

CHAPTER 32

What next? Future issues for public relations



Learning outcomes

By the end of the chapter you should be able to:

- discuss some of the key themes emerging from the book
- consider trends in public relations theory and practice
- review the specific developments for public affairs as a specialism in public relations practice
- identify possible areas for research and further study.

Structure

- Campaigning and pressure groups
- Internationalisation of public relations
- Publics
- Public relations' identity
- Issues
- Technology
- Practitioner roles and professionalism in public relations
- Specialisation of public relations practice
- Media fragmentation
- Education

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of what we believe are some of the key themes for public relations research and practice that emerge from the content of this book. These themes are by no means comprehensive, nor are they isolated; they are linked because they reflect the wider issues in the social, political, economic and technological environment. The purpose of identifying these themes is to pose questions for further class discussion and initial bases of investigation for students planning a dissertation or thesis.

Campaigning and pressure groups

Campaigning and pressure group activities are on the increase in the developed world in response to a wide range of global issues concerned with the effects of human consumption and resources: the food we eat, the energy we use, the environment we inhabit and the ways in which resources are distributed among nations and societies. Many of these issues are coming to prominence via technology, and the internet in particular, to galvanise public opinion and present challenges for governments and corporations alike.

In 2005 the campaign 'Make Poverty History' drew attention to the plight of Africa and the effects of global economic policies on many African countries: poverty, illness and high mortality rates. The World Economic Forum's G8 summit provided a focal point for campaigners to put their case to the governments of the developed world to get these nations to adopt policies that would reverse Africa's fortunes. Also in 2005 the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg declared that the long-running 'McLibel' case was in breach of the right to a fair trial and right to freedom of expression for the 'McLibel 2' activists Dave Morris and Helen Steel. The two had launched legal proceedings against the UK government to address the imbalance between powerful corporations (like McDonald's) and individuals (like themselves) cited in libel suits. As establishment norms are challenged, will we see more activism in the future involving similar 'David and Goliath' scenarios? (See Think about 32.1.)

Internationalisation of public relations

Public relations has become a global phenomenon. No organisation operating across international borders can function effectively without knowledge of other cultures, media systems and communication

practices. While international public relations may be more readily associated with multinational corporations (MNCs), such as Microsoft, Philips or Tesco, it is not just a concern for commercial organisations operating in global markets. In attempts to encourage positive worldwide opinion to support favourable trading conditions, economic investment and tourism, public relations techniques are adopted by organisations of all kinds including 'unpopular' political regimes and previously unknown nations.

Public relations has made the first steps towards professionalisation on a global scale although it is likely to take many more years to achieve a globally recognised status. Recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity is the next step and this will need to become part of practice. The Second World Public Relations Festival in 2005 chose 'diversity' as its main theme, adopting a manifesto about how organisations should strive to communicate 'for diversity, with diversity and in diversity' (World Public Relations Forum 2005).

In the future, the public relations industry will need to demonstrate its own 'social responsibility' in a more dynamic and effective way. As the number of institutions and organisations that use public relations increase, so will transparency and accountability for the profession. (See Think about 32.2.)

Publics

The notion of 'a public' is central to public relations, yet there is debate in the literature about the meaning of the term. The term 'public' is commonly used in many academic disciplines and usually refers to everyone in the population (e.g. 'general public'), but the use of 'public' in public relations often refers to carefully defined 'target groups' of the organisation (see Chapter 12). Public relations theory has been criticised for defining publics from the organisation's point of view: that 'publics' exist only because the organisation

think about 32.1

Campaigning organisations and pressure groups

- 1 Why is 'public relations' more often associated with governments and corporations, whereas pressure groups 'campaign'? Are there any real differences in approaches, strategies and tactics from what you have learned? Think about this question from the point of view of (a) a large corporation that you are familiar with (b) a large campaigning organisation that you support.
- 2 Is it possible to be both passionate about a cause and a public relations professional?
- 3 In demonstrating their commitment to social responsibility, should public relations agencies be required to work *pro bono* (literally 'for the good' involving little or no fee) for a campaigning organisation or pressure group?

think about 32.2

Internationalisation of public relations

- 1 According to opinion polls, trust in leaders of organisations and politicians appears to be in decline in the developed world. Will the internationalisation of public relations contribute to building trust among a global community?
- 2 What can the public relations profession do to 'recognise and appreciate' diversity in practice? What will this mean in practical terms?
- 3 How can the public relations industry demonstrate its own 'social responsibility'? To whom is it responsible?

says so. Critics point out that taking this instrumental view of publics denies publics their self-identity and agency in setting their own objectives.

