

How to influence: policy in healthcare and higher education with Fleur Nielsen, Josh Niderost and Jon Eames

Who really makes the decisions in health and education policy? How do we reach decision makers?
Who and what can help us?

- A range of stakeholders are involved in influencing health and education policy. This includes patient bodies, unions, employers representatives, regulators, universities, think tanks, the civil service and non-governmental organisations. Ultimately it is the Government that makes decisions through winning votes in Parliament. This is why having a majority in Parliament is so important and why winning general elections is so critical.
- The policy decisions made 'at the top' are the most visible policy decisions. These make the news and often determine the direction of travel but policy change requires input from so many actors including often many civil servants and arms length bodies. When you witness policy 'travelling' through the process from announcement to execution it becomes clear, I think, how little influence individual actors or even Governments really have
- I think this is never more true than in the health sector which is so enormous and involves daily decision making at every level by so many different people. Note too how many different Governmental and arms length bodies are involved in this sector, especially in England. Each organisation has its own strategic priorities, personalities and stakeholders. This can make policy execution S-L-O-W

How can working with the Press help? What does a communications team or lead do in an organisation and how do you/can you engage as individuals? How has social media changed media influence in recent years?

- The communications work is about raising the profile and awareness of a policy issue with a wider audience. Much of what happens in relation to healthcare is overlooked by the national media but feature heavily in the trade press such as Nursing Times, Nursing Standard and Health Service Journal
- The development of social media in recent years, alongside the decline in print media, has radically reshaped the media landscape around the world. Individuals can now connect with others globally on an issue they share views on and work to build change. We can see the positive effect of the social media campaigns [#hellomynameis](#) and [#EndPJparalysis](#) in enabling healthcare professionals to reflect on their practice and think about improving service user experience.
- As much of the media has moved online there is more immediacy, which can be good, but at the same time there is a strong element of 'here today, gone tomorrow'. This increases the importance of keeping a focus on important policy issues or it will get lost with the sheer volume of media output

Have you ever been part of policy change? What did you do? How does grass-roots lobbying differ from the methods used by professional organisations?

- Grass roots lobbying is often about vocalising demands and can be useful in raising matters in the media or the public consciousness. However in order to be effective lobbying also needs to work within established pathways.
- Consultations can be a great way for individuals to participate in the decision making process.
- Local structures often feed into and influence national organisations which in turn have easier access to policy makers

Further Reading

Wyn Grant, 2000, Pressure Groups and British Politics
Rodgers, R., & Walters, R., 2015, How Parliament Works (7th Ed)
Cairney, P., 2011, Understanding Public Policy: Theories and Issues