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‘Public policy windows for philanthropic funding: the case of charitable giving in UK higher education in the 21st century’

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Abstract:

In the UK a sudden policy shift took place with regards to philanthropy in higher education when more attention was paid by government in the early 2000s (DfES 2003, 2004). This has not been investigated within an academic and social policy study; as such the UK government’s perception of the role of philanthropy in the funding debate is unclear. Philanthropy in the provision of higher education remains a relatively under-explored field despite the UK’s long history of philanthropy in higher education throughout the centuries from creation to supporting its institutions (Proper, 2009). This research therefore sets out to address some of these gaps by bringing together the disjointed literature of philanthropy, higher education management and social policy. To date no scholars have made more than a cursory attempt to embed theories about philanthropic influence within other well developed formal theories and in the policy process. The research questions proposed are ‘What are the reasons behind the opening of a policy window for philanthropy in the 21st century in the UK HE sector?’ and

'What is the role of policy making in charitable giving?' These questions will be examined with the help of the policy process theory of policy windows as originally introduced by John Kingdon in his multiple streams approach (Kingdon 1984, 1995, 2003) and has been widely applied in multiple areas of research (Ness 2010; Zahariadas 2007) including the EU policy making (Ackrill and Kay 2011). Kingdon's approach will form the substantial investigation of this paper and will be supported by data from document analysis as well as interviews with senior fundraising professionals. Findings from document analysis of this research have indicated that there is little evidence to suggest philanthropy has been a major feature in public policy in recent years and indicates it being an isolated instance rather than a thematic feature. It was also found that philanthropy was used as a solution to a funding problem in higher education which was analysed with help of the multiple streams approach. This study is a crucial first step towards understanding philanthropy in the policy making process using a policy process theory with the aim to enrich fundraising theory as well as practice.

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