Throughout this book, we have seen evidence in practice, however, that 'publics' are asserting more power. Campaigning groups are taking an active interest in organisations and their goals, while other groups such as consumers are consciously turning away from corporate and consumer messages that are not 'tuned in' to their particular interests or needs. At the same time, public sector organisations are trying to get nearer to publics by stressing concepts of 'choice' in public access to information and services, and participation and involvement in policy decision making. (See Activity 32.1 and Think about 32.3.)

activity 32.1**How publics are viewed**

Compare three retail organisations' annual reports (by downloading from their websites) and examine the language that is used to discuss consumers, employees or other publics such as the local community. Note the variation in the terms used and their connotations. Consider how each organisation views its publics. Which organisation appears to consider its publics as powerful and active? What theories can you use to explain the different approaches?

phenomenon as both a management function and as an academic discipline. The identity problem starts with the term 'public relations': this in itself is regarded as an Anglo-American construct and direct translations into other languages cannot always be found. Elsewhere, as in the case of Europe, 'communication management' is a preferred term. Definitions of public relations – its role and purpose – is a further area of debate: there is no agreed definition, although preferred definitions abound.

Public relations (as evidenced in the scope of this book) lays claims to a wide range of activities – from lobbying to sponsorship – yet those involved in these somewhat disparate areas may not describe themselves as public relations practitioners at all. And when we consult the international literature, 'public relations' is a term used to denote other activities, including 'guest relations' and interpersonal contact (as in China).

Without a clear identity, the practice has been subject to encroachment from marketing, human resources, management consultancy and (as in the USA), the legal profession. Having discussed the problems of a lack of identity for public relations, the growth in the number of public relations qualifications means that academics will continue their attempts to define the field and professional bodies will continue to pursue their goals of professional recognition. (See Think about 32.4, overleaf.)

Public relations' identity

Public relations emerged during the last half of the twentieth century. It is therefore a relatively new

Issues

As we have already seen in this book, issues arising from the social, political, technological and economic

think about 32.3

Publics

- 1 Referring to theoretical discussions, what is 'a public'? Is it simply a defined target group of an organisation? Or does 'a public' have its own identity?
- 2 How will the development of the internet influence the concept of 'a public'?

think about 32.4

Future identity of public relations

- 1 Why does identity matter? Does it matter that public relations is defined in different ways (e.g. 'relationship management' or 'reputation management'), given other labels such as 'corporate communication' and may denote varying activities across organisations?
 - Consider the arguments for and against public relations as an academic discipline – are the available theories adequate in defining the field?
 - Consider the arguments for and against public relations as a discrete management function – can it be differentiated from other functions?
- 2 Looking at the arguments in this book concerning the identity and reputation of the profession, will 'public relations' be a commonly used term in 10 years' time?
- 3 Is the specialisation of public relations practice a safeguard for professional identity, or merely further evidence that public relations cannot easily be defined?

environments have increasingly become a concern for governments and organisations, due to the wider availability of information on the internet and the number of activist groups which are prepared to protest about the perceived risks arising from the issue, either vocally or through direct action. Issues affect all organisations, not just big governments and multinational organisations. In a risk-averse society, the linked issues of obesity and the fat content of food can affect the stakeholder relationships of a small business processing food products or a school catering service – unless either organisation takes action to manage the issue and reduce the perceived risk to consumers. (See Think about 32.5.)

influence not only on our working habits but also on how we live our lives.

Companies such as Microsoft permeate nearly every country of the world through product dissemination. However, there are common assumptions about technology's spread that can lead to what is called the 'digital divide'. This is the exclusion of certain social and demographic groupings from technology's reach. This is one of many future issues that students, academics and practitioners of public relations should be aware of and manage. (See Think about 32.6.)

