments, many Universities, and the British Council to take this idea forward.

Introduction

There is longstanding agreement that the sporting games that both British and Australian people play form a vital part of our respective cultures, societies, and values. Sport represents one of the oldest relationships between the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. The competition it inspires is fierce, yet sport also reflects the special bonds of friendship that exist between the two nations and their peoples.

Hosted by Sports Diplomacy Alliance, the one-day Australia-UK (AUK) Sports Diplomacy Dialogue brought a sporting perspective into the 2021/2022 UK/Australia Season (Who are We Now?). Bringing sporting champions and Ministers, diplomats, industry and government professionals, business leaders and academics together, the Dialogue focussed on the history, contemporary relevance and potential of sport in the Australia-UK (AUK) relationship. It was presented in partnership with the British Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Griffith Asia Institute, and sponsored by the UK Government's GREAT campaign and Department of Trade.

- While the sporting ties are longstanding, this Dialogue symbolised a new era in AUK Sports Diplomacy. It's aims were to:
- Provide the UK/Australia Season with a range of local, national, and international perspectives on sport, diplomacy, and intercultural relations
- Explore how Sports Diplomacy could generate social, academic and diplomatic impacts in the UK, Australia and beyond.
- Extend Australia's Sports Diplomacy capacity beyond the Indo-Pacific, and apply best knowledge and practice to the UK
- Celebrate, map, and better understand the Sports Diplomacy relationship between the UK and Australia, conducive to creating new social, diplomatic, and academic opportunities
- Create academic-to-policy networks and begin conversations that enable further collaboration
- Generate the first internationally peer reviewed journal article that analyses Sports Diplomacy in a bilateral relationship
- Trial a bilateral Sports Diplomacy model that could be applied to Australia and the UK's other key strategic relationships, including for example, with India, the US, New Zealand, France, and Pacific Islands Countries
- Amplify the reputations of Australia and the UK as connected, trusted, and culturally innovative countries
- Gauge the interest in a potential annual or bi-annual AUK Sports Diplomacy Dialogue running from 2023 onwards

The first of its kind, the Dialogue reflected positively on the AUK shared sporting past. Findings suggest that there are compelling reasons to celebrate the diversity of our shared 'Sportscape' and further explore opportunities that strategically harness the soft power of sport to improve UK/Australia diplomatic, business and trade, community, and people-to-people relations.

Importantly, the Dialogue generated new levels of interest and energy in and around the AUK sporting opportunities, competitions, and partnerships. It got sports tech entrepreneurs, diplomats, academics, students, sportspeople and lots of others 'in the room.' It attracted a high calibre of online and in-person participation drew positive media attention, and engaged peak bodies and networks globally. The Dialogue provided a fresh view of the role sports has, does and should play in the UK/Australia relationship. As both countries embark on a decade of mega sporting events and mega diplomatic challenges, sports diplomacy, influence and soft power will play a vital role in this, and other, key strategic partnerships.



Key Themes

The following section provides an overview of the themes and discussion points to emerge from AUK SD Dialogue panels.

Panel 1: The Fiercest of Friends: Building Communities through Sport

The first session set the scene. It effectively argued that sport is an inherent value embedded within the childhoods, cultures and interactions of the broader AUK diplomatic relationship. Key points to emerge focused on the:

- Unique place that sport holds in the relationship, incorporating respect, banter, fun and rivalry across all the competitions.
- Significance of old sporting connections in an era of Great Power competition, autocracy, and strategic rivalry, whereby sport offers both nations an important platform for creative diplomacy, expresses a commitment to shared principles, and brings diverse perspectives to the fore.
- Value of sport as a driver of people-to-people connections that celebrate each other's stories, best theory and practice as the UK and Australia work towards new levels of strategic and diplomatic partnership.
- Opportunity and potential to build awareness, train and empower sports people (with Australia's Sports Diplomacy MOOC as a concrete example). As one speaker noted, "it's one thing to ask Australian sportspeople to be better diplomats, but another to provide the tools to make that possible".

