

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Loughborough University		
Unit of Assessment: UOA C19 - Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Shaping UK Lobbying Policy and Helping Organisations Lobby More Effectively in a Context of Democratic Change		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 - 2021		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Phil Parvin	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in Politics (2012 – Nov 2020). Reader in Politics (Nov 2020 – Present).	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2010 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact.		
<p>Unelected lobby groups are important for government decision-making and policy formation, but they face two challenges: first, many politicians are sceptical and even hostile about their legitimacy; second, they find it difficult to communicate their concerns effectively in a context of political change. Parvin's research on the theory and practice of lobbying addresses these two challenges and has had two connected impacts: (1) It has increased understanding of lobbying / public affairs among UK parliamentarians and government, helping to shape the policy / regulatory environment in which lobbyists work, and (2) It has improved the professional practice of a wide range of lobby groups in the UK and Australia, through organisational and policy change. The research has benefitted around 200,000 individual end-users, including employees and members of companies and political organisations across the public, private, and charity sectors.</p>		
2. Underpinning research.		
<p>The impacts described in this case study were generated by an ongoing research programme carried out in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Loughborough University by Dr Phil Parvin. Dr Parvin, a political theorist with expertise in political lobbying and democracy, has over 15 years' experience of working with lobbyists, campaigners, and parliamentarians. The research is driven by two questions: (1) What role do unelected lobby groups play in liberal democratic states and what role, if any, <i>should</i> they play? (2) How might lobby organisations more effectively communicate their concerns in a context of wider democratic change?</p> <p>(1) Unelected lobby groups play an important role in liberal democratic states including the UK [R1]. This is both a good and a bad thing. On the one hand, they provide much-needed expertise to generalist politicians, increase the representation of marginalised groups, and represent a bridge between citizens and institutions. On the other, they exist outside of formal democratic checks and balances, they are unelected and hence suffer a legitimacy deficit, and – empirical data suggests – disproportionately concentrate power in the hands of wealthy individuals and organisations. Parvin's research analyses these tensions, and establishes the role that lobby groups have, and <i>should</i> have, in democratic societies.</p> <p>(2) Parvin's research also analyses how wider patterns of social and political change have affected the <i>role</i> of lobbyists and their <i>practice</i>. In particular, he researches how changing patterns of citizen participation have increased the centrality of lobby groups and changed their internal structure: as many citizens have become less politically active, many organisations have come to rely less on activist members to bring about political change, reorganising</p>		

themselves as professionalised, hierarchical ‘interest groups’ which operate at the elite level [R2]. Parvin analyses the impact of economic inequality on the representation of marginalised groups by lobbying organisations and citizen participation [R3], and researches the implications of unequal representation and political activity for democratic equality, inclusion, and decision making. He does so through critical engagement with contemporary research on democratic deliberation [R4], as well as dominant approaches in political science to citizen participation, engagement, civic membership, and democratic expertise [R5].

Parvin’s research is thus both normative and explanatory, as well as being grounded in the lived experience of lobbyists themselves: his theorising about the role of unelected lobby groups in democratic states is fundamentally shaped by empirical data and the practice of lobbyists themselves. The research employs a ‘normative ethnographic’ method: an exciting new approach in political theory in which normative conclusions are shaped by a deep grasp of empirical data produced by social and political scientists, but also the lived experience of political actors. This enables impacts to flow in both directions: normative arguments in the field of democratic theory are shaped by empirical reality and the day-to-day experiences of end-users which means they can, in turn, speak to and help shape the practice of these end-users. The research is thus enriched by dissemination in peer-reviewed academic journals (as indicated in the underpinning research section below) and also outlets aimed at a wider audience of policy-makers, think tanks, and lobbyists across numerous sectors.

3. References to the research.

R1: P. Parvin (2016) ‘Silencing the critics: Charities, lobbyists, and the government’s quiet war on dissent’, *Renewal* 24/3, pp. 62-75.

https://renewal.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/ren24.3_08parvin-1.pdf

R2: P. Parvin (2018) ‘Democracy without participation: A new politics for a disengaged era’, *Res Publica* 24/1, pp. 31-52. DOI: 10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1

R3: P. Parvin (2017) ‘Democracy, capital, and the rise of the new inequality’, *Political Theory* 45/6. DOI: 10.1177/0090591717693754

R4: P. Parvin (2015) ‘Is deliberative democracy feasible? Political disengagement and trust in liberal democratic states’, *The Monist* 98/4. DOI: 10.1093/monist/onv021

R5: P. Parvin (2018) ‘Representing the people: British democracy in an age of political ignorance’, *Political Studies Review* 16/4, pp. 265-278. DOI: 10.1177/1478929918758572

The underpinning research was funded by a prestigious, competitively awarded twelve-month **Leverhulme Research Fellowship** for the project ‘Power, Influence, and Democracy: A Philosophical Defence of Lobbying’ (2012 – 2013, £44,926).

