

Lobbying and Activism by *Prof Alison Scott-Baumann, Dr Rob Faure Walker, Dr Maryyum Mehmood, Dr Alyaa Ebbiary, Shahanaz Begum and Hasan Pandor* (4th May 2020)

If we want a better world we must all be prepared to speak truth to power. Lobbying works best when supported by academic and scientific research. This must also include those whose voices often go unheard, such as students and minority groups, so that we can combine skills and apply useful pressure to change the body politic, from many different angles. **Academics, experts and interest groups must work together to be at the heart of driving political change, having impact with different types of research.** Everyone should be concerned when they hear people say they have “had enough of experts” and their “academic” arguments.

To successfully engage in the political world, academics and students must be aware that it is governed by different norms and expectations. **Think-tanks and Government commissions are not held to the same standards of peer review and ethics as academics. When functioning as lobbyists, we must uphold the high standards of academia, and also make the paradigm accessible to achieve successful outcomes. We need a fivefold plan: a clear ethical position, a communication pathway right into the corridors of power, reliable and valid evidence, understanding of structures and issues in Westminster and a collaborative approach. SOAS COP provides a model for this.**

Ethics

The SOAS COP team meets weekly, and invites contributions from other academics, students, lobbyists and communications experts. In these extensive discussions **we consider our mission, our limitations, and the possibilities for engagement, e.g. providing training.**

A two-way watching brief on Westminster

We monitor communications about new bills, new laws, and select committee activities etc., and we send our regular briefings to all MPs, all members of the House of Lords, and selected civil servants for maximum impact.

Peer review to ensure clarity and purpose are effective

All briefings submitted to SOAS COP, whether written with the support of one of the team or independently, are reviewed by the team: **briefings are published after careful consideration.**

Open call responsive to urgent issues in our democracy

SOAS COP responds to urgent issues where govt policies require correction and accepts briefings from expert academics, students, and stakeholders from SOAS and beyond. **We provide advice and support to ensure that anyone can contribute a briefing for review.**

Collaboration for impact

Political change is only brought about through working together. As such, cooperation is at the heart of what SOAS COP does. We are not here to promote individuals; rather, **together we become stronger in challenging injustice and supporting informed policymaking.** This approach results in the organic emergence of Hannah Arendt’s “community of interest”:

CASE STUDY: In the case of the Coronavirus Act 2020, a positive outcome was achieved when SOAS COP and a number of other NGOs issued briefings on the eve of the legislation’s passage through Parliament, all calling for the Act to be reviewed after six months instead of the two years proposed by the Government. There was no collaboration, yet all parties presented the same resolution to the political problem, and this resulted in a 6 month “sunset clause” being written into the legislation. Different individuals and groups often publish the same demands for change: this is the best form of lobbying and gives us hope in the future of democracy.

Visit our website for further briefings (<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/cop/>). If you would like a personal briefing or clarification on any of the issues raised here, please contact the author at rw52@soas.ac.uk. Do contact Professor Alison Scott-Baumann and her team for further briefings and access to other experts as150@soas.ac.uk