

## HANCOCK & BULL

**MPs on the science and technology committee are concerned that the new “anti-lobbying” clause inserted into all grant funding agreements will bar scientists from being able to speak to them about their research or even give presentations at conferences if an MP happens to be present.**

The new rule was announced in February and bars any government grant from being used to support “activity intended to influence or attempt to influence parliament, government or political parties... or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action”.

Cabinet Office minister Matthew Hancock called it a common sense rule to stop pressure groups using government funding for campaigning. However, science and technology select committee chair Nicola Blackwood has written to business secretary Sajid Javid pointing out that the ambiguous wording of the clause puts scientists, public health researchers and other academics whose study is state-funded in a bind. Fearing that they might fall foul of the clause, researchers “will become reluctant to present to us the policy recommendations that arise from their work”, she said, and would be unable to provide advice to parliament even if asked for their views.

The committee wants an exemption for research grants so government-funded work can

be used as evidence in policy making. Charities, meanwhile, warn that the rule will wreck many of the grant-funded partnerships they currently have with government departments and agencies that actually *want* to draw on charity expertise to develop policy and improve regulation.

PS: According to ministers, the need to stop grant money being diverted to lobbying was exposed by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) think tank, whose lifestyle economics editor Chris Snowdon has produced three reports on what he calls “sock puppets” – charities that receive public funds while appearing to be entirely independent campaigners.

Snowdon has long had it in for public health scientists and campaigners in particular, calling them “scrotum-faced head-bangers”, “deranged” and “leeches”. But the announcement of the “anti-lobbying” restriction also marks a victory for Big Tobacco. Between them tobacco firms have donated £100,000 to the IEA in recent years – while the IEA has acted as the tobacco industry’s own sock puppet, producing helpful reports on issues such as plain packaging. The IEA denies that tobacco companies contributed financially to Snowdon’s specific reports, but refuses to reveal the identity of a mystery donor who gave £15,000. Tobacco companies have long wanted to kneecap their opposition in the public health lobby by undermining their funding.