

Taxpayer funded lobbying and political campaigning 2020

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Introduction

The UK has a wealth of organisations operating in civil society. Many of these, like the TaxPayers' Alliance and Greenpeace, survive with no taxpayers' money, only existing thanks to generous donations from private individuals and groups.^{1,2}

Yet there are many such organisations that take taxpayers' money, and then often call for higher government spending or openly campaign against the policies of the elected government. As the 2009 TaxPayers' Alliance research paper *Taxpayer funded lobbying and political campaigning* found, public bodies in 2007-08 gave over £37 million of taxpayers' money to organisations engaged in lobbying and campaigning.³

But taxpayer funding of lobbying and political campaigning has a number of negative effects:

- It distorts decision making in favour of the interests and ideological preoccupations of a narrow political elite.
- It slows adjustments in the direction of policy in reaction to new evidence or circumstances.
- It increases political apathy among the public.
- Taxpayers are forced to fund views they may seriously disagree with.

This note provides a snapshot of the sums that central government, devolved administrations, and a small selection of local authorities are handing out to organisations that engage in lobbying and political campaigning.

As this paper has only utilised the most recent publicly available documents, it is not an exhaustive list of money received by politicised organisations and dispersed through public bodies, but is a collection of key examples to show the scale of public funds being taken.

Key findings

- Political research and campaigning organisations known to attack the government or lobby for changes in public policy received **£39,584,172** from that same government between 2017 and 2019.
- **Rosa**, which was given a **£978,000** grant in 2017-18, in late 2019 accused the Conservative government of "actively selling off our NHS to the US."
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) granted **£256,607** to organisations that lobbied for policy changes in 2018-19. One of these, **Diverse Cymru**, publicly opposed a 'no-deal' Brexit in August 2019, having recently been commissioned to create films highlighting refugees' issues in Wales.
- Several think tanks continue to receive significant amounts of taxpayers' money. Between them, the **New Economics Foundation**, **Bright Blue**, **Demos**, the **Institute for Government** and the **Institute for Public Policy Research** received **£514,215** between 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- **Alcohol Change UK**, a leading nanny state group which lobbies for tightened alcohol control policies, such as minimum unit pricing, received a total of **£185,759** from the Welsh government in 2018-19. Of this total, **£40,593** was earmarked for 'policy and influencing' and **£64,940** was for 'profile, communications, campaigns and events'.

¹ TaxPayers' Alliance, *Funding*, www.taxpayersalliance.com/funding# (accessed 17 January 2019).

² Greenpeace, *Funding and Transparency*, 2020, <https://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/funding-and-transparency/> (accessed 5 February 2020).

³ Sinclair, M., *Taxpayer Funded Lobbying and Political Campaigning*, TaxPayers' Alliance, 3 August 2009.

Table 1: political organisations in receipt of taxpayer funding

Organisation	Funding (£)	Year	Source of funding
Alcohol Change UK	185,759	2017-18	Welsh government
Amnesty International	6,884	2018-19	Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
Bright Blue	18,000	2018-19	EHRC
British Institute of Human Rights	11,616	2018-19	EHRC
British Youth Council	228,000	2017-18	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Citizens Advice	22,300,000	2018-19	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Demos	75,000	2017	Sport England, British Council, Cabinet Office, BBC
Diverse Cymru	19,000	2018-19	EHRC
Doctors of the World	57,240	2018-19	EHRC
Engender	20,000	2018-19	EHRC
Fabian Society	4,000	2017-18	Woodland Trust, which in turn received over £2 million in public money in 2018
Fawcett Society	23,091	2017-18	Government Equalities Office
Institute for Government	78,500	2019-20	Scottish government, Arts and Humanities Research Council, City of London Corporation, Independent Commission for Aid Impact, Economic and Social Research Council, UK Statistics Authority
Institute for Public Policy Research	215,000	2018-19	EHRC, City of London, Newcastle city council, Sellafeld, Natural England, Hull city council, Environment Agency, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission, Local Government Association
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants	10,169	2018-19	EHRC
New Economics Foundation	127,715	2018-19	Economic and Social Research Council, Greater London Authority
Race On The Agenda	19,197	2018-19	EHRC
Rosa	978,000	2017-18	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Runnymede Trust	significant	2015-2020	UK Research and Innovation
Shelter	15,204,000	2017-18	Multiple local authorities, government departments, public bodies and the London Councils association
War on Want	3,000	2014-15	Arts Council England
Total	39,584,171		

Organisations selected

This is not an exhaustive list of all organisations in receipt of taxpayers' money. Rather, it seeks to provide a snapshot of funds received by these organisations, who have then gone on to attack the government or call for changes in government policy. See below for a full list of why each organisation has merited inclusion.

