

**Intro:**

Hello, and thanks for tuning into a new episode of Engage, a podcast from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. Hosted by Max Sugerman, this episode explores the current state of lobbying and the public affairs industry, as well as advice on how practitioners can be more transparent and open, demonstrating best practice in any future public affairs activity.

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**Max:** Hello, I'm Max Sugerman, chair of CIPR Public Affairs Group. Research has found that public trust in government and elected politicians is at an all-time low right now. With the number of scandals over the past few years in politics, it's more crucial than ever that public affairs professionals show that they're being ethical and transparent, and are working to support the UK's democratic policymaking process.

So, on this episode, we're going to explore the current state of lobbying and the public affairs industry, as well as looking to advice on how practitioners can be more transparent and open, and demonstrate best practice in future public affairs activity.

We've got a fantastic line-up and I'm going to ask each of them to introduce themselves on our panel. So, if I can first start with Andy Sawford. Do you want to introduce yourself first?

**Andy:** Yes, hello. Hi, Max, and thanks for inviting me to join the podcast. My name is Andy Sawford, I'm the managing partner of the Connect Group, which is one of the top ten largest public affairs agencies in the UK. And prior to that, and it will be relevant, I guess, as we get into our discussion today, I was a Member of Parliament and I've also run a think tank.

**Max:** Fantastic. Thanks, Andy. Rachael, do you want to introduce yourself?

**Rachael:** Hi, yes, thanks, Max. Hi, I'm Rachael Clamp, I am former chair of the Public Affairs Group at CIPR and a CIPR board member, and I now run my own communication and engagement agency.

**Max:** Great. And last but not least, Peter.

**Peter:** Hi, I'm Peter Geoghegan. I'm the editor-in-chief of openDemocracy, which is a global news site that often focuses on issues around transparency and accountability. And I'm the author of a few books, including the most recent one that's called Democracy For Sale: Dark Money and Dirty Politics.

**Max:** So if we can start by – probably at quite a basic level – of defining what public affairs is, so, what does the public affairs mean to each of our panellists? It's a different industry to traditional PR and it's something worth exploring how it differs from the traditional PR community. So, Andy, do you want to give your overview of what you think the public affairs industry is?

**Andy:** Yeah, I mean, there are 100 different definitions out there, Max. I think of public affairs as activity that is about engaging positively with policymakers and with the policymaking process to shape the political and regulatory environment in which you operate, but also to inform policymakers. And that, for me, is why lobbying done well, is a positive part of our democratic system.

**Max:** And Rachael, would you agree with that? Is public affairs a key part of the democratic process?

**Rachael:** Yes. So, yep, I'm nodding along with Andy here. I completely agree. It's that... the engagement for positive and for good. We have 600 plus people in Westminster, and they can't be experts in everything and we want them to have the best information and be able to make informed decisions based on the latest information that's available, and lobbying can help do that and is really important for us as a nation and for our democracy, I believe.

**Max:** Yes, I tend to agree with that and think that we should be moving to even more professional industry as well. Peter, I mean, you've been covering the public affairs industry and open democracy also covers different nations around the world as well. Can you talk a bit about UK public affairs, sort of, within that context of the global industry as well?

**Peter:** What's really striking is if I do work, which I have done, say, in the United States, I can look up their excellent disclosure log straight away as we talk now, I could find out who's been involved in lobbying in Congress, who's been involved in lobbying in various aspects of local government in America, I can find out who's on the foreign registrations, et cetera, et cetera. And when it comes to the UK, it's incredibly confusing. Like, even as a journalist who writes about this stuff at length, it's an incredible...you know, it's something that's really, really hard to track and follow and...yeah, lots of different countries around the world do have different aspects and different lobbying registers, et cetera, et cetera, and have different tolerances, I think, of lobbying in the political system. I think in different countries it has very different characters and very different, kind of, acceptability's and levels of what that influence might look like.

But the one thing that really strikes me as a journalist working in the UK is just, you know, is, you know, how difficult it can be. I noticed in the link for our chat today when I was asked a good few weeks ago to take part, and very happily I am too, was that the CIPR is actually trying to create... has created its own lobbying register because it has to, because there isn't an official one.

And I think that's probably a drum I might end up banging quite a few times over the next 45 minutes, but I'll try and do it in enough different ways that it will sound fresh each time.

**Max:** Well, no that's a really interesting point. Rachael, sorry, did you want to come in there?

**Rachael:** Yeah sorry, I just want to chip in on something that Peter raised there and talking about almost being... we're global citizens and with what you highlighted there about lobbying and public affairs being different in different countries, not just the way in which it is regulated, recorded, disclosed – the terms and the actual practice is very different. And we can sit at home, the general public can sit at home, watch something like the West Wing, which has got a completely different lobbying angle, what lobbying is in the States, how it is conducted versus how it is in others, and I think there's...that whole definition piece is a bit of a mess in that respect as well.

**Max:** Well, that's really interesting, and I agree with you. You look to America and it seems a lot larger and a lot more professionalised in some ways. Just looking back as well, I mean, obviously, there's been the lobbying act that came in under the Cameron government, but how do we feel the industry has changed over, say, the past 10-20 years? Because obviously it wasn't always as regulated as it is now. There's obviously more to do, but how do we feel like it's changed over that time? So, Andy, could I come to you on that?