4. Details of the impact.

Dr Parvin was for five years (2001 – 2007) a professional public affairs practitioner, and then a Director at the Hansard Society. His research has shaped the regulatory and policy framework in which lobbyists operate for over a decade. His 2008 report *Friend or Foe: Lobbying in British Democracy* (Hansard Society) provided the definition of lobbying used by the Public Administration Select Committee in its inquiry into the issue, was quoted by David Cameron in his pre-election campaign, and was instrumental in the shaping of the 2014 Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning, and Trade Union Administration Act. Since 2001, Parvin has established his reputation among public affairs professionals, and an extensive network of contacts and external partners. Together these have afforded him access to key figures in UK public affairs and politics, and enabled him to develop strong **pathways** to use his research to help policy makers and public affairs professionals. The research undertaken in the current REF period has had two principal impacts.

Impact 1: Shaped the policy and regulatory environment in which lobbyists work, and increased understanding of the industry among government

Dr Parvin's research has been instrumental in improving understanding of the UK's £1.4 billion public affairs industry among government, leading to improved regulatory standards, and greater transparency across the entire public affairs industry. It has played a significant role in establishing regulatory codes of conduct and ethical guidelines used by over 2000 professional public affairs consultants and in-house lobbyists.

As Gill Morris, Chair of the **Association for Professional Political Consultants** until 2018, reported, Parvin's research [R1, R5] helped to "*raise the status of the industry in the eyes of politicians, and also helped shape the regulatory framework in which the industry now works*". The APPC was for 25 years the 'principal representative body for lobbyists and the guardian for professional ethics' with over 90 member organisations employing over 2000 individuals. Its central role was to ensure that lobby groups of all kinds were able to effectively campaign for political change transparently, within a clear and identifiable regulatory framework. The APPC's work in this area endures in contemporary codes of conduct and regulation. Morris described the '*considerable impact that Dr Parvin's research into lobbying has had on the public affairs industry*' and on the regulation of lobbying. In particular, Parvin's work on possible regulatory reforms, and the positive role of lobbying groups in societies characterised by wider democratic change, '*has played a direct and important part in building advocacy for what we do.*' His research

'supported and strengthened advocacy amongst member organisations. Doing so directly benefitted our 2000 member company: it helped me put the case for better regulation and to make the positive case to support UK lobbying and its value. As a result, codes of conduct are in place across the sector, there is more transparency and there is a better awareness among government, parliamentarians, and the wider policy making community about the role that lobbying plays in the UK, and its place in our democracy.' [S1]

Parvin's impact on policy debates is further corroborated by a senior member of the House of Lords. Lord McNally, Liberal Democrat peer and former lobbyist, describes how Parvin's work has been:

'pivotal to the discussion within the public affairs industry among its practitioners, and beyond it among policy makers and other political actors. Public affairs professionals continue to find it useful in their own work, and in particular in their discussions about governance, regulation, and codes of conduct within the industry. Policy makers like myself have found it helpful as a source of clear and penetrating analysis on the ways in which lobbying fits in a democracy, and how we can ensure that it is practised ethically, transparently, and effectively in a changing political landscape' [S7]

Finally, Marc Stears, Director of the Sydney Policy Lab, former Chief Executive of the New Economics Foundation (NEF, one of the UK's largest and most influential policy think tanks), and former chief speechwriter for the Labour Party described Dr Parvin's work as having '*a significant impact on . . . debates within the policy making communities of the UK and Australia*', as well as on his own work and professional practice, outlined in more detail below [S2].

Impact 2: Changed the way that think tanks, corporations, campaign organisations, and trade unions communicate with government, external partners, and their own members

In addition to impacting UK policy debates, Parvin's research has '*influenced the role and conduct of public affairs professionals in the UK*' [Morris, S1], transforming the professional practice of numerous individuals and organisations, from think tanks to some of the world's largest global corporations. Through building close working relations with key individuals in a

wide range of organisations, Parvin's research has led to organisational change, and the development of new practices.

(a) For the New Economics Foundation think tank, Marc Stears, (introduced above) claimed that Parvin's research [R2, R3, R4] shaped his practice, leading him to make fundamental changes to NEF and also the **Sydney Policy Lab** (which he now leads) realigning the way they communicate with other policy actors and their external partners. The research:

'had a demonstrable and wide-ranging impact on how I do my job, and the activities and structures of the New Economics Foundation and the Sydney Policy Lab under my leadership . . . It has helped me to shape the research and campaigning activities of [these organisations] . . . As CEO of NEF and Director of the SPL . . . I re-oriented our research programmes in ways which better tackle the reality that Dr Parvin describes.' [S2]

In particular, Parvin's research

'helped NEF to ground its 'wellbeing economy' campaign in a firmer grasp of the relationship between lobby/advocacy groups and patterns of participation. It also helped SPL to better pursue its core concerns of power, equality, and belonging . . . As CEO of NEF at a pivotal time in its development, and current Director of the SPL, I can say without a doubt that the impact of Dr Parvin's research on these organisations' research and advocacy work has been significant and far-reaching.' [S2]

Parvin's research

'improved my understanding of the challenges facing democratic states, changed my attitude to these challenges, and what solutions might be viable, changed my professional practice, by helping me to incorporate these ideas into research and advocacy [at NEF and SPL], . . . [and, in doing so] benefitted both NEF and SPL.' [S2].