Table 3: reasons for inclusion for each political organisation

Organisation	Reason for inclusion
Alcohol Change	Alcohol Change is one of the UK's top nanny state groups. It also helps run the APPG on Alcohol Harm which lobbies MPs across parliament on issues like minimum unit pricing
Amnesty International	Amnesty International is currently running a campaign against scrapping the Human Rights Act, which they claim is on the government's 'to-do list' ⁴
Bright Blue	In 2019 Bright Blue published a report calling for government to unfreeze fuel duty and increase duty on taxes on diesel cars. ⁵
British Youth Council	The umbrella body for the British Youth Parliament, which has lobbied for votes for 16 and 17 year olds and transport renationalisation ⁶
Citizens Advice	Nationwide peoples advice service that also encourages government to undertake various policy changes ⁷
Demos	'Blairite' research organisation which is traditionally heavily associated with the Labour party ⁸
Diverse Cymru	Signatory to a letter from civil society organisations lobbying against a no-deal departure from the European Union ⁹
Doctors of the World	Issued a statement criticising the Withdrawal Agreement Bill which claimed it could lead to a Windrush scandal for doctors ¹⁰
Engender	Part of the Brexit Civil Society Alliance, an ostensibly neutral organisation, it has lobbied against a no-deal departure from the European Union ¹¹
Fabian Society	A self-described "democratically governed socialist society" and a founding affiliate to the Labour party ¹²
Fawcett Society	Took advantage of allegations surrounding the Prime Minister's personal life to encourage him to back specific legislation ¹³
Institute for Government	A Whitehall think tank, it recently published a paper making the case against government restructuring ¹⁴
Institute for Public Policy Research	A research organisation that often calls for increased spending and taxation ¹⁵

⁴ Amnesty International, *Human Rights Act*, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/human-rights-act> (accessed 12 February 2020).

⁵ Shorthouse R & Nicolle, W., *Emission impossible? August 2019*, Bright Blue, p.99-100.

⁶ UK Youth Parliament, *Manifesto 2018-19*, 2018.

⁷ Citizens Advice, *Nearly half of benefit claimants hit by the benefits freeze can't afford essential bills*, 2020, www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/nearly-half-of-benefit-claimants-hit-by-the-benefits-freeze-cant-afford-essential-bills/ (accessed 6 February 2020).

⁸ Helm, T & Hope, C., *The top twelve think tanks in Britain*, Telegraph, 24 January 2008, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/1576447/The-top-twelve-think-tanks-in-Britain.html.

⁹ Diverse Cymru, *Open letter to the Prime Minister*, 29 August 2019, www.diversesecymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Civil-Society-Open-Letter-to-the-Prime-Minister-English-Version.pdf (accessed 16 January 2019).

¹⁰ Doctors of the World, *Fears of a Windrush scandal in the NHS for EU citizens*, 9 January 2020, www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/news/fears-of-a-windrush-scandal-in-the-nhs-for-eu-citizens/# (accessed 16 January 2020).

¹¹ Engender, *Engender joins forces with over 85 civil society organisations to express concerns about no-deal*, 29 August 2019, www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/engender-joins-forces-with-over-85-civil-society-organisations-to-express-concerns-about-n/ (accessed 22 January 2020).

¹² Fabian Society, *About us*, fabians.org.uk/about-us/ (accessed 21 January 2020).

¹³ Smethers, S., *Boris Johnson's #MeToo moment?* Fawcett Society, 1 October 2019, www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/blog/boris-johnsons-metoo-moment (accessed 6 February 2020).