**Andy:** Yeah, I mean I've been working in public affairs on and off but through most of my career, including an agency also in in-house roles. I mean, I completely agree with Peter that actually lobbying and our democracy would benefit from greater transparency.

The voluntary codes are really important. As members of the CIPR and the PRCA, we subscribe to those codes and we're also fully compliant with the code that was set up under the David Cameron act – the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists and the act. I was actually in Parliament at the time that was going through, I wasn't in the employ or in any way had any interest in any lobbying companies or lobbying businesses at that time, but did have a perspective of someone who'd worked in lobbying. And I spoke in some of the debates around the passing of the bill and made the case that it didn't do what it purported to offer, really, which was an improvement in transparency because it was so limited. I mean, it offers a little bit of transparency around some activities, but it doesn't, for example, require transparency around engagement in the lobbying of Parliamentarians – it only focuses on ministers and senior officials. And I think that we do really need to see a step change in transparency. I would be very happy to support and sign up to a much stronger transparent system.

I think also it's important that we don't just focus on a small group of people that we can identify very clearly as lobbyists, people like me who run public affairs agencies, where that's very much our, sort of, public... our reputation is around public affairs. Actually, public affairs and lobbying is part... an important function in businesses and organisations all across the UK. In some cases, they'll have teams almost as big as teams in an agency, for example, and certainly expenditure can be quite substantial, in particular in larger businesses, larger trade associations – so their activity also ought to be properly registered and transparent. So I would like to see a change.

I'd also like to see, and I think, Max, we may come to this, but I'd also like to see on the point about, you know, Peter being able to see in America, you know, what's happening and being clear about where you can find that information, I think I would like to see some coordination across the UK in terms of the devolved legislatures, in terms of how local government operates. That said, I... you know, I'm generally a supporter of a devolution, I think one of the problems with that particular system is too many decisions are made by too few people in Westminster, but some degree of coordination and harmony because we must be able to agree what the principles are around transparency and good practice and apply those across our politics across the UK.

**Max:** Yeah, we'll certainly have a look at the devolved approach, which has progressed somewhat. Peter, would you agree with that point that we've got a bit of a way to go for ORCL and the current way that lobbyists are registered?

**Peter:** Yes, I think we really do. And I think you said at the start about the general public and kind of faith in politics, you know. We had the Greensill lobbying scandal pretty much this time last year, which dominated the front pages. The FT's team won Private Eye Paul Foot Award for it, produced huge numbers of column inches. And really, I think, you know, at the heart of that was, what to the general public was an incredulity that David Cameron was able to lobby on behalf of Lex Greensill and didn't have to register it anywhere because he was an in-house lobbyist. He was able to take up the position exactly 24 months after he left office, so he didn't qualify in terms of needing to clear it with the appointments committee on...for post-ministerial position. So no laws had been broken and no rules... had been broken in the process, and I think that's really not going to do your industry any favours with the general public. You know, people are not...people are going to see that and feel really like that it's not good enough, and more so, especially when you're looking at it twelve months down the line.

I remember writing about it for the London Review of Books when it happened and I was actually unusually panglossian at the time. I said, look, surely there will be some changes here, at the very least – the lobbying register, as is, will change. And we had a PACAC committee inquiry into Greensill, we did other inquiries too, made loads of recommendations, but nothing has changed. And it really is, as far as I can see, not a huge prospect of change around it. And I think that's really....you know, it's going to

continue to contribute to a kind of sense of a corrosion of trust because stuff is happening, lobbying is coming into the public domain, people are getting, rightly, you know, annoyed...you know, very concerned about it. It's becoming a political scandal, and there isn't a sense that anything has changed on the back of it.

**Max:** Andy, did you want to come in there?

**Andy:** Well, just on that, Peter, it's interesting to hear you describe the Greensill case, and I agree with you and I know this is overall, but to say it doesn't reflect well on our industry because to me it is an example of the lobbying scandals over the years, where ministers, MPs, make, sort of, cackhanded attempts to earn some money and trade off their political roles and try to do lobbying – don't really know what they're doing, don't recognise that actually it's a well-developed professional practice.

I can give you my own experience around this: after losing my seat in the general election in 2015, lots of others who lost their seats came to me and said 'oh, how did you get job in lobbying?' And 'I'm going to do that'. And I said, 'well, I'm working in lobbying, not because I was an MP, it's despite that, it's because I've got a long track record of being a public affairs advisor and, actually, being an MP for a short period was out with my overall career'.

So this idea that having been an elected politician means you'd be a good public affairs advisor – in my experience, actually, it's very often not the case and those people end up landing us in the spotlight for reasons that are really nothing to do with how we try to operate ethically.

**Rachael:** And I think, Max, when you ask what's changed. I think that's one of the things that we have seen change or increasingly change in that – to your point there, Andy – it's increasingly recognised that, just because you've got your black book, because you've been a minister or Parliamentarian, doesn't mean you can walk straight into something. Or, when that is the case, you've probably got a 12-month life and then you disappear because that book's run out because it is a professional skill. We work very hard at what we do, there are some people that can do it, there are some people that can't, and it's not just about going out and having drinks all the time. You know, there's that to it, and I think that's one of the things we've seen change because it is

now recognised more as an industry and as a discipline and there's the skills that go around it. You have the CIPR, we do a lot of stuff to support the community in the industry and that continued drive towards professionalisation.

