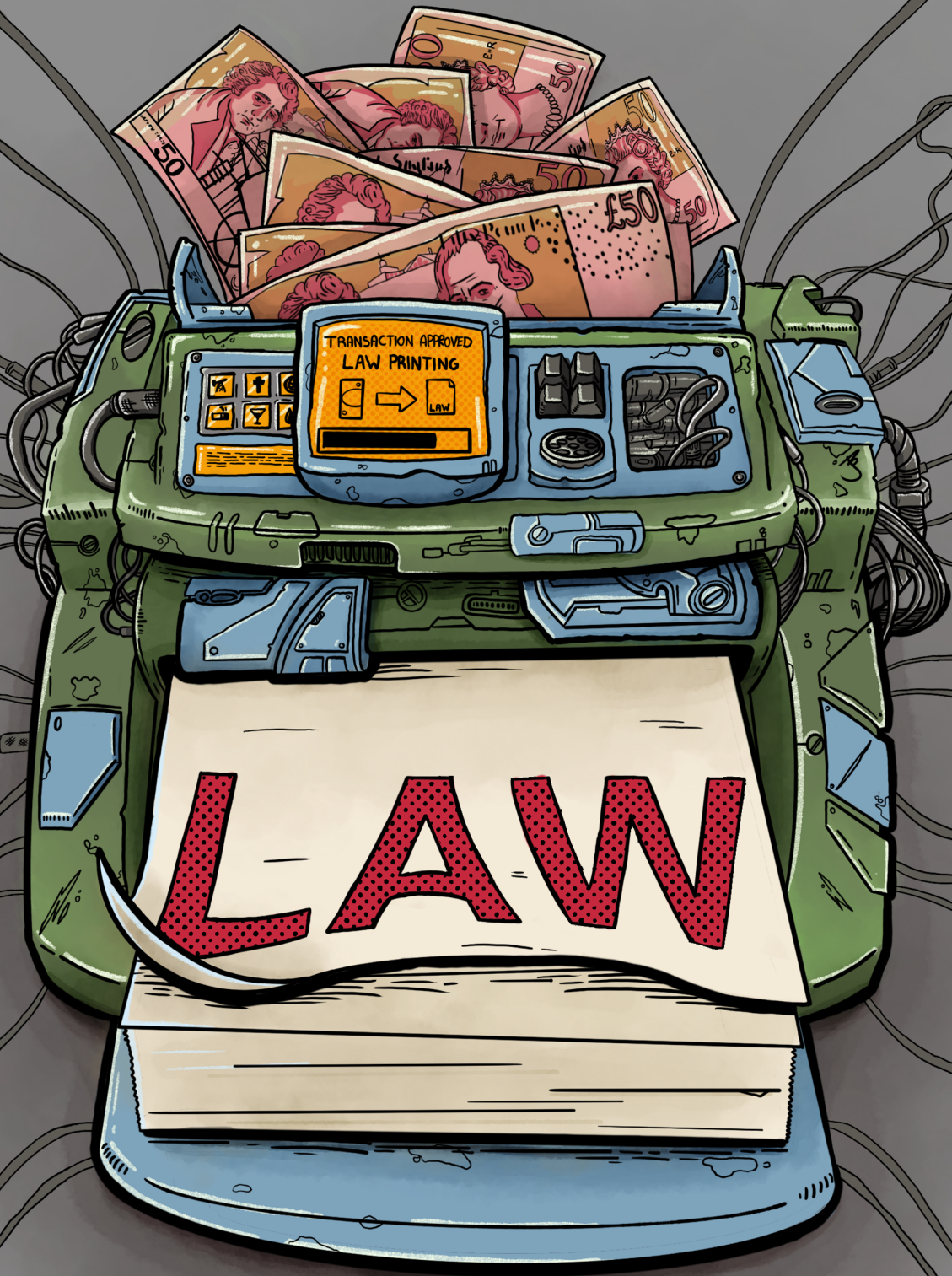


INFLUENCE REPORT 2023



Who **Funds** You?

Introduction

The Who Funds You? project helps people understand more about organisations called think tanks that work to influence public policy.

It offers potential funders and members of the public an independent assessment that helps to identify which think tanks follow best practice. By applying a consistent methodology to rating the financial transparency of think tanks it provides a framework and an incentive for them to declare their funders.

This is the third Who Funds You? report that openDemocracy has produced since 2022. We haven't changed the core methodology that the team of volunteers who began this work established in 2012. This consistency lets us track trends in the transparency of the sector as a whole and it provides reassurance to think tanks that wish to improve their rating that their efforts will be recognised.