(b) At **McKinsey & Company**, Steve John, Partner & Director of Global Communications reported that Parvin's research into the changing role of citizens and organisations in UK democracy [R1, R2] as influential in his approach to his own role at the firm, changing the professional practice of a senior executive of one of the largest consultancy firms in the world, employing over 30,000 people in 130 cities across the world. John's role was, until 2019, to lead an international 350-member team to 'work with partners to protect and build the firm's reputation globally'. John stated that through working closely with Parvin over a series of one-to-one and small group events, he learned how McKinsey could work more effectively with external partners and other policy actors. Dr Parvin's research 'helped [him] further understand the wider context in which businesses and other non-state actors lobby for change' in ways that shaped his own practice.

'His insights into the ways in which changes in the political landscape can - and should - shape effective lobbying campaigns, have shaped my thinking, and I have drawn on his research in my own work . . . These insights have enabled me to connect with external partners by better understanding the challenges they face and what they need to succeed.' [S4]

(c) Dr Parvin's research has also impacted the practice of **trade bodies**, an influential class of organisation charged with representing industry and business interests in the political system. One example is the **Publishers' Association**, the principal trade body for the £6 billion British book and journal publishing industry, with over 170 member companies. Dr Parvin worked closely with Chief Executive Richard Mollet, discussing his research findings with him [R2, R5], and showing him how the organisation might work more effectively with other groups to ensure that the interests of book publishers and authors are heard at the highest levels of government. Mollet describes Parvin's research as 'extremely influential', providing vital background context to the wider lobbying efforts of his organisation. He suggests that Dr Parvin's research was

'vital to [his] work as an advocate for the publishing industry at a time when it was coming under multiple pressures from online piracy, copyright reform and, in the case of academic publishing, emerging business models.' [S5].

Mollet suggests that Parvin's research

'confirmed the importance of alliance-building and collaboration with partner organisations as a means of effectively seeking political change . . . His work prompted me to make important changes to our campaigns, and in the way we engaged with government, for example by introducing more social media and other online tools into our campaigning'. [S5]

(d) Finally, Parvin's research [R4, R5] has been influential in the **trade union** sector, initiating demonstrable change in the practice of how unions communicate with their members, and with like-minded organisations, in the interests of bringing about policy change. For example, Martin Mclvor, Research Officer at the major trade union **Prospect** describes the significant changes that Dr Parvin's work prompted in his organisation's professional practice, transforming the way it communicates with its 140,000 members and seeks political change on their behalf. In a series of one-to-one meetings, Parvin and Mclvor discussed the research in ways which enabled Mclvor to implement changes in his own professional practice and implement positive changes in his organisation, including the

'introduction of new ways to facilitate collaboration with our members, to inform them of our activities on their behalf, and find out their views. For example, I have been involved in improving Prospect's use of digital innovations such as platforms enabling members to easily contact their MP, and provide evidence and examples to support our national lobbying efforts, without creating undue or unrealistic demands on their time or familiarity with political processes.' [S6]

It has also helped

'to improve and streamline our lobbying of government and other decision makers. For example, using social media to highlight and leverage commonalities of interest between Prospect and other civil society organisations engaged in lobbying government, such as environmental NGOs. These two changes alone,' he says, 'have improved the way we engage with our members and also the way we campaign in support of their interests.' [S6].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact.

[S1] Testimonial from Gill Morris: former Chair of the Association for Professional Political Consultants (03/12/19).

[S2] Testimonial from Lord McNally, member of the House of Lords, former Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Lords and former lobbyist (16/01/21).

[S3] Testimonial from Marc Stears, Director of the Sydney Policy Lab, former CEO of the New Economics Foundation corroborating impact on New Economics Foundation (UK) and the Sydney Policy Lab (Australia) (22/11/19).

[S4] Testimonial from Steve John, Partner & Director of Global Communications, McKinsey & Company outlining the impact of Parvin's research on his understanding of British democracy, and on the way he approached his role (04/11/19).

[S5] Testimonial from Richard Mollet, CEO Publishers Association, describing the impact that Parvin's research had on his own practice and that of the PA (26/10/20).

[S6] Testimonial from Dr Martin Mclvor, Prospect outlining impact on professional practice, and reforms that he introduced in his organisation based on it (18/06/18).