And we do have a very long way to go with ORCL, I think we all know this. It is....yeah, let's... I just... lost for words at the fact that we've done... that's one of the few laws that exist, one of the few pieces of legislation that exists in...that talks about communication, how you engage with people, and yet it wasn't fit for...it's still not fit for purpose about how it talks about digital, it's never evolved or changed, it's not kept up with the world and it's not kept up with, well...with anything. We have an on-demand world. You can tweet people, you look at how people are engaging during the pandemic, there's still no changes made to it, unlike the devolved ones.

**Max:** So that's a really good point. I want to ask the panel whether we really think there's going to be changes in the coming years. I know that, Peter, you mentioned the Public Account and Constitutional Affairs Committee that are looking at the act. Is there the political appetite to actually do anything about this? I don't know who wants to come in on that? Peter, do you want to have a go at that?

**Peter:** I think it's, you know... I've been very interested to hear what Andy and Rachael think as well, given possibly some more, kind of, proximity to politicians who might be, you know, who might know more about this or the industry's, kind of, view on it. But I think from a little bit of a remove, I do speak to lobbyists all the time, I have plenty of lobbyists in my contact book, and quite a lot of whom talk like Andy and Rachael, who, you know, are professional lobbyists and would like to see reform. I think it's hard to see at the moment, again, this was a lobbying scandal, again, albeit not one from what you... might term in the industry. The Owen Paterson affair from, what, you know, October-November of last year, which you could make the case, arguably, was the beginning of the end for Boris Johnson. You know, he was... from then on, his popularity started to dip massively, and what you had there was a Parliamentarian, you know, who was employed in a second job for a number of different companies, was lobbying on their behalf and ways that broke the rules. And we know what happened next in terms of trying to get rid of, essentially... denude the Standards Commission to make sure that the rule-breaking would never be found again.

But what's the problem with that, fundamentally is, again, it's that sense of which nothing changed. I know, again, there was internal parliamentary inquiries into second jobs, lots of fulmination and conversation about what might happen with second jobs, what might be a good way of doing it, what might be a bad way of doing it, a general sense in which the current way of doing this is not a very good way of doing it. And then again, nothing happening. And I think that's a huge problem.

It is a running theme, frankly, when it comes to issues around lobbying and government transparency. There's a lot of conversations. It's the kind of issue that journalists like me and I think, generally, the public do care about. It's one of the reasons we write about it, and when we write about it, they care. But there isn't a sense in which there's as much follow-through from it.

And, at least the current government. I find it very, very hard to imagine. Potentially, you know...it depends what happens in the next couple of years, the kind of sense of sleaze that some of these stories contribute around Boris Johnson I think did give a real impetus a few months ago. How long that lasts, I don't really know. It feels as if the time is right for some sort of cross-party, you know, agenda for change that probably would take in everyone from industry to politicians about what an alternative – a better alternative – would look like. There's plenty of models out there, as far as I understand it, too. It's not, for want of another way of doing these things. So, you know, I still find it hard to fully understand why politicians won't act on this, because my sense is, if you were to poll the public on it, it would be very popular.

**Max:** Yeah, thanks, Peter. Andy, given your background, do you think there's appetite in the Labour Party to look at the issue?

**Andy:** I don't see the Labour Party putting lobbying on their, sort of, five-point pledge card, but I would expect to see commitments around additional transparency in the Labour Party manifesto, and, you know, I very much hope we see that partly in the context of some of the recent loss of trust, really, in politics. I think the way that Keir Starmer sought to try and draw a distinction with his approach around 'partygate', no one really was covered in glory in all of that, but at least he tried to say, 'well, actually, I'm going to show the public that I'll behave in a different way if I'm found by the police to break the rules'. So, I mean, that is some leadership, I think, in politics around saying,

actually, we ought to have some standards in public life. And I would anticipate that the Labour Party would want to bring forward proposals around transparency.

What I would say, generally, is I think that the direction of travel is towards greater transparency, partly in terms of the legislative framework. I think the media, actually, can play quite an important role and I think organisations like Peter's play an important role, NGOs, in shining the spotlight on lobbying. So, I think it's a good thing that the media, for example, go through each of the Whitehall department's declarations monthly and see who ministers are meeting with. You know, I think that that... it shows us, actually, how limited the current reporting systems are, but it also shows us that there will be scrutiny, that people are interested in who is in and out of the corridors of power.

ORCL is really inadequate, but a step towards something that, actually, you could... I mean, it is currently being reviewed and I think that, you know, whether or not there is a change in government in terms of party politics, I think that that act will be strengthened in the future.

And what... it seems to me that there's not actually, at the heart of this, really a fundamental problem with trying to introduce proper, statutory strong regulation. The press, of course, have shown that what they will do is they will turn on any politicians who try to strengthen the regulatory framework. So I don't hold out a lot of prospect that we'll have a proper regulation of the press in the UK. But I don't think that there are... you know, people like me and Rachael who are voices in the public affairs industry, we would support, not try to oppose, regulation because actually it benefits professional practitioners like us.