Technology

For public relations practice the impact of technology focuses on information and communication technologies (ICT). Technology has transformed the way we communicate in recent years and this has had specific effects on the practice of public relations. How and where we work, how we communicate with colleagues, clients and media stakeholders have all been influenced by technology and its evolution. Sociologists have therefore discussed technology's

Practitioner roles and professionalism in public relations

Public relations practitioners are quite rightly subject to frequent public scrutiny. As this book has demonstrated, the role has a wide range of activities and influences in contemporary society. To demonstrate this, consider just the chapter headings at the front of this book and the specialist areas such as media relations, internal communication, financial public relations, issues management and public affairs.

Discussion within this book has also been about the social responsibilities of organisations in society (Chapters 6 and 18) as well as the behaviour of the

think about 32.5

Issues management

- 1 What global issues are likely to become prominent over the next five years?
- 2 As the opportunities for people to access information increase (e.g. through freedom of information legislation, databases and discussion forums on the internet) what type of skills should a public relations practitioner develop?
- 3 Is it possible to 'manage' a whole range of issues for a large organisation? Drawing on theory and practice, how should issues management be organised in the future?

think about 32.6

Technology's future impact on public relations

- 1 Consider the theoretical and practical implications of the digital divide on public relations.
- 2 Technology is increasingly being used in the political electoral process around the world. What effect will these types of intervention have on the future of political communications?
- 3 What are some of the ethical considerations communications specialists should make with regard to technology and public relations?

practitioners themselves. Debates for example surround the description of public relations practitioners as 'ethical guardians' (Chapter 15). As with journalism, there is a major debate evolving about the ethics of the discipline as well as the behaviour of its practitioners. The book cites examples of good and bad ethical practice at both corporate and individual level. As students and academics we need to maintain these debates and this focus on what is a complex and challenging area. (See Think about 32.7.)

Specialisation of public relations practice

Public relations is big. This book reflects this blunt statement. The range of subjects covered, the disciplines that feed into the literature and the named practices are diverse and include: politics, psychology,

philosophy, management theory, communications, cultural theory, sociology, strategy and, of course, public relations itself. If you also review what people do, whether by looking at job adverts or the activities of consultants, it is similarly diverse. Part III of the book provides discussions of the theory and practice of some of these specialist areas of practice. Within some of these areas practitioners are engaged in nothing else but working in that defined area. In others, the specialist skills may form a large but not an exclusive component of the practitioners' day-to-day life. So where are these specialisms going? Will they continue to refine, getting ever more focused in what they do with dedicated knowledge and underpinning that require specific vocational and academic training? To help in this understanding Karl Milner has conducted research into one of these specialist areas, namely public affairs or lobbying which has seen significant growth over the past decade. Case study 32.1 (overleaf) explores this specialism in some detail. (See Think about 32.8.)

think about 32.7

Role of the public relations practitioner

- 1 What is a public relations practitioner? This straightforward question is still not simply answered. More work is required to explain the role, its origins and definition.
- 2 What is a profession? This is an old sociological debate and one that now includes analysis of public relations practice. Some work has been done but more is required.
- 3 Why is relatively little known about the position of ethnic minorities within the public relations profession?

think about 32.8

Future of specialisms in public relations

Will specialist practice areas evolve to such a degree that they no longer form the underpinning of the practice? In other words, will they live as separate or distinct disciplines with different labels and terms of reference?

case study 32.1

The story of consultancy lobbying and its growth in the UK

Since the early 1980s we have witnessed the formation of a new branch of the public relations industry – lobbying consultancy. Lobbying is far from new – individuals and companies with their roots in public relations and law have acted in the political arena on behalf of clients for many years. What set these new firms apart was that lobbying was their core activity and they offered across the board political advice to their clients. They are in effect ‘lobbyists for hire’ (Moloney 1996).

This boutique industry provides us with an excellent case study of a discrete public relations sector. We can consider what factors have influenced its development that may illustrate the driving forces that can effect change. This case study tells the story of this industry and considers how external and internal factors have affected the nature of the consultancy lobbying business.

Pre-1980s

There have probably always been individuals and organisations that have offered their clients knowledge of politics and an ability to influence politicians. Since the Second World War, public relations firms and legal advisors have offered such advice to paying customers (Finer 1966). But these organisations did not focus on this activity nor did they offer these services as the central core of their business. This may well have been because the post-war environment was one in which close connections existed between politicians, civil service mandarins and industry leaders. They were likely to have schooled together and socialised at the same ‘gentlemen’s clubs’ (private members’ clubs), therefore space for skilled communicators to practise and in particular offer ‘access’ simply did not exist.

