

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

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Abstract

Philanthropy in higher education in the UK received notable policy attention in the early 2000s, yet the topic has not formed part of well-developed policy process theories so far and its appearance has been left unexplained. Policy process theories, such as Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) (1984, 1995, 2003) offer opportunities to introduce and embed philanthropy in formal policy studies. Kingdon’s approach will form the substantial investigation of this research in which the reasons behind the opening of a policy window for philanthropy are examined along with investigating what the role of government should be with regards to supporting philanthropy. This will be supported by data from interviews with senior fundraising professionals. This study firstly argues that several factors including the right timing in which political and ideological shifts were already under way in higher education were present for the window to open. These factors include the use of higher education institutions (HEIs) as a key policy instrument to deliver government goals and the important role of policy entrepreneurs. Secondly, this study found that from the view of fundraisers’, positive outcomes were attributed to the government in encouraging philanthropy which help conceptualising its role but that overreliance on giving mechanisms by policy makers is problematic. This study is a first step towards understanding philanthropy in the policy making process with the help of a dedicated theory, allowing further enrichment of policy and fundraising theory.