**Max:** Rachael, just coming to that, I mean, you wrote a paper with the CIPR Public Affairs Group last year looking at what can be done and you've been, sort of, also leading a lot of what the industry can do on making itself more professional. Do you just want to, kind of, cover what the industry is doing at the moment?

**Rachael:** Yeah, sure. It was a collective effort from the Public Affairs Group and CIPR HQ. I think that the key thing that we put in there, and I remember us having the conversations in the workshops with lots of different members, and ultimately: it needs to be simple, and you can so overcomplicate some of these things and put all the rules

and the loopholes... at one point, I think in one of our early draughts, we got this very long sentence that was outlining all the different people that we wanted people to declare that they had met, and who that should encompass. And at that point, you actually then start to create a loophole, because if somebody just doesn't quite fit into that category, or almost like... David Cameron waiting these 24 months, as soon as you're outside of that...the answer is written down, then you can be exploited, but you're not breaking any rules. So that's what we said: the rules almost needed to be big and simple, so they are all encompassing.

But one of the other things that we came out with as well was that we recommend that ORCL also... there's more consequences to actions. So at the moment, one of the comments was that you can...you get a letter saying 'you should have submitted' or 'you haven't submitted', 'you should resubmit', 'you need to submit'. And then if you are sanctioned, if you are fined, you are fined but it's not recorded anywhere. So you pay your bill and then it moves on. And...so where's the detriment to any business? So it doesn't capture everybody as it is, and then those people that it does capture actually don't necessarily need to fill anything in because you can always let...it's just the cost of doing business, being fined on a regular basis if you didn't want to do it. And that is being... I'm being extreme, I'm not suggesting anybody does that, but it doesn't have teeth.

So what we want is something simple, something that can flex and grow over time as the world and our industry evolves, but that also has got some teeth. It's almost not rocket science, and I think you'll see with the people that we've already had sign up to UKLR, which is the CIPR's voluntary register, we know there are people wanting to behave in this way that are wanting to be transparent. I signed up to it, I signed up to it in-house, I signed up to it even though...when my business was small, I've signed up to it even though I'm not yet at ORCL size.

**Max:** If I can come in there, I think there was a really interesting point on 'add simplicity', and this comes back to what Andy was saying earlier, where we've seen a devolved approach to lobbying. So Scotland has its own lobbying register, I think Wales, the Senedd has an inquiry, I believe, into how they look at lobbying. And we're also seeing in Westminster a kind of a foreign lobbying register as well being proposed, to highlight what foreign lobbyists are doing in the UK. Is there a risk that very well-intentioned

lobbyists, who want to be on registers and want to show what they're doing, are a bit bamboozled by all the different things going on?

**Andy:** I would say, Max, that it's important for public affairs practitioners to make themselves aware of the frameworks in all of the jurisdictions and to comply with them. And I think that they should be able to do that, they are set out in statute legislation and in guidance. If you consider the... from a Westminster point of view, which is where I do the majority of my work – I'm based in Westminster, the ORCL framework, so the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, my criticism of ORCL is not of the individuals who hold the role and, actually, the team there do quite a good job of publishing guidance and consulting and updating that guidance, so there's a lot of information there, so no excuses, as far as I'm concerned, for not following the codes as they currently exist. But what I would like to see is that... there are some more common principles across the UK and that those codes are strengthened.

It's not that I think there's necessarily a right or a wrong way, it's just that we need to agree how we're going to enhance transparency. I'll give you an example of different approaches. I work... very early in my career, I worked in the European Parliament, and there they have a register of lobbyists who can get passes, and that has some merit.

I actually happen to support the view in the UK that you shouldn't be wandering around Parliament buildings or Stormont unless you're there because you work there and have a very legitimate reason to be there. So you can be there as a guest, and that is at the invitation of a Member of Parliament or a member of their staff for a limited time for that particular meeting, and you come through its security and enter the building in a proper way. The idea that we have people standing around Parliament's bars and cafés doesn't seem to me to be a great model.

That said, in Brussels, people will argue that it actually incentivises transparency to have that ability to apply for a pass and that the model works for them. So I'm not saying there's a specific model we must adopt in the UK, but let's strengthen and let's have some common principles across all the jurisdictions of the UK.

**Max:** Rachael, did you want to come in there?

**Rachael:** Yeah, so I just.... I agree with what you're saying there Andy, there's...what we can learn, but I think there's also some things that we can look at, well, actually, how can we combine some of these things? So, for example, what you were talking about with passes there is... in my mind, a few years ago we were talking about some ideas and we said, 'wouldn't it be great if, when they do the refurb of Parliament, you can apply for a pass to be able to... electronic pass, to be able to tap for that pass to tap for you to be able to get in, you have to have done your return. You have to have said who you are going to meet. Your pass will not work unless you have done your return or unless you have qualified who it is you're going to meet. And by that way you can build transparency into some of the most simple of things. You have lobbying that then will actually take place in the Parliamentary estate. So you can add that degree of transparency to it because you can see where a lot of it is happening and you are encouraging that whole behavioural change about doing the... recording the meetings. Which can be... and the reason I think this is the...where we can learn even outside of other lobbying legislation and regulation is something as simple as... you go to a restaurant or you order a pizza, it comes and you fill in the 'how is the service?' You do three little dots or whatever it is, it can be something as simple as that: I am meeting this person, talk about this, talk about that. It can take seconds to do something on an app like that to return. And we're just not embracing some of the technologies and some of the behaviours that we use in other parts of our life into this. And then we add the complexity to the things, to the point about all the different registers and procedures you have to fill in. Simple, let's find some really simple things, to add transparency and maybe we can move into a world where... not tomorrow, at some point where lobbyists, public affairs professionals have got a pass but it's to give them the ability to be able to have their meetings.