By the 1970s these social relationships were starting to break down; with globalisation, more foreign organisations became interested in the UK. By the end of that decade a new breed of firms such as Ian Greer Associates (founded in 1969) were offering political advice to clients unfamiliar with the UK political establishment. Individuals, public relations firms and lawyers acted on behalf of mainly private sector clients, while others such as the large UK private sector companies, nationalised industries and the trade unions relied on their personal and directly sponsored relationships with politicians to secure political advantage.

1980s

By the early 1980s specialist public affairs companies like GJW appeared, fuelled by a round of privatisations and the interest of US companies wishing to gain a presence in the UK and Europe. Many US firms re-

tained professional lobbyists at home and looked for similar advice in the UK. British firms followed suit and an era of tremendous growth began. Public relations companies and others set up formal lobbying operations in the UK to cash in; the number of firms and lobbyists in consultancy work increased year on year (see Figure 32.1).

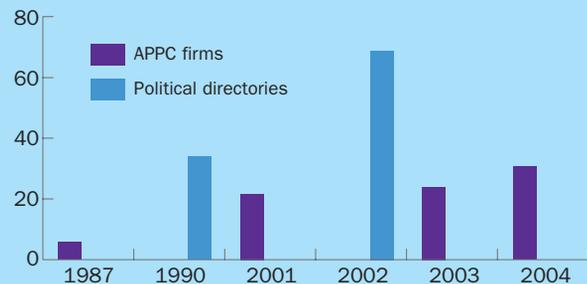


FIGURE 32.1 Growth of political consultancies (source: Milner 2005)

Sectors such as property, health and defence turned to consultancy lobbyists for complementary advice hoping to gain political advantage. This new breed of professional firms, dominated by practitioners with Conservative party sympathies, had grown and was now catching the public eye and, increasingly, its tactics and motives were questioned. In response, the industry formed the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC) to represent their interests. Initially starting with five member firms, the APPC has grown ever since. There have always been more firms offering political consultancy than are members of the APPC, but they do represent a significant proportion of the industry. This is demonstrated by comparing the firms listed in the commercially available reference guides or ‘political directories’ that list contact details for lobbying firms and have been sporadically published. Although these directories are never a complete record, they do indicate a greater number of lobbying consultancies being available for hire between 1991 and 2002 (Atack 1990; Johnson 2002).

1990s

By the early 1990s well over 30 consultancies had been established. The largest of these were very successful and were becoming established with recognisable brands and steady income streams. This had two effects: first, it allowed practitioners to take on ‘loss-leading’ clients such as smaller charities; second, lobbying

case study 32.1 (continued)

consultancies became takeover targets for larger communications groups looking to move into this space.

The number of consultants continued to expand into the hundreds and client lists grew as it became the norm for companies faced with an increasingly interventionist government to retain a lobbying consultancy. The dotcom bubble fuelled growth, but the initial dynamism of the young industry was fading as large privatisations slowed and lobbying firms themselves sold out. The industry came under particular scrutiny from political audiences and beyond as a series of scandals led to the Committee of Enquiry into Standards in Public Life, which investigated links between lobbyists and MPs. Yet the sector continued to grow.

By 1996/7 it became clear that the Labour party would form the next government and this regime change fuelled further expansion. Consultancies employed Labour specialists in response to nervous clients unsure of what a Labour government would mean for their businesses. Questions arose about the links between lobbyists and politicians, this time Labour links, yet again this had little impact on the success of these firms.

2000 on

Despite a general economic downturn in the early decade, consultancy lobbying continued to grow, only more slowly. New Labour policies were a driver of growth, freeing the political reins on government institutions (for example, industry regulators such as OFGEN) which started to turn to lobbyists for political advice, whilst increasing regulation forced greater interaction between government institutions and their potential clients and new directives on 'contracting out' helped consultancies.

By 2001 organisations were familiar with Labour, and started to build specialist lobbying capacities in-house on a scale not observed before, expanding the overall number of jobs available to lobbyists. Consultancies, although still hiring, did not expand as rapidly as in the 1980s and 1990s. Client numbers also grew slowly as did fee income (see Figure 32.2).