We are pleased to have once again increased the number of think tanks we have scrutinised. When we took over the project in 2022, it covered 26 organisations. The report now covers 64. They are many and varied in their size, scope and tactics – but all seek to influence public policy.

This report shows UK-based think tanks raised more than £101m to support their policy work in the last year. Impressive as it is, this number is likely to be a considerable underestimate: 19 of the organisations in our audit were so opaque we could not find a clear income figure for them.

For the first time we have teamed up with the political monitoring service PolicyMogul to help us add an influence rating to our assessment. This additional measure makes it clear why financial transparency is so important. The ability of think tanks to shape public debate – online or in our parliaments – is not notional or theoretical. It is real. This report puts some numbers on this influence for the first time.

PolicyMogul technology now powers live data on our Who Funds You? microsite that shows when individual think tanks are mentioned in UK legislatures, and which political parties have referenced their work. openDemocracy is grateful for the support provided by PolicyMogul.

Key findings

- Opaque think tanks had an income of more than £25m last year, up from £19m in the previous year. This is likely to be a significant underestimate as 19 think tanks did not publish a clear income statement.
- Eight out of 14 highly influential UK think tanks were opaque about their funding – with 'E'-graded think tanks getting almost as many mentions in UK parliaments as 'A'-rated ones.
- 'Dark money'-funded think tanks were more influential on social media than transparent think tanks, even though they raised less cash overall.
- Seven think tanks have improved their transparency rating since 2022 and three have become less transparent.

Who Funds You?

The UK campaign for think tank transparency

Why do we do this?

Think tanks are many and varied.

Some are explicitly affiliated with a particular political party, even if they are rarely democratically run themselves. Others are avowedly non-partisan. Some are charities, some have complex governance structures that extend beyond the UK. Some work with local government, some work across the globe and some focus on the national parliament in Westminster. Some target the devolved legislatures in Edinburgh, Cardiff or London, whilst others target specific policy areas such as the environment, health or the economy.

Some think tanks care deeply about their credibility and proactively aim to be as transparent about their finances as possible. Others seem to do as much as they can to hide where their funding comes from and have tested the boundaries of the law around lobbying and charitable status.

Many have close ties to current or former politicians. Some may have serving politicians on their boards, and some pay politicians to produce policy papers or speak at events. Some think tanks also act as an incubator for aspiring political leaders, helping them to gain contacts, supporters and credibility. Some are also funded by the same people that donate to political parties.

Many take funding from private companies, too. These companies may have self-interested reasons for wanting the government of the day – or a political party that may lead the government in the future – to adopt policies that make it easier for them to operate.

All think tanks try to influence public policy in some way or another. Their annual reports often boast of their access to the machinery of government and that their policy recommendations have been adopted by civil servants and elected politicians.

They do this primarily by producing research and organising events, but they may also try to influence policy in other ways. They may have staff that sit on formal government advisory committees or who directly lobby government ministers. They may be part of international networks that pursue similar policy goals across the planet. They may try to reach a wider audience by producing their own media output, courting journalists who can promote their ideas or running advertising campaigns.

All this activity can have a significant impact on government thinking, even though think tanks themselves are rarely democratically controlled or regulated as lobbyists. It also must all be paid for. This is why understanding who funds think tanks, and who they act for, is so important.

55 Tufton Street - Home To Eight Right-of-Centre Political Organisations | Photo by Ben Pruchnie/Getty Images



Meet the influencers

For the first time this audit has sought to assess the impact of the think tanks we feature. We identified 14 highly influential think tanks as part of this work – meaning that they have a significant influence on public debate as well as among elected policymakers.

Of these 14, eight were found to be opaque about their financing, five were transparent about their sources of income, and one earned an intermediate ‘C’ rating.

Transparent and influential

Organisation	Transparency	Influence rating
Institute for Fiscal Studies	B	High
Resolution Foundation	A	High
Chatham House	B	High
Institute for Government	B	High
Institute for Public Policy Research	A	High

The Institute for Fiscal Studies is the most influential think tank in the UK, according to our methodology. It earned more than 230 mentions in UK legislatures alone, making it by some margin the think tank that British lawmakers reference most. Content published by the organisation is also frequently mentioned on social media, meaning that its work also resonates directly with a wider public.

The IFS earns a great deal of its income from academic research grants from the public sector. Approximately half of its income comes from this source, with a further 20% coming directly from UK government departments. The IFS tends to draw its senior management staff from current or former civil servants or academics.

The Resolution Foundation is the most influential think tank in the UK to also obtain a 'A' grade for financial transparency.

Highly influential and transparent think tanks earned more than 418 mentions in UK parliaments between them, and earned more than 2.2 million social media engagements. They had a combined income of £40.6m.

