

Lunch and Learn – How to engage policy makers

Notes on session and useful links

This series is organised by the LSE KEI Integrated Service, a coordinated internal infrastructure to communicate, support and assess knowledge exchange and public engagement activities, as well as other pathways to impact, within the School. We aim to encourage LSE researchers to think about opportunities for knowledge exchange and public engagement throughout their research projects; to communicate the value of engaging non-academic audiences in research to LSE researchers and the wider LSE community; to showcase “effective” engagement activities; and to equip LSE researchers and research support staff with the skills needed to carry these out.

Find more information at lse.ac.uk/kei

[Link to handouts from this session \(via Google Drive\)](#)

Greg Taylor, LSE Public Affairs team (comms.publicaffairs@lse.ac.uk)

Introduction to LSE Public Affairs team

Based in the Communications Division, we use our experience in Parliament, London and local government to help LSE’s academics and researchers plunge into the heart of Government policy, Parliamentary scrutiny, and local politics.

We can help amplify research in a number of ways, including:

- Highlighting opportunities for political engagement, including with Government departments and select committees, in our weekly Public Affairs bulletin
- Mapping the most influential political stakeholders on areas of research.
- Providing advice on submitting consultation and Select Committee responses and giving oral evidence
- Setting up meetings with MPs, Lords, think tank specialists and Parliamentary groups
- Drafting and sending out research briefings to Parliamentarians and others
- Proactively finding speaking opportunities at roundtables, debates and conferences for LSE researchers.

[Sign up for the public affairs weekly newsletter for details of opportunities that might be relevant for your research.](#)

George McGregor, Managing Partner of Interel UK

Influencing Government Policy (see slides)

Worked both inside and outside government. Began working for a trade union on policy and research – this gave great insight into how NGOs/3rd party organisations can change government policy, for example the minimum wage campaign. You can put research and advocacy together to make a lasting change.

Subsequently worked as a Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for Scotland – a political appointee, but also a civil servant at the heart of government.

Finally, and currently, working for a public affairs/government relations agency, Interel UK. One of the top 5 UK public affairs companies. They help clients achieve objectives in a political context. This is sometimes called lobbying (pejoratively) but it actually plays a key role in democracy. Clients include charities like St John's Ambulance (who are trying to get First Aid included in the curriculum) and the Dog's Trust (who are trying to stop puppy smuggling), but also John Lewis, Ali Baba and Expedia.

Observations on how to use the power of research to make changes to public policy.

It is not just about MPs and Ministers

(see slide 5)

You need to do the ground work first and look for the influencers who are likely to shift opinion.

Don't underestimate the power of **charities**, they are some of the best lobbyists around, especially in public health. They are very effective at cascading innovations around the world, for example the sugar tax, or minimum alcohol pricing, which were put into practice in one country and then championed by charities across the globe. One good idea in one jurisdiction has the power to go much further.

Ideas gestated in **think tanks** become policy documents, then policy seminars, then migrate into party manifestos or even policy. Look at leading think tanks online, contact individuals/feed into policy development strands.

Think about where and how policy is formulated

(see slide 6)

Sometimes policy is reactive (for example Grenfell)

Sometimes ideological (for example, a future Labour government would be a very receptive audience for research around nationalisation)

Sometimes research is evidence based, sometimes (worryingly) it is not and the evidence is constructed after the policy is decided

Sometimes it comes from vested interests (for example trade unions). If your research coincides with a group's interests, share it with them. Never close down an opportunity to share research.

Who drives policy?

(see slide 7)

In Number 10 the PM has around 20 Special Advisors and 100 career civil servants.

The timeline of the parliamentary session is important. At the beginning of a parliament, Number 10 break down the manifesto and this is the critical document for shaping policy. As time progresses and manifesto goals are ticked off there is space for new policy development.

In Departments, civil servants are incredibly important – there is always a civil servant working on a policy area. The LSE Public Affairs team can find out who that is for you.

How should you approach them?

Capture them with ideas. Frame your approach in a problem-solving way: how can you help them to do their job in a more effective way? In the current context of austerity, civil servants are stretched and need external help.

Civil servants use research to justify/knock down policies.