**Max:** Peter, what do you think about all of this? Do we need a more kind of technological-led approach?

**Peter:** I don't know, I'm kind of agnostic enough on the approach side of it. I think it's kind of, you know, I wouldn't claim to be the expert in what's the best process. You know, as I say, as a journalist using... who often reports on the United States well, I am just really struck by how much easier it is to find things out in the United States, how much more transparent registers are both from companies' point of view, for individuals, foreign agents, et cetera, et cetera, and how different it is in the United Kingdom. And

even just listening to the number of acronyms we've been using on this call, and the confusion they've generated on this call, suggests that all is not great and that would probably be where I come in on this.

**Max:** I think that's a fair point. Yes, definitely need to use less acronyms. I think, just...I'm quite keen to widen this out because obviously public affairs doesn't happen in a vacuum, and trust in politics generally impacts public affairs. So I've got some statistics here: The Carnegie Trust found that less than half of the English public – this is only English, not UK wide – but less than half of the English public feel that democracy works well in the UK, and the overwhelming majority do not trust their MPs. Now, is that a problem? Are we going to see a general decline... that general decline continue?

**Peter:** I think with Cambridge University a couple of years ago, the big kind of...just before the pandemic, there was a big study on the state democracies around the world and trust in politics. I think it was the UK, actually, and the US who particularly fell...who came very low down on that, as did a number of other developed nations. We do have, you know, a serious trust issue in politics, I think that's for sure, and we can see it manifesting in lots of different ways. And I would, you know, I don't think that transparency is the only part of that, I wouldn't suggest that it is, I don't think, you know, lobbying is the only part of it. But I think what's at the root of this is not always coherent and not always accurate, for sure sense, in which politicians are, quote unquote, only out for themselves. And I think that's part of what, for me, where that lack of trust comes from.

And as I said, that is not necessarily in any way my personal experience from working in journalism, but it's something that, you know, that is... a lot of people feel, and some of the things that people like I report do feed into that because there is an aspect where someone's getting, say, £500,000 a year for a second job as a consultant in an industry that they don't seem to know very much about, except for the fact that they were the minister in charge for a couple of years, that would make people rightly, go, 'okay, that doesn't fill me with confidence in my elected officials'. And I think it is important to see this within this context.

I think it is why politicians, you know... listen, I....I totally hear where Andy's coming from and say that Labour and their five-point plan for their manifesto is unlikely to be lobbying reforms likely to be one of them. But there's a kind of one thing I've always found in my work is that, and it kind of works across parties, is that politicians tend to feel like there's lots about the system they don't like.

I do a lot of stuff about electoral law and electoral reform and the electoral acts and the problems with them, but at the root of it there's also a sense of, 'I kind of understand it and I know how to make it work for me, so I'm not that keen to change it'. And I think that works across politics. If you think about, instead of a UK general election, 650 mini general elections, and in each of those seats the incumbent kind of feels like 'I kind of understand how it works here, so even if it doesn't benefit say, my party or other people I know, I feel like I know how it works here'. And I think that attitude is probably part of the problem with this, really, at root.

And you're not going to solve every problem, every issue in terms of trust. We're not going to massively... you're not going to have a step change in public trust, say, with a new piece of legislation or whatever else. But there's a slow accretion of time where these kinds of scandals become less and less because of transparency. It becomes a more kind of accepted way of doing things. It becomes less...you will see less of these big headline-grabbing scandals like Greensill. And I think that is really... that can only be positive for the state of trust and democracy and it's a really important issue, like we have, you know... we can sit here and look across the United States where you have really, really, really big issues with trust in the democratic process to the point where, you know, half the country almost doesn't believe the election results from the last presidential election. So it doesn't...we don't have to go that far to see what happens when trust breaks down, and that might not... and that's not just from, say, you know, transparency phases because I've already talked up the quality of US disclosures, but it's part of a system where people feel like they're not being given the full story and as long as we're not fully transparent about things like lobbying, that will continue.

**Max:** And, of course, we're talking about this in the context of a Prime Minister who's resigned because of standards in public life, not really over a policy issue but more about, you know, various, sort of, behaviours and scandals within the party. Do you

think that this is a turning point, Andy, or is this something that...are we always going to be seeing politics tarred with that kind of brush of scandal?