This group of transparent and influential think tanks are almost twice as likely to be mentioned in Parliament by lawmakers and raised considerably more money – but their opaquely funded rivals are better at digital influencing.

'Dark'-money funded and influential

Organisation	Transparency	Influence rating
Institute of Economic Affairs	D	High
Policy Exchange	D	High
TaxPayers' Alliance	E	High
Centre for Social Justice	D	High
Migration Watch	E	High
Centre for Policy Studies	D	High
Global Warming Policy Foundation	E	High
Reform Scotland	E	High

Between them, influential 'dark money' think tanks were mentioned by name 229 times by UK lawmakers in the 12-month audit period – and they earned more than 2.8 million social media engagements on their digital content.

The TaxPayers' Alliance and Migration Watch are so opaque that we could not identify a published annual income figure for them. In the last year the other influential but opaque think tanks had, between them, an income of more than £12m.

With the exception of Reform Scotland, all of these high-influence, low-transparency think tanks have strong links to the Conservative Party and each other. They often have donors in common too.

To give just a few examples, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) has two Conservative peers on its advisory council, whilst its chairman, Neil Record, is also a Conservative party donor and on the advisory council of Migration Watch. Record is also a director of Net Zero Watch, the campaigning arm of the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF), along with a Conservative MP, Andrea Jenkyns.

Nigel Vinson, a retired Conservative peer, is a life president of the IEA and is also reported to have supported the GWPF¹. Other trustees of the GWPF include author and Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson, and the editor of the Conservative Woman website, Kathy Gyngell. The GWPF was founded by the late Nigel Lawson – a former Conservative chancellor of the exchequer and peer.

Patrick Minford, one of the few academic economists to support Brexit, is on the advisory council of the TaxPayers' Alliance whilst also acting as a trustee of the IEA.

David Frost, a Conservative peer and former government minister, is a fellow and former director of Policy Exchange. He is also a trustee of the Global Warming Policy Foundation.

The Centre for Policy Studies is run by a combination of party donors, Tory politicians, and people with policy or media specialisms. For example, it counts Fraser Nelson, editor of the Spectator, and Conservative Party mega-donor Anthony Bamford among its directors.

1 "Two secret funders of Nigel Lawson's climate sceptic organisation revealed" Rowena Mason, The Guardian, April 10, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/sep/02/nigel-lawson-climate-sceptic-organisation-funders>



David Frost at first bilateral meeting on the future relationship between the EU and UK - March 2020 | Photo by Thierry Monasse/Getty Images

Bamford is also a Conservative peer and chairman of JCB, a manufacturer of construction equipment. Frost, was, until January 2023, paid as an external adviser to the board at JCB. Sitting Conservative MP Graham Brady and Ben Elliot, a former Conservative Party fundraiser and party co-chair, are among many other Tory-connected directors at the Centre for Policy Studies.

Former Tory leader and current MP Iain Duncan Smith is chair of the Centre for Social Justice.

Finally, these think tanks are so intertwined that many of them share an address. The TaxPayers' Alliance, Migration Watch and the GWPF can all be reached at 55 Tufton Street, London – a handy ten-minute walk from Parliament – along with a number of other opaque think tanks and campaign groups.

International links

Many of these influential but opaque think tanks also have international links. The Centre think tank, which recently produced its own report¹ into UK think tank transparency, found that Policy Exchange had received at least \$3.8m through a non-profit US-affiliate arm since the year 2000. Similarly, the IEA received around \$3.1m through a similar US non-profit over the same timescale.

1 Centre Think Tank. **Following The Money Accessed online, November 2023:** <https://centrerethinktank.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Following-the-money.pdf>

Our own research shows that the US arm of the GWPF raised \$1.3m from US donors since 2017 through its own dedicated US foundation.

Digital influence funded from outside the UK

The IEA has received funding from US donors specifically to boost its ability to influence the public directly. It is a member of the US-based Atlas Network of free-market think tanks. A 2021 annual report from the network boasts that it gave the IEA \$20,000¹ specifically to boost a YouTube channel promoting post-Brexit free-trade deals. The channel reportedly went on to earn 500,000 views in one year. In the previous year a report from the same group claimed² that its support helped the IEA to earn “a million YouTube views” and double its “online video subscriptions”.

More recently, our own audit found that the IEA had a significant presence on YouTube, where it earned 1.7 million views over the 12 months to September 2023, more than any other think tank that we covered. The IEA channel regularly platforms right-wing politicians including Claire Fox, Jacob Rees-Mogg, and John Redwood, as well as staffers from other think tanks with similar political positions.

In addition, the IEA invests in Google search advertising to extend its reach and operates a Patreon account to solicit further direct donations from the public³.