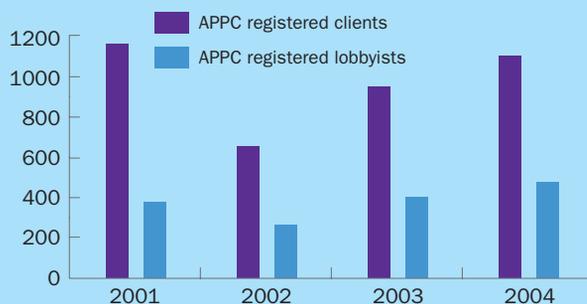


FIGURE 32.2 Steady growth of consultancies following the millennium (source: Milner 2005)

This is a simplified overview of the industry, but it illustrates the way in which markets may grow, stabilise or contract, depending on a number of external and internal influences. The next section considers four prime factors and their specific impact on the industry over time.

The economy

Comparing the FTSE indices with the growth experienced in the UK market, one would expect a close correlation. Clients are unlikely to hire external political help if they are under financial pressure. There are clearly exceptions to this rule (when a company's very existence depends on a political decision, for example) but we can see that the FTSE trends do indeed echo those experienced in the lobbying sector.

The FTSE100, FTSE250 and the FTSE All-Share Index record the combined share price performance of those companies which are registered on the London Stock Exchange (Figure 32.3). As such they act as an accurate guide to UK economic performance. The indices clearly record a general economic downturn in 2002/3. This directly correlates with a drop in the number of client relationships and lobbyists employed around that period. Commercial companies remain the mainstay of most lobbying firms and it is these relationships that are the most important to the financial success of a firm. The general economic environment plays a major role in determining business success. In consultancy lobbying, however, there are other external factors that are equally important.

Political environment

If the economy were the only driver in this market then why were there no comparable lobbying firms operating to any scale prior to the 1980s? Clearly, other factors influence this market.

Although close connections still exist today, society's 'players' are less likely to have the intimate relationships as before, therefore there is now space for skilled communicators to practise.

This is an example of how political affairs companies work within a very specific ecology, that of politics. Changes within that environment make real differences to the prospects for consultancies.

Westminster legislation and parliament

In October 2004 the government introduced new gambling legislation in the Houses of Parliament. Casino operators and their respective trade bodies required legal change in order to achieve scale in the UK. One would therefore predict a sudden presence in the APPC register (see Figure 32.4).



case study 32.1 (continued)

FIGURE 32.3 FTSE indices 2000–2005 (source: London Stock Exchange 2005 www.londonstockexchange.com)

One can clearly observe that post-2003 (once intention to legislate was signalled), the number of casino organisations hiring lobbying firms doubled and for an industry with relatively few participants, this represented a significant percentage of the total number of casino organisations worldwide. This is a clear indication that legislation drives the lobbying market. Other activities of parliament such as select committees can drive clients to use lobbyists – the 2004 review of Pubs by the Trade and Industry Select Committee, for example, increased lobbying activity.

Many lobbying firms act as the secretariat of the all-party parliamentary groups. In January 2005, 301 such groups were registered with the Houses of Parliament (Vacher's Quarterly 2005).

Increasing size of government

More government institutions, increasing regulation and greater market intervention have helped consultancies to grow – there is simply more work to do. On

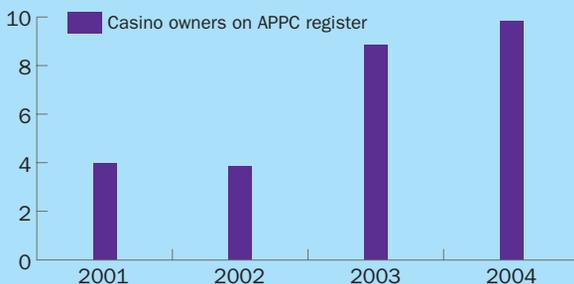


FIGURE 32.4 Casino industry growth recorded in APPC register (source: Milner 2005)

the most basic level, the Scottish Parliament was passed into law in 1998; by 2004, 8 of the 22 listed APPC firms had offices in Edinburgh (Milner 2005).

From 1996 to 2003, 23,322 new regulations were enacted and over 100 new non-departmental public bodies had been created. As more organisations come into contact with regulation (and therefore government) the more likely they are to turn to lobbying firms for advice (House of Commons Library 2004).