¹⁴ Sasse, T et al., *The case for keeping ministers in post longer*, Institute for Government, January 2020.

¹⁵ IPPR, *UK needs to shift to 'tax and spend' economy to end austerity and fix 'killer' social injustices, says IPPR*, 3 July 2019, www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/uk-needs-to-shift-to-tax-and-spend-economy-to-end-austerity-and-fix-killer-social-injustices-says-ippr (accessed 21 January 2020).

Organisation	Reason for inclusion
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants	Opposed to the EU Settlement Scheme ¹⁶ , frequent critic of the Home Office
New Economics Foundation	A research organisation which accuses the government of “fuelling climate disaster.” ¹⁷
Race on the Agenda (ROTA)	Participated in an open letter to the home secretary criticising a reduction in stop and search restrictions ¹⁸
Rosa	Claimed the government was “actively selling off our NHS to the US” in a post on their website following the 2019 general election ¹⁹
Runnymede Trust	Race equality think tank that organised a protest against a Home Office criminal deportation flight to Jamaica. ²⁰ The trust received in conjunction with some universities a share of £2.8 million from 2015 to 2020 ^{21,22}
Shelter	Housing and homelessness charity, frequently urges government to address the housing crisis through the provision of social homes ²³
War on Want	Campaigning group which has campaigned against trade deals, and for increased regulation for businesses

Methodology

This research was conducted using publicly available data only. Financial returns from government departments and agencies were examined, including annual accounts, monthly expenditure documents, and charitable grants data. In addition, annual accounts and funding documents from some of the organisations listed were also used.

If a department published *Analysis of grants awarded under section 70 of the Charities Act 2006*, this information was included.

In all instances, the most recent data was used. This has led to some inconsistency over which specific year the data represents. Many international development charities present their accounts according to the calendar year instead of the fiscal year. This inconsistency results from the UK reporting official development assistance (ODA) spending according to the calendar year, rather than the financial year as is the norm across the rest of the public and private sector.²⁴

¹⁶ JCWI, *Our letter to party leaders on the EU Settlement Scheme*, www.jcwi.org.uk/news/our-letter-to-party-leaders-on-the-eu-settlement-scheme (accessed 16 January 2020).

¹⁷ New Economics Foundation, *The British Government is Fuelling Climate Disaster*, 9 December 2019, neweconomics.org/2019/12/the-british-government-is-fuelling-climate-disaster, (accessed 21 January 2020).

¹⁸ ROTA, *The Coalition of Race Equality Organisations send an open letter to the Home Secretary “Priti Patel please don’t politicise the police”*, 23 August 2019, www.rota.org.uk/content/coalition-race-equality-organisations-send-open-letter-home-secretary-“priti-patel-please” (accessed 17 February 2020).

¹⁹ Rosa, *The December Digest*, 17 December 2019, www.rosauk.org/uncategorized/the-december-digest/ (accessed 16 January 2020).

²⁰ Holbourne, Z., *Hostile environment: Forced deportations resumed*, Runnymede Trust, 6 February 2020, www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/hostile-environment-forced-deportations-resumed (accessed 6 February 2020).

²¹ UKRI, *The Runnymede Trust*, 6 February 2020, gtr.ukri.org/organisation/818019D0-61FB-4A83-B43E-9FB86CE85EC1 (accessed 6 February 2020).

²² UKRI, *Runnymede Trust*, 6 February 2020, gtr.ukri.org/organisation/BC6CFEFA-1C13-4A77-A169-A3BCC0B00174 (accessed 6 February 2020).

²³ Shelter, *280,000 people in England are homeless, with thousands more at risk*, 18 December 2019, https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/280,000_people_in_england_are_homeless,_with_thousand_s_more_at_risk (accessed 7 February 2020).

²⁴ Hutton, J., *First Aid: Fixing International Development*, TaxPayers’ Alliance, March 2019, p.3.

The term significant is used in relation to organisations that have received funding through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), yet have not disclosed the amounts received in their own accounts (as the Institute for Government have). UKRI only discloses the amounts going to a specific project, though that project may have multiple partners. When looking at UKRI projects to include, only those still ongoing in 2020 and beyond have been included.