

Experts, politicians and the media

Beware the tyranny of experts.

Whilst like the next person if I fell ill I would turn to a good doctor to help me, that does not mean experts are always right or should make all the decisions.

It has been fashionable for some years to say experts should be in charge of more of our public policy decisions and politicians fewer. This resulted in some famous policy disasters chronicled here . It has also led to greatly contrasting styles of interview on the UK media, especially by the BBC and Channel 4.

If an "expert" is interviewed they are introduced positively, they are rarely interrupted, they are asked questions designed to let them explain their knowledge and viewpoint. The interviewer is often on their side and usually concludes with a short summary of their main points to reinforce them.

In contrast a politician interviewed on the same subject is often introduced with some critical or derogatory reference or characterisation, interrupted often, asked questions which make allegations or allege views to the interviewee which he or she does not hold, seeks to set the interviewer against the politician with a superior moral position and ends with a put down or critical comment.

I have a bigger complaint about the way the so called expert is interviewed than the politician. I of course think interviewers should be challenging and put alternative views where necessary. When interviewing an expert we should be told

Who they represent

Who pays them

Their political affiliations where they have them

What their main qualification is

The interview should consider covering professional competence where relevant. For example, if interviewing an economist about the current crash, did they forecast it or the last one and what did they say about previous disasters? If they earn money from a related interest the interview should also refer to or ask about that. If the expert is a known supporter of a particular political party or movement that too might need to be questioned.

No politician should be given an easy interview, but they should be allowed to state their case before it is probed and questioned. I sometimes am frustrated by interviews of Labour people because the interviewer talks over them to the point where we cannot hear what Labour does actually think or

recommend about a crucial topical issue. I will look in a future post at the ploys interviewers use to ensure politicians come over badly.

[IR35](#)

On Friday I attended a presentation at a business breakfast about the problems created by the new enforcement mechanisms for IR35. The Wokingham Positive Difference networking group met in the Town Hall to hear how companies the Inland Revenue would in future assess whether someone was a sole contractor or in effect an employee working for their client company.

I explained I was against the change of approach by the Revenue. I have written and spoken about the issue. I have lobbied two Chancellors, the Minister concerned and the Prime Minister. I further promised to work with other like minded MPs should a new Parliamentary opportunity present to relaunch the issue in the Commons. Meanwhile implementation goes ahead.

[EU advice on borders and the virus](#)

The EU Commission has reminded all EU states on its website that “it is the responsibility of the Member States to refuse entry on public health grounds to individual 3rd country nationals” where they are judged to be a risk to public health. This applies at all borders between an EU member and third country.

It wants the external border of the EU to be reinforced, with migrants kept separate on arrival until their health has been checked.

It has also made clear it does not recommend that action at internal borders within the EU between member states. It states

“It should also be noted that according to the WTO and others, reintroduction of border controls at internal borders in order to refuse entry is not considered an appropriate preventive (or remedial) measure”

Closing schools?

The Republic of Ireland and Scotland have closed their schools. The rest of the UK has not. I invite views on this.

I do not have a strong view myself as I am not an expert on the virus and do not have access to much of the medical and statistical information about it.

The latest medical view I heard from the government is that the virus either does not attach to so many children, or if it does many remain without visible symptoms. If many children do or will experience a mild or invisible form of the illness it may be impossible to know whether tested or not whether they have had the virus. The test apparently works better on people with symptoms. Medical opinion seems agreed children are the least likely to get a bad version of it and extremely unlikely to die from it.

The one plus from shutting schools is it prevents circulation of the virus between pupils and teachers in school. If the pupils off school continue to socialise with each other and with other adults a lot of this benefit is lost. Only if they go home and stay at home would there be a major and lasting reduction in their number of contacts and therefore in their vulnerability to picking up the virus. If they already have the virus spending all their time at home might increase the chances of other family members contracting it.

There are several negatives in closing schools. Many more adults will have to give up work and mind their children at home. These will include many nurses, doctors and other health workers needed to work in the hospitals and surgeries to tackle the health emergency. Those who make a living out of supplying and providing contract work for schools will lose their income. Education, exams and training will be interrupted, disrupting the life chances of those facing early public examinations that matter.

I am happy with the government's decision so far not to close the schools. It is difficult to believe closing the schools would slow the spread much or protect many more people. Limiting access to care homes and places where vulnerable elderly live might achieve more in limiting infections of those most at risk.

Visit to Bohunt School

On Friday I visited the School. 4 students showed me round, I answered a series of questions from a pupil panel, and had a session with the Headmaster.

I briefly visited a number of spirited and informative lessons and met a series of questions about environmental matters and access to politics for young people.

The School would like to add a Sixth Form to its establishment. I am happy to support that aim, as I agree a Sixth Form can provide academic, sporting and general leadership to a student body