Panel 2: Sports Technology Diplomacy between the UK and Australia

The discussion recognised sports-technology as a burgeoning global sector that provides an opportunity to build diplomatic relationships, brand and national identity around technological prowess. This session highlighted that:

- Australian and UK policymakers could better coordinate, incentivise and align support for sports and technology partners, youth, and the nascent AUK sports technology ecosystem
- The extended Working Holiday Visa and new Australia/UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) present many opportunities to increase knowledge, youth exchange and talent in this rapidly growing area.
- The new FTA strongly encourages investment and trade in Sports Tech.
- That access to investment, usually staged, is allowing technology companies to build their footprint over time. Sports Tech businesses that spoke at the Dialogue, like VALD in Australia, have also benefited from increased diplomatic attention and effort, allowing them to branch out internationally. Working around major events and infrastructure investments (such as the UK did when it turned the 2012 Olympic Village into a hub for sports tech entrepreneurs and start-ups) and across the bilateral relationship will contribute the necessary economies of scale and coordination of the ecosystem.
- Cultural familiarity, history and trust that exists between Australia and the UK offers a tangible benefit to businesses seeking to collaborate.
- Embassies, consulates and high-commissions in both countries can offer access to local contacts, networks and funding.
- There is a need to focus and collaborate on emerging developments and issues, such as blockchain technology and the metaverse, and to mobilise private sector and venture capital in ways that will maximise innovation opportunities for the tech sector
- Data will be a key driver in the years ahead affecting the development and direction of businesses, in making scalable, accessible technology for wider use (while issues of safety and privacy are yet to be resolved).
- The link between sports technology as a beta testing ground for allied health open more potential to deepen and develop the bilateral trade and investment relationship in sport and health technology.
- The attraction of sport as a platform can be leveraged to engage next generations in technology and innovation through sports technology and more broadly, build STEM talent.

Panel 3: Women and Sports Diplomacy

The role of women in sports is identified as a major factor in lifting women's participation and empowerment, contributing to sports excellence and legacy and embedding and advancing broader issues of gender equality, inclusion and human rights. The discussion focussed on how women's sport can be used as a diplomatic means to a range of women's economic, diplomatic and social issues. Women's sports diplomacy could, for example:

- champion equity and inclusion in decision-making, participation and performance represent diversity of voice, experience and perspective in the governance and integrity of sport
- promote the voice, needs and fears of young women in Less Developed Countries
- contribute to innovations that broaden the reach, participation and impact of sport and sporting events
- use sport as a platform to build confidence in female leaders and to connect female leaders and athletes among countries for positive diplomatic, economic and social outcomes.
- act as a 'Trojan horse', teaching men about the stories, challenges, and knowledge to be shared from playing, administering or simply following women's sport

Panel members highlighted the need to promote mentoring for women athletes. They also stressed a need to understand and challenge inherent structural and financial barriers within sports and sporting codes, to maximise sponsorship, media, business and career transition opportunities, and to advance and improve gender equity across all facets of the sports landscape. Sustained investment and attention, including through the showcasing and exchange of women's experiences in sport, will be required if women athletes, coaches and administrators are to realise their potential across all domains of the sporting landscape. Further investigation into women's sports diplomacy was urgently needed.

Panel 4: Mega Sporting Events (MSEs) and the Green and Gold Decade

The conversation drew attention to the intersection between arts, culture, and sport, and the challenging but exciting way combining these different fields allowed cities to be showcased to the world. The importance of legacy planning was highlighted, noting the key is to embed the legacy envisioned so deeply into every aspect of the planning that subsequent governments are unable to remove it. Sports Diplomacy, it was argued, was crucial in bidding, hosting and legacy planning, as goals to win need to be recognised and invested in a decade (or more) before. As Brisbane prepares for the 2032 Summer Olympic Games, and lots of other MSEs, the need for authenticity of brand was identified as critical for running, promoting and enjoying a successful event.



Panel 5: City-to-City Sports Diplomacy with Commonwealth Games Theme

Hosting MSEs provides a unique opportunity for cities to engage on the world stage while showcasing their credentials and capabilities in and beyond sport to a global audience. The discussion centred on the experiences of the cities of Gold Coast (2018) and Birmingham (2022) highlighting the fact that these cities had the capability to host major events with positive and unique outcomes.

- For the Gold Coast, the opportunity to build relationships across and within Oceania through high performance coaching, preparation and support was a significant achievement. The GAPS program delivered by Griffith University with multiple stakeholders across government and sporting peaks provided a unique sports diplomacy model; ensuring Pacific Island athletes and coaches were able to compete successfully on the international stage. Their success brought diplomatic and national prestige and in turn, changed lives and perceptions.
- Birmingham's experience brings opportunity for entire communities to work together toward one common goal, opening pathways to new collaborations. The different format of the Queen's Baton Relay was noted, as an evolving but ever important diplomatic tool to connect young people in the Games.
- Importantly, it was noted that cities never make a bid to simply host eleven days of sport; rather they make a bid to accelerate progress and development, with an eye to economic and social legacy impacts.