**Andy:** I think, Max, you point to the fact that there are... there are all sorts of things going on here around the decline of trust. That's the behaviour of politicians, that's some of the big debates we've been involved in in recent years. I think Brexit, for example, no sides covered themselves in glory there really. And actually, I think the lesson from that as I reflected on it, is that if you treat the public in the fashion they were by just appealing to their, sort of, to people's... in a sense, people's worst instincts, so exaggerated claims that everything was going to fall right over if we left the European Union versus completely untrue claims that we'd have mass immigration from countries that aren't anywhere near joining the European Union in the near future – both sides doing that, actually, I hoped for political leaders that move away, really, from the playing on the, sort of, populism – populism that is amplified by social media, for example. Social media can help people connect with politics, it can in some respects be positive, but it's also, in some parts of our political life, been fairly toxic, frankly.

I hope for politicians who actually, given the challenges that the country faces, the world faces – you think about climate change, which we see the effects of now almost daily: flooding in London just in recent weeks, the record temperatures here – that we'll have politicians actually talk more honestly with the public about some of the choices that we face, about the fact that politics is grappling with, often, with competing interests and often very difficult trade-offs in society. I think lobbying is not really a big part of that declining trust, in my view. I would sort of take issue really with... I thought Peter perhaps put a bit too much emphasis, frankly, on the extent to which that's about lobbying. I'm not sure that practice now in terms of how people engage with Parliament is worse and I would argue is probably much better than it has been in the past – this is certainly not the era of brown envelopes, you know, that isn't how things work now. There is more transparency, there is an expectation that people like me will be professional, ethical, that will act with integrity. And that's not just an expectation from the public, that's the people that I work with, you know, my team, have good values, they want us to be good actors in the political system.

My clients value their reputations. Reputations are won and lost so easily these days. They don't want to work with people who will behave in any kind of shady way that gets

them into difficulty. So, one part of how we make sure that we have a good political system and well regulated, transparent lobbying – we've got a lot to work on there and to improve – but I think the overall issues about trust are much bigger. And they're not even just about politics, of course, they are about declining trust in lots of our traditional institutions: in our media, our church, even our universities and so on. So it's broader, it's a big challenge, but you have to be hopeful.

**Max:** Rachael, do you want to come in there. Are you optimistic that we're moving in the right direction?

**Rachael:** I don't know. I think the challenge, you know... so much has been said by Peter, Andy I agree with and nodding along furiously here again. I think one of the things we need to remember when it comes to trust and the behaviours that we are seeing for the last...in the last seven years – I think I may have this wrong – we have had the Scotland independence referendum, we had the EU referendum, we then had a leadership change, we then had a general election, we then had a leadership change, we then had a general election and we're about to have a leadership change again. So actually...and in there we also had a couple of years of pandemic. And so what you've actually seen for almost seven years is constant electioneering and running the country with catchy slogans. And that's sort of where we have been, and so it's really difficult to be able to build trust when you've got a slogan one week and then you've got a different one the next, because there's no substance to it and it builds everybody up around one issue.

And, yeah... it's important, it's important to engage, but at the same time, there's more to what goes on and what needs to go on than just like three words, four words, and then you don't start to... until you start to unpick things and everyone... things actually happen. The world didn't end the day after Brexit, everything didn't fall over. At the same time, £350 million a week is not going into the NHS. It works on both sides, you know, no one comes out well in this, but how about we, sort of, move on from that? That was that. Let's now not argue about something that happened then, let's not argue about whose marketing team did the best job, and let's go on.

But unfortunately, as we're recording this, we're waiting for a new Prime Minister, we've seen lots and lots of electioneering happening again and no talk about policy, and it's

just so insular. And that's when we then get a lot of people switching off. So you get a degree of voter apathy because they just don't want to hear about what's going on in the bubble anymore, or they feel disconnected, 'nobody ever listens to me'. And then they hear something, almost out of the blue, or let's say, for example, at the moment, the whole situation with the energy cap, very little has been talked about on the news other than the hustings, but then all of a sudden, your energy bill next year is going... this time next year is going to be three times what it is today. You can't answer that with a catchy thing, and so you've got people saying, 'well, actually, where are they all? What are they doing?' It's the summer, they're on holiday, and then you've got... they start arguing about – with one another about – who's on holiday and who shouldn't be, and all that kind of thing because it's just taking a pot shot, because we've been in electioneering mode for seven years.

**Max:** I think that's really interesting. I mean, just coming back to what you're saying about the slogans, I mean I'm always quite sceptical when people say to me, 'oh well, why aren't we reading more about in-depth policy?', because the nature now of the... I was about to say to 24-hour news cycle but it isn't 24 hours, it's now, you know, even shorter than that – the cycle of news – that means that you can't really get into an issue like that if you're... or the public can't. And I don't think there's that much discussion of some of these things. So is that just going to always stop us from getting into the issues in depth? Peter, do you think that's a barrier?

**Peter:** I think that probably is. I think we do, you know... we probably don't have as much, you know, kind of, tolerance for policy debate. And also things move so quickly, even like... some of the things we were talking about, when you're in the middle of these scandals, and I think, historically, it probably would have – you know, if you look at what came out of, you know, it was a series of scandals in 1990s, it felt like they were never going to go away, as far as I... I wasn't around then, I was a young man in rural Ireland, but, you know, I've read my history books and I sensed that they weren't going to go away so something must be done. The 24-hour news cycle has also changed the, kind of, policy around some of these issues. So, for people like me, who's a journalist and there's interest for you guys in the industry, they're going to be front and centre all the time, but it's a mark of how quickly the, kind of, policy agenda moves on from things like this. I think that's a real problem: how to get the focus to stay long enough that you can have a constructive conversation around what needs to change, how much to

change, why it might be possible and to keep the attention span there, to keep...to, kind of, get a legislative programme to, kind of, go alongside it.

