

The First Year of Better-Informed Policymaking with ICOP

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Throughout 2020, the *Influencing the Corridors of Power* (ICOP) project from SOAS proved how scholars/academics can have [a direct and positive impact on policymaking](#) by:

- writing and sharing [35 peer-reviewed briefings](#) with policymakers
- successfully [informing changes to legislation](#)
- supporting [academics to submit Evidence to Parliament](#)
- [training academics](#) to engage with Parliament
- supporting MPs in writing [official questions to the Government](#)
- working with [MPs and their aides to support Parliamentary research](#)
- launching the [ICOP '5-Minute Briefing' Podcast](#)
- issuing 11 evidence-based [briefings on Covid-19](#).

Working with the Chair of the Muslim Doctors Association Dr Hina Shahid and Siobhain McDonagh MP towards the start of the pandemic, ICOP successfully encouraged the government to collect and publish Covid-19 mortality data in [relation to ethnicity](#) and to recognise the impact of COVID-19 on faith Communities. As the impact of the coronavirus on ethnic minorities has since been revealed, we can see how vital this was. **By bringing advice from a wide range of stakeholders [including children into Westminster](#), ICOP shows how policymaking can be supported and informed by diverse and expert voices, and not just those close to government.**

The importance of the independent advice that ICOP offers was made stark by the disastrous undermining of expertise in 2020. At the heart of this was the Great Barrington Declaration that recommended going all out for herd immunity. This seemed to offer the trustworthy advice of medical experts until it was revealed that it had been coordinated by a [fossil fuel industry funded climate change denying think tank](#). Nonetheless, this cynical move to protect business by [undermining public health measures was embraced by the Chancellor](#) who encouraged returns to work, 'eat out to help out' schemes, and failed to deliver the level of sick pay people needed to self-isolate. This [predictably led to more unnecessary deaths](#), a situation that could have been avoided if policymakers had listened to their independent advisors. **By producing peer-reviewed research from within university systems of governance, ICOP offers unique single-page expert briefings and [5-minute podcasts](#) to policymakers while serving as a platform to widen academic and public engagement in policymaking.**

Governments have long used special advisers and commissions to tell them what they want to hear, yet Britain's extraordinarily high death toll from coronavirus has revealed that this is not always what they need to hear. **In this context, the independent and trustworthy expertise that ICOP offers is needed more than ever. At the start of a new year, ICOP is now reaching out to work with and offer training to other universities and stakeholders.**

The rapid rollout of the [vaccine by the NHS](#) shows what can be achieved when our public institutions and experts are empowered. Recent revelations of the Health Secretary's appointment of a '[close friend and lobbyist](#)' to a public health role call into question the professionalism of advice the government are receiving. Sadly, 2020 showed us how dangerous it is when governments cherry-pick expertise. **ICOP's commitment to impartiality offers a vision for the trustworthy and independent expertise that should be informing policy. For a functioning democracy it is not only policymakers who should be better informed, but the public too. So, whether you are a policymaker or not please [subscribe to receive ICOP briefings](#) so that you are better informed in 2021: the success of our democracy depends on this.**

Visit <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/cop/> and [@SOASICOP](#) for further briefings. Please contact Professor Alison Scott-Baumann and the Team for further briefings and access to other experts as150@soas.ac.uk. *The views expressed in SOAS ICOP Briefings are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of SOAS.*