Session 6: The Kangaroo Route

The Kangaroo Route focused on the potential to exchange ideas and share lessons learned from major events hosted by the UK and Australia in the past, present and future. Diversity and uniqueness are vital to any future successes, such as:

- The City of the Gold Coast leveraged the chance to bring themes of reconciliation and inclusion to the fore. The Gold Coast Organising Committee (GOLDOC) incorporated the first ever Indigenous reconciliation plan into the Games planning and design, while men and women / able bodies and parathletes competed alongside each other. Additional emphasis was placed on strategies to ensure Pacific Island nations were included within the event.
- Birmingham's municipal leadership aim to reflect the city's young, diverse population through the Games. The hosting role will enable Birmingham to tackle employment rates, employ a tourism program to boost investment, increase community access to opportunities, showcase its proud history, and attract record investments which will support advancements for the city.
- For Ambassadors and diplomats engaged in sustaining and developing the bilateral relationship, these events provide the chance to reflect on and amplify aspects of the close friendship, sense of community, and warm connection between the two nations and their peoples.



Key Findings

The 2022 AUK Sports Diplomacy Dialogue provided a useful engagement platform for participants to share the best theory, knowledge and practice on Sports Diplomacy. As Australia and the UK prepare to host a decade of major sporting events — from the 2022 Commonwealth Games (Birmingham) to the 2032 Brisbane Olympics — the sporting landscape continues to confront multiple challenges where diplomacy and sport intersect. Sports diplomacy offers a critical platform for different countries to engage in Dialogue as they navigate and respond to plethora of challenges and opportunities. Key findings to emerge through the dialogue highlighted the potential for AUK sports diplomacy to:

- **Advance shared bilateral interests and opportunities:** The event was unique in that it brought together a wide range of stakeholders with a shared interest in leveraging the opportunities presented by sport in the context of the bilateral AUK diplomatic relationship. It reaffirmed common bonds and reminded participants that sport continues to provide a universal language that transcends difference and enables collaboration.
- **Articulate the foundations for success:** Sports Diplomacy can appear as unwieldy terrain, but when viewed through the lens of bilateral relationship, like that between Australia and the UK, underpinned principles can bring a sense of coherence to the range of activities. For Australia and the UK, it makes sense to place emphasis on i) delivering prosperity and stability; ii) building and sustaining open and collaborative partnerships based on complementary interests and mutual benefit; iii) excellence and integrity; iv) inclusive sport and participation.
- **Support, celebrate and engage the network of champions and role models:** the AUK relationship is brimming with sporting champions and role models (or “diplomats in tracksuits,” as the keynote speaker referred to the role sportspeople can, and should, play off the pitch). These sports diplomats, through their contributions to sport and more broadly within communities, deserve training, as well as recognition. As messengers, they play a valuable role in shaping and changing perceptions (and or stereotypes), building trust, and drawing attention to and advocating for shared goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The network of sporting champions and role models (as athletes, coaches, administrators etc) that exists between Australia and the UK, though rich and diverse, remains relatively untapped in the context of the bilateral relationship. More could be done to support, celebrate, train, empower, and engage with this network.
- **Invest in the sports technology ecosystem:** while there is significant innovation and entrepreneurship emerging in the sports and tech industries, much of it has evolved serendipitously and as isolated pockets of activity. Sports industry and technologies have enormous potential to flourish within the AUK SD bilateral relationship, particularly with intentional enabling mechanisms and investment (and not just those that are — usually - focused around major events). Australia and the UK might consider a joint framework for enabling the sports tech ecosystem, including research collaboration, innovation hubs investment incentives and mentoring opportunities.
- **Plan for shared legacy and track outcomes** — AUK Sports Diplomacy is crucial in legacy planning, as goals to win need to be recognised and invested in a decade (or more) before. Legacy tends to be a given for major events and the Commonwealth Games series in particular offers the chance to plan for shared legacies to be realised through the AUK bilateral relationship while leveraging complementarities the two nations bring to a broader Commonwealth legacy. As yet this is an underexplored opportunity.
- **Write the world's first bilateral Sports Diplomacy Strategy** — with best practice shared, a body of research on AUK SD about to be published, and planning for a 2023 Dialogue well underway, many participants felt the timing was ideal to design, implement and measure a bilateral SD strategy between the Australia and the UK. A world's first, this strategy might would be low-cost, low-risk and high profile, generate social, economic and diplomatic impact, and — as a model - serve other key (or failing) strategic relationship for both countries.
- **Broaden the playing field** — due to the success of the first Dialogue, there is a possibility to consider tri or multi-lateral Dialogues, Summits or events that showcase DFAT, the British Council and SDA's talents and desires to bring other countries and organisations into the realm of Sports Diplomacy. Scaling up, so to speak, would achieve significant impact if allied to a major international event, such as the 2023 Pacific Games, or the 2023 G20 Summit to be held in India. As Dr. Stuart Murray noted, “they have a W20 (for women), why not an S20?”
- **Digital Sports Diplomacy** - The event needed an official hashtag like #AUKSD or #SDAUKdialogue. This would have promoted more traffic and easier to search on afterwards. Also could be constant for the follow up event in UK. Similarly, a social Media Strategy was required for an event of this size and scope. For example, some Tweets from UK Government Departments (DIT, FCDO, GREAT, Birmingham Comm Games, and so on) would have helped. Also, from the British Council in UK not just BC Aus.