I do feel like, probably, and it's not...we're not... the UK is not alone in this, but the space for that kind of considered debate and discussion on some of these issues. We try and do it on our website openDemocracy, try and have some conversations around these things, especially around, say, you know, access to information, all those kind of issues, and talking about what's wrong with the regime and what might want to change. And sometimes it can be quite technical conversations, but because of an audience interest, we can write them and talk to them about it. Even John Penrose, the former tsar, anticorruption tsar, was writing on OD not long ago about some of these issues, and it's important to have those spaces, but they are few and far between and they... outside of...you know, kind of... in larger media outlets, the tolerance of interest is quite low and so it means that when a conversation starts around this is almost always in response to a scandal.

And because the new cycle moves so quickly, it feels like it can move off before something is actually done about it. I think that's why it is so incumbent on politicians to actually go, 'right, we're going to keep a focus on this', whether it's PAC AC, you know, PAC AC committees or other committees, and go, 'right, we need to actually do something about this, otherwise it will just recur, but it won't be solved'

**Max:** And that's a really good point, because a lot of great work happens on select committees and bill committees. But if you ask the public what Parliament is, they point to PMQs. Andy, as someone who's been in the chamber for PMQs, is there too much of a focus on that half an hour of the week when all this other good stuff is going on in Parliament, which the public don't often see?

**Andy:** Absolutely, Max. As you say, every day Parliament is buzzing with important committees, select committees, bill committees. I'm not sure that people outside of Parliament or those, like us, who advise organisations on engaging with legislation, understand that every piece of legislation has line-by-line scrutiny. And, actually, the way that that scrutiny is carried out is very far removed from the 'yah boo' politics, tribal politics of the House of Commons at 12:00 on a Wednesday...12:30 on a Wednesday.

It's actually quite consensual, I've been on a number of bill committees and there's a...well, there are disagreements, and sometimes very strong policy disagreements between members of committees on a bill committee, for example, looking at piece of legislation. But there is a shared purpose in looking in detail and carrying out your role properly as Parliamentarians to scrutinise legislation, to challenge the government, the executive, who propose most of our legislation – with the exception of private members bills. And that good work also happens in the House of Lords. Personally would prefer that we didn't have a sort of massively, overcapacity, unelected House of Lords, but I nevertheless actually respect many of the individuals there and the work that they do.

So I've got a lot of time for MPs, I think that most of them are really well-intentioned people who actually work very hard and usually do so in the public interest. Unfortunately, of course, that isn't what the public really see, and PMQ is the worst representation of Parliament, you know, and very far from what's actually happening most of the time in there. I was going to say, one of the things that makes me hopeful is that Parliament is changing, so even from the time that I was in Parliament, which was... around a decade ago I was elected, it was much whiter, male. Parliament is becoming more diverse and I think that is about trying to represent the interests of more people and more different people across the UK, and it's not being a place that actually entrenches privilege. And I think, from the point of view of public affairs and us trying to make sure that laws are made in an informed way and that different opinions are heard in the legislative process, that a more diverse Parliament is a good thing and important for public affairs practitioners to connect with that more diverse Parliament.

**Rachael:** I think the other thing that can help me with trust and to help move forwards and just picking up on what you were just saying about the public not completely understanding what everyone...what happens, I think you'll probably find... it astonishes me that we don't learn more about our democratic and political systems in schools. It's mind-boggling... so many countries...everybody knows how the process works, everyone knows how...in the States, they even have cartoons about it, don't they – this is how the bill is raised and all that kind of... it is entrenched in their behaviour. They all know how to do it and how the process works. In the UK, we don't. It's almost seen then as being a little bit elite, or you're a bit of a geek if you're interested in politics. And so...and you then don't trust because you don't understand. But if somebody is telling you that's bad, then that must be bad.

You know, Max, the work that we've been doing with I Have a Voice, helping get more people from different backgrounds, at school level, involved with politics, educating them on it, on what their potential careers could be in that world – so taking it from a career angle rather than just an awareness, but actually building awareness, because everybody does have a voice, but to use that the best way they can they need to understand it and have the trust in the process, which comes back to the understanding.

**Max:** I think that's a really good point. Interestingly, you know, diversity in politics amongst MPs is getting better. I don't have the statistics, but I wonder what the public affairs industry is like. I wonder if anyone knows how aware we are on our equality, diversity and inclusion journey.

**Andy:** I could give you a frank assessment... is that the industry is becoming more diverse, but that diversity is skewed. So still most senior practitioners are white. There's still a ...leans more towards... I think there's a gender imbalance at a more senior level and that's reflected by gender pay gap reporting, ethnicity and reporting. But we're making progress because there are people from different backgrounds. It is becoming more diverse and, you know, it's not just about gender or ethnicity – this was a profession at one time where you would have found over-representation of people from private education, for example, so it is becoming more diverse.