The role of consultations

(see slide 8)

This is the more formal way that government goes about policy making – everything is available online.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?publication_filter_option=consultations

In 2017 there were 536 policy consultation documents.

If you have something to contribute to a continuing public policy conversation this is a good place to go. Keep your contributions clear and simple. Remember that civil servants and MPs are generalists not specialists – it won't make an impact unless they clearly understand.

Sometimes, having submitted a response, you will be invited to speak.

Legislative process

(see slide 9)

Remember – just because something appears in a green/white paper doesn't mean it can't be changed. There are opportunities to change policy at every stage of the formulation process.

Use evidence, harness the power of research

Use lobbying

Use media and social media to draw attention to your points

SPADs

(see slide 10)

Some are media advisors (you would think of them as spin doctors), but most are policy advisors. They travel with ministers, they attend all their meetings, they see everything in the ministerial box – they can make policy happen.

Some of the best SPADs come from academia.

The magic process for influencing policy

(see slide 11)

Identify an issue » Map stakeholders (Public Affairs team can help with this) » Compile evidence » Start an inquiry (e.g. through an All Party Parliamentary Group) » Lobbying/media campaign (that can't be ignored) » Policy formulation

6 top tips

(see slide 12)

1. Get in early
2. Identify influential NGOs/business organisations
3. Target who matters in government and parliament – a scatter gun approach doesn't work

4. Keep it simple
 5. Highlight international comparisons
 6. Offer solutions
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Anna Connell-Smith, Specialist, Education Select Committee

Select Committee Process (see slides)

Looking at influencing policy from a parliamentary rather than government perspective.

In a Select Committee, the chair is the most powerful member, as they are elected.

Committee make-up reflects the make-up of parliament and members are nominated by their parties.

Committees shadow and scrutinize the work of relevant government departments, covering the areas that those departments cover (so the education committee looks at school, HE, children's services and further education). Nobody in government can sit on a committee, as their job is to hold those people to account. They mostly look at policy, but also expenditure. They are independent. They try not to be too reactive, they want to be forward looking. They also hold to account non-departmental bodies/organisations associated with the government department, so for the Department of Education that includes Ofsted, the Office for Students etc. They can scrutinize appointments to these organisations.

Committees make recommendations but ultimately can be overruled by the government. Their real power is in raising issues for discussion and debate which usually prompts the government to look more closely at them.

They mostly follow the **inquiry process** (see slide 7). In gathering evidence they consider written evidence from anyone – no more than 3000 words in line with the terms of reference for the inquiry.

Submitting written evidence gives you the best chance of being asked to give oral evidence. Oral evidence is in a Q&A format.

They are trying to ensure more diversity in their witnesses and avoid having the same people coming back all the time. This means more women and more ethnic minorities, but also more early career researchers. Often senior academics are not considered the best witnesses.

At the end they publish a report, with a summary of all the evidence received and conclusions and recommendations for government. The government have to respond to these.

How can researchers engage?

(see slide 13)

- Submit written evidence – you can't submit work that has already been published elsewhere, it has to be original, but you can quote or summarize research papers.
 - Oral evidence – don't be overly political, this goes down very badly. The committees rely on cross-party consensus. Try to be neutral and speak only to the evidence.
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Engaging with policy makers

- If you are submitting anything written, use no more than 2 sides of A4
 - Know who to speak to, what are their key concerns? How is the policy affecting their constituents?
 - If speaking to diplomats or ambassadors consider what are their priorities
 - Understand the broader context
 - Know yourself. What are the strengths and unique selling points of your research? How are you going to grab their attention?
 - Importance of clarity: be direct. Drill down on the key points.
 - What are the risks and opportunities?
 - What are the consequences of your recommendations?
 - No jargon, no ifs, no buts
 - Don't offer a value judgement, provide knowledge and insight. Don't get involved in normative judgemental narrative.
 - Don't assume that they know much about your subject – they may ask very simple questions, answer them as clearly as possible. Give concrete examples or comparative examples.
 - Be confident
 - Make sure you follow-up – what is the next stage? It could just be dropping them an email, asking if there is anything else you can help with. Build the relationship.
 - Answer the “so what?” question
Present solutions to real-life scenarios
 - Make what you know speak for itself
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