Media Commentary and Outputs

The 2022 AUK SD Dialogue generated both traditional and social media outputs including radio interviews with ABC Brisbane and 2BC. Dr Stuart Murray's editorial, 'In turbulent times, sport diplomacy is more than a game' was published in The Weekend Australian on 25 March.

Additional outputs generated from the Dialogue include:

- Academic peer reviewed journal entitled 'What role has, does and should sport play in the UK/Australia diplomatic relationship?' by Professor Caitlin Byrne, Dr. Sarah Kelly OAM, and Stuart Murray; to be published in Sport in Society.
- Video footage from the day available on SDAs Vimeo platform (access is password protected)
- Perspectives: Asia public seminar event to be hosted by the Griffith Asia Institute and the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) addressing the sports diplomacy and human rights. Speakers Nikky Dryden and Steph Brantz will address the question: how Australia can harness the power of sport at home and in the Asia Pacific. The event will take place in Brisbane at the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) on 2 June 2022.

Dialogue highlights were also captured on social media throughout the day.



Statistics and Infographics

The Fiercest of Friends

Sports Diplomacy in the Australia-UK relationship

21 March 2022
The Gabba, Brisbane QLD

About the Event


Registered participants (in person attendance) –
87 Virtual participants – 142 Speakers – 30


- Including Ministers, Olympians, High Commissioners, creative directors and professors


Sessions – 6


- Building communities through sport
- Sports Tech
- Women and sports diplomacy
- Mega events and the green and gold decade
- City-to-city sports diplomacy
- The Kangaroo Route: from the Gold Coast to Birmingham


Key findings

 Sport can advance shared bilateral interests and opportunities

 Need for strategic investment in the ecosystem

 Sport contributes to the foundation for success in a bilateral relationship

 Plan for a shared legacy

 Sport supports, celebrates and engages a network of champions and role models

Feedback

72% of participants strongly enjoyed the event and attend again 50% of participants would recommend the event to others

50% of participants understanding of sports diplomacy improved as a result of attending the event

90% o of participants said the event provided a strong and dynamic networking opportunity

Top three most interesting sessions:

- Mega events and the green and gold decade
- The Kangaroo Route: from the Gold Coast to Birmingham
- Women and sports diplomacy

Future dialogues

Most popular countries for future bilateral dialogues:

- Asia Pacific (including New Zealand)
- India
- Indonesia

Future editions

All participants would like to engage in moresports
diplomacy focused events focussed and discussions

Next Steps: A Call to Action

Australia and the UK are at an ideal point to analyse, evaluate, and re-imagine the role sport plays in the AUK relationship particularly as both nations recover and build forward from the Covid pandemic.

The recently established Free Trade Agreement, the enhanced three-year Working Holiday Visa (WHV), and the AUKUS strategic Alliance are but a few opportunities for re-shaping our social, economic, and diplomatic relationships with sport playing a role.

On the pitch, the 2022 World Expo, the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games, the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, the British and Irish Lions Australia Tour (2025), the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games offer multiple for better alignment of Sports Diplomacy (SD) agendas, strategies, and outcomes.

The AUK Sports Diplomacy Dialogue was not intended as a standalone event, but rather the beginning of an ongoing conversation. Sports Diplomacy Alliance recommends that the time to start planning a 2023 UK series is now, and will work with the Australian and UK Governments, the Sports Diplomacy Advisory Council and the British Council to take this idea forward.

There is already a lot of interest in a 2023 'return leg' of the AUK SD Dialogue to be held in the UK, and beamed live to Australia. Many universities have expressed an interest to SDA in partnering, as have our networks of diplomats, ministers, ambassadors, business people, students, and many others, from all over the world.