The IEA is not the only opaque think tank that seeks to extend its influence with the public by publishing directly online.

The Centre for Policy Studies hosts CapX, an online magazine featuring centre-right authors. Whilst the CPS is opaque about much of its funding, according to an archived web page from the CapX site⁴, it was initially launched with sponsorship from US-based Templeton Foundation – a significant funder of libertarian causes – and the Rising Tide Foundation, a Swiss-based funder with similar interests.

- 1 Atlas Network Grantee Impact Report 2021. Accessed October 2023 via** https://admin.atlasnetwork.org/assets/documents/financials/AtNet-GranteeReport2021_printV3_sngls_2022-07-07-202233_jmft.pdf
- 2 Atlas Network Annual Report 2020. Accessed October 2023 via:** https://admin.atlasnetwork.org/assets/documents/financials/AR_2020_Spreads_2021-08-19-155008_byqa-update-28-1-22.pdf
- 3 Google Ads Transparency Centre, IEA search, accessed October 2023:** <https://adstransparency.google.com/advertiser/AR09611681267036717057?region=anywhere>
- 4 About, CapX. Wayback Machine June 2015. Accessed November 2023:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20150626103044/https://capx.co/about/>

Influencing Holyrood

Reform Scotland is a think tank based in Scotland, and appears here as the most influential of the opaque UK think tanks targeting a devolved legislature.

It does not reveal its donors but its accounts do reveal that three of its directors have provided financial support to the organisation over repeated years. It is chaired by Jack McConnell, a Labour peer and former first minister for Scotland, and it paid CEO Chris Deerin £78k last year. Deerin is also a freelance journalist and Scotland editor of *The New Statesman*.

Until June 2023, the organisation also counted senior Scottish National Party adviser Kevin Pringle among its directors. Pringle resigned to become the Scottish government's head of communications and strategic political adviser.

Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh | Photo by Alistair K Stuart /Getty Images



Financial secrecy networks

So far, our report has focussed on the most influential think tanks. But our methodology may not capture the whole influence of some think tanks where they operate through particularly opaque or disparate networks.

The Legatum network of organisations is a case in point. It operates through a group of organisations based throughout the world, with a Dubai headquarters. The United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is a part, is ranked eighth most opaque country in the Tax Justice Network's global index of financial secrecy¹.

The Legatum.com website names six related initiatives, but the openCorporates database lists many more 'Legatum' corporate entities that may or may not be part of the network – it is not possible to tell, as many are registered in secrecy jurisdictions. Some of the entities named by Legatum, such as the UK-based Legatum Institute, could be considered think tanks, some are more akin to philanthropic development projects, whilst others are apparently investment vehicles.

The Legatum Institute in the UK has charitable status and a long track record of influencing Conservative Party thinking, particularly around Brexit. The Charity Commission criticised it in 2018 for producing Brexit research that did not provide "balanced, neutral evidence and analysis". It is controlled by four directors, all of whom give the same Dubai HQ contact address to Companies House.

The think tank was directly run by another Conservative peer, Philippa Stroud, until March 2023. She has recently taken on a role with another Legatum-funded project, the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship. Prior to working for Legatum, Stroud was an advisor to former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith and co-founded the Centre for Social Justice with him.

- 1 **Atlas Network Grantee Impact Report 2021. Accessed October 2023 via** https://admin.atlasnetwork.org/assets/documents/financials/AtNet-GranteeReport2021_printV3_sngls_2022-07-07-202233_jmft.pdf
- 2 **Atlas Network Annual Report 2020. Accessed October 2023 via:** https://admin.atlasnetwork.org/assets/documents/financials/AR_2020_Spreads_2021-08-19-155008_byqa-update-28-1-22.pdf
- 3 **Google Ads Transparency Centre, IEA search, accessed October 2023:** <https://adstransparency.google.com/advertiser/AR09611681267036717057?region=anywhere>
- 4 **About, CapX. Wayback Machine June 2015. Accessed November 2023:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20150626103044/https://capx.co/about/>

More recently, Dubai-based Legatum Ltd has reportedly flown UK politicians to Dubai for meetings. For example, David Frost's register of interest¹ shows that Legatum funded his flights and accommodation for a trip to Dubai in April 2023. The purpose of the trip is not declared.

Another Dubai-based firm that is part of the Legatum network, Legatum Ventures, owns 43.3% of the controlling shares in GB News. Since its launch June 2021, the UK broadcast regulator Ofcom has upheld five complaints against the channel for accuracy, impartiality and standards since the channel launched, with a number of further standards probes ongoing. The channel has courted controversy by employing right-wing politicians – often sitting Conservative MPs – as presenters.

Nigel Farage, another right-wing politician turned presenter on the channel, has also been