A direct effect of the growth of government has been the number of public bodies that are employing lobbyists. Indeed, over a four-year period of study (2001–2004), government institutions have been second only to private companies as the most frequent user of commercial lobbyists (see Figure 32.5).

Local government institutions from Edinburgh to Essex have hired APPC lobbyists over the past four years, and in large numbers. In the majority of cases it is difficult to assess motive as there is no geographic or party political pattern to the makeup of this group. In total, almost one-quarter of all recorded instructions between clients and lobbying consultancies in the period 2001–2004 were from government institutions and not-for-profit clients.

Government procurement

Although the size of government has clearly increased, there are equally a growing number of areas in which government is 'contracting out' to non-governmental organisations. Governments have always relied on private arms manufacturers, for example, but it would seem to be a practice that is moving into all types of new areas. Suppliers to government are most likely to hire lobbyists.

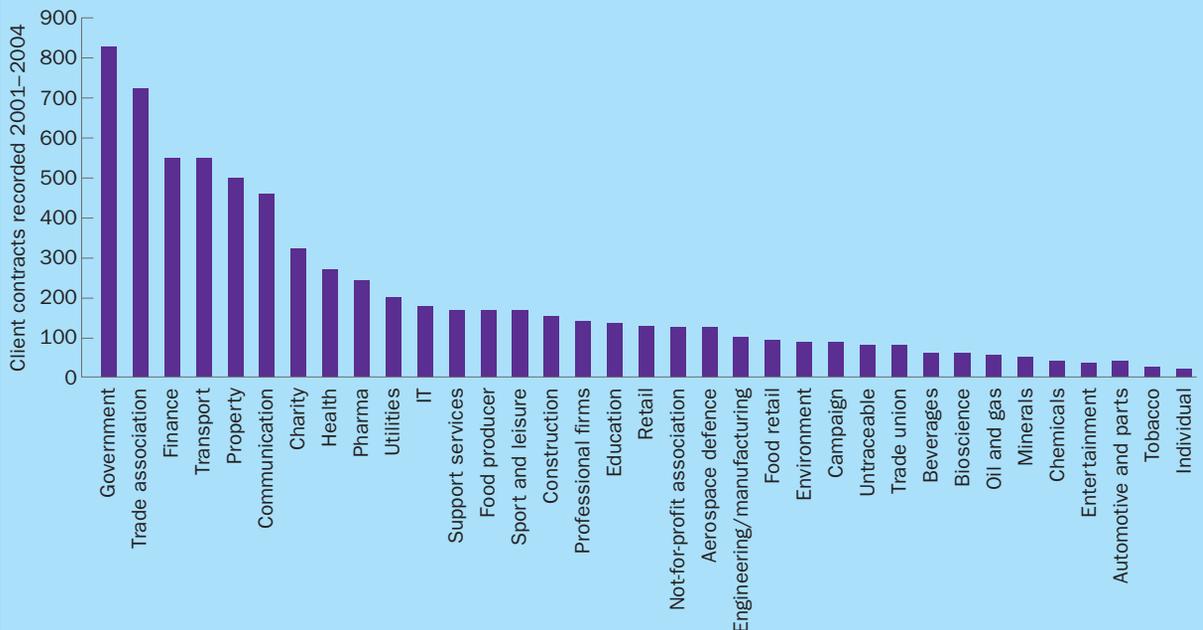
case study 32.1 (continued)

FIGURE 32.5 Most frequent users of commercial lobbyists 2001–2004 (source: Milner 2005)

Supply side

One factor that is often overlooked is the role played by the lobbying industry participants themselves in choosing their clients. The UK lobbying industry still lacks real scale, therefore the individual prejudices of practitioners can have a significant effect on the client base.

Studies in the USA have uncovered the way lobbyists use their time. They have found that for one-third of the time lobbyists are at work they are involved in issues of personal political interest (Kersh 2002). Consultancy lobbying is cyclical in nature; this means lobbyists often find themselves with time to fill and if you are interested in politics, what better way of ‘having fun’ than in politics itself or on behalf of a client with whom you have an affinity. This type of activity can have a significant impact on a market (Loomis 2003).

There is a long tradition of commercial lobbying firms working for charitable organisations. Some charitable organisations are far better funded than private companies and no doubt pay lobbyists well for their time, but many do not. Working with highbrow charities will improve your networking or may enhance your image with your key audiences; working for a political party or candidate during an election clearly improves knowledge and arguably access. Whatever the reason, there is a long history of this type of philanthropy.

