

## Fleet Street still packs a punch, finds research

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Printed newspapers are still among the most influential sources of information for senior civil servants, according to University of Manchester research.

The findings are welcome news for Fleet Street journalists, battling against online competitors and ever shrinking print ad revenues.

The results also explode the [myth](#) that Oxbridge educated civil servants tend to go back to their old tutors for advice – only 11% claimed to access academic expertise through that route.

The survey of over 320 senior civil servants by the University's Policy@Manchester network revealed that 61% used newspapers and weeklies to first learn about academic research.

An even higher 79% preferred briefings or reports, but just 27 % used social media, 24% university websites and 9% from University blogsites.

Over half also claimed to be accessing the more 'classic' academic outputs – the 'gold standard' of peer-reviewed academic journal articles.

The 55% figure is surprising, say the team, as most academic publishing is costly, and has not yet embraced the Government's open-access agenda.

Also according to the survey, the disciplines most useful to the civil servants' work were public policy at 63%, economics at 60%, public administration at 54% and business and management 49%.

The sciences were considered to be less useful: only 5% each chose chemistry and physics, 9% biological and 16% medical and biomedical.

The research was carried out Professor Colin Talbot, Director of Policy@Manchester, and Dr Carole Talbot.

Professor Talbot, who is based in the University's School of Social Sciences, said: "We focus on senior civil servants - non-elected public officials - because in British government they play a very important role as 'gatekeepers' of what 'gets into' the policy-making process.

"And this report shows that though many people report the demise of printed newspapers, we are wrong to underestimate their influence.

"In tandem with the 79% preference for research reports, this suggests a preference for 'pre-digested' sources – ones that are quick and cheap, in both money and time to access."

He added: "It is also clear from some of the comments we received that social media and 'web presence' is increasing in importance and may provide opportunities to support engagement between the two communities to a greater extent in the future.

"But it is also clear we are not there yet."

Dr Carole Talbot, based at The University's Business School said: "What is interesting, and perhaps surprising about these results is the degree to which social sciences dominate the responses. Disciplines found most

useful to policy makers

"And it's fascinating that public policy and public administration, were seen as the most and third most useful disciplines.

"Neither of them really exist within British academia as organized disciplines, so there is clearly a mismatch between what senior civil servants and academic institutions see as important.

"However, both sciences and social sciences were rated by 88% as having "a lot" or "some" impact, but sciences scored more highly on "a lot" of impact (40% to 31%).

"These senior civil servants were also surprisingly positive about academics playing a role in the policy process."

She added: "It is gradually being accepted on all sides that the powerhouse of knowledge creation and systematization which our 120 or so Universities represent is a vital national asset for Government, civil society, industry and the economy.

"Our survey suggests a significant minority of senior [civil servants](#) do not regularly and systematically engage with academics and academic research and expertise as well as they might."

Provided by University of Manchester

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