I'd like to see us go further, so we're looking, for example, at how we can offer apprenticeships rather than it just be a graduate profession. Actually, could we get people in an apprenticeship level and in that way increase diversity? So the honest answer is, Max, I think there's a long way to go, I mean, I remember going to an industry meeting around the time of the Black Lives Matter protests around the world, particularly in America and obviously here in the UK, for a discussion around how we respond as an industry, and I think that response has been demanded by every walk of life around the world. And, as we gathered we realised that one flaw in developing our response was that most of us were white men. But that, you know...actually, we did respond to that, and I think, you know, some of the initiatives there are in the industry now around championing diversity are, yes, long overdue but actually beginning to make a real impact. So, I am hopeful that, you know, we're going in the right direction.

**Max:** Peter, do you want to come in on that? I mean, you look at politics and open democracy, again, internationally, how do you feel the UK is doing on the diversity front, and public affairs too?

**Peter:** I guess, you know, there's... it depends how you look at it and that. I don't know what the statistics are on public affairs, but it still does feel... the look and feel of it is still a very, you know, white and still very male place. You know, we've never had a female leader of the Labour Party, you know, we've never had, you know, a non-white Prime Minister, like. So, there's still a huge, you know, huge way to go on that. But I also think it's beyond just representation, I think you can focus very clearly just on representation, but in doing that you lose a lot of other types, you know... diversity of voices, diversity of opinions, diversity of opportunities, and I think that's a big part of this too. I think sometimes we can get a bit... we can focus very much just on representations, the only... as the be all and end all when it comes to this conversation. But like, how do you get included into the lobbying world? How do you become somebody who can actually access those spaces? You have to go to a private school to get there, possibly just to go to Oxford, probably – all of those things. Similarly, when it comes to politics as well, I think those sort of questions are really important to ask as well.

**Max:** I agree with that. So, just to conclude, Andy and Rachael, one thing we haven't spoken about is public affairs within the wider comms discipline and PR profession, how do you feel public affairs is becoming...is it becoming more integrated with general comms and PR? And what are we seeing are the trends going forward? So, Rachael, do you want to tackle that first?

**Rachael:** I'm often surprised when there isn't a closer link between public affairs, lobbying and other communications disciplines. I'm a generalist but I've moved obviously into the more public affairs world. But when you look at the overall comms mix, it may be a different channel or different discipline, but it's about the same brand, same values, same purpose, so there has to be that relationship with the other areas. It becomes, in my view, another part of the mix. And I think we'll find there's a lot of people that are doing lobbying when they don't necessarily realise they're doing it.

**Max:** Andy, what are your thoughts?

**Andy:** I think it's absolutely vital for organisations to integrate public affairs with their comms and, actually, more broadly with their organisational strategy – their business objectives, for example. I would argue that public affairs is very much part of the public relations industry, and I try to explain it as that part of the public relations industry that has a particular role which is helping organisations to communicate with political audiences and policymaker audiences. But it's really important that organisations are consistent and authentic. So, for example, any organisation that tried to segment how they were going to communicate with their supply chain, with their customers, but say something different to political audiences, I would tell them that, actually, that will undermine their reputation, trust in them, their authority in terms of communicating with all those audiences. So, really important that they take an integrated approach.

What I would say, though, is important to recognise that there are aspects of public affairs that are quite specialised, that are quite technical. So, for example, helping organisations to engage in the legislative environment and the regulatory environment. There are aspects of that that – I was surprised, having been a public affairs practitioner for a long time, having helped organisations engaging with legislation, for example, when I served in Parliament, when I sat on bill committees – I was surprised at how much I hadn't known about the dynamics of our legislative process and how it works. And so I think it is important to respect that there are aspects of public affairs that really do cross over and cry out for integration in organisations. There are aspects of public affairs that need to be recognised as being quite technical and requiring real specialised skills. So it's a bit of a mixed answer for me, but, yes, overall integration, of course, is the right way to go.

**Max:** I think that's a really good way of putting it. And if I'm just coming out, I think, you know, when you look at how much of public affairs is now being done on Twitter, for example, the impact of what happens in the press, on what goes on in select committees, if you're a public affairs professional who only looks at Hansard, you're not going to be doing a full job. And in the same way that, you know, if you're in the PR arena and your business is impacted by politics, then you're going to need to understand public affairs and politics too. So that's been really great.

I just want to say thank you to Andy, Rachael and Peter for an absolutely fascinating and fantastic discussion. If you are listening to this and want to find out more about

public affairs, the CIPR website is an absolutely fantastic resource – that's CIPR.co.uk. And if you are interested in registering for the UK Lobbying Register, which was recently relaunched and is the UK's only free and accessible register for all, then you can go to [lobbying-register.co.uk](http://lobbying-register.co.uk) and find out more about that there. Thank you very much to Andy, Peter and Rachael again and thanks for listening.

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**Outro:**

Thanks for listening to this episode on the lobbying and public affairs industry. We'll feature links to resources relating to the issues discussed in this podcast in the show notes. But remember, don't let the conversation stop there, if you have any tips or guidance for other practitioners, or have any comments about the episode, share them on Twitter using #Engage.