Since 1997 it has become more common for trade unions to use political lobbyists. At least 20 trade unions used commercial lobbyists between 2001 and

2005. Perhaps this is because of the increasing sophistication of the political campaigning of trade unions. This phenomenon also reflects the pre-eminence of Labour-sympathising lobbyists in the marketplace (post-1990s) wishing to have trade unions on their books (Milner 2005).

Client preference for in-house

A growing number of organisations are building their own in-house public affairs capacity. If you turn to the back of any issue of *PR Week* published between 2001 and 2004, you will observe many more advertisements for in-house lobbying positions than for consultancies and in-house-dominated informal practitioner groupings, such as ‘PubAffairs’ in Westminster, have seen their membership lists expand in recent times, from 10 practitioners in 2002 to 1030 members in 2005 (Milner 2005).

This in-house growth does not seem to have diminished the number of lobbying firms being hired but it has increased the competition for lobbying talent. It has also changed the nature of the retained relationship for many consultants who now have to work alongside public relations and legal departments far more regularly than in the past.

Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that the economy is a key factor determining consultancy success, but it is not the only

case study 32.1 (continued)

one. Whether a change of government automatically drives a growth in the lobbying market is harder to fathom. By 1997 the Labour party had been out of power for many years and businesses and other organisations were not familiar with them. With limited in-house provision firms and organisations turned to consultancies. New governments do herald a plethora of new laws and parliamentary activity, therefore a change probably would influence growth. And, if patterns were to repeat themselves, a further change of government would bring a new generation of ‘rainmak-

ers’ to the top to drive consultancies forward. Those lobbyists, in turn, influence the makeup of their client lists, but it is commercial clients that fund consultancies, effectively subsidising the work carried out on behalf of charities, political campaigns and others by lobbyists themselves. We also await a time when the size of government shrinks. This has not happened since the Second World War but perhaps it may in the future. Whatever the future holds, it seems likely that consultancy lobbying will remain a significant sector within the wider public relations field.

Media fragmentation

The media have been viewed as a powerful force in society for over a century. Their role in society, politics, business and even armed conflict has been acknowledged and frequently subject to in-depth research. The academic interest has focused on behavioural influences, whether these be encouraging us to vote in a particular way, buy specific products or to internalise the views and opinions of political leaders and institutions.

In this textbook we have also explored how the media landscape has evolved with the globalisation of media ownership (look again at the media moguls that existed during the early days of print media and those around today, e.g. Rupert Murdoch). Further developments include the continued introduction of

new media formats, technological developments and changes in audience loyalties linked to this evolution (such as more choice for the receiver). (See Think about 32.9.)

Case study 32.1 focuses on one of the specialisms of public relations practice that has experienced dramatic change over a relatively short period of time. The case is based around up-to-date research into public affairs (lobbying) and highlights how quickly public relations practice moves and why, as students and practitioners, it is important to maintain a critical awareness of the practices we study and work in.

Education

It would be surprising in an academic textbook if education were not raised as a core future concern.

think about 32.9**The media landscape over the next few years**

As the media outlets change and diversify, can practitioners maintain their commitment to keeping all stakeholders informed?

think about 32.10**Role of education in influencing the future of public relations practice**

- 1 Consider the arguments for and against a future profession that is wholly defined by entry qualifications.
- 2 Will a more educated profession (i.e. in terms of public relations knowledge) ensure more ethical practice?
- 3 Should public relations research and education only focus on improving the practice?

However, for public relations this is particularly true. As discussed in Chapter 3, education in public relations is still relatively young. Research in the USA (Port of Entry 1999) and the UK (Tench and Fawkes 2005) demonstrate that education in the discipline is still evolving. The body of knowledge is increasingly being defined and clarified but this work is not yet complete.

Consideration should be given to who is coming into the practice and, specifically, on new entrants'

demographics. For instance, where are they from, what age do they enter, what gender, what social and educational backgrounds do they come from and what skills do they enter with?

Debates continue about the skills required for public relations and whether they are – or should be – intellectual or practical. Is public relations education about training technicians or strategic thinkers? These are important and challenging issues for students to research and explore. (See Think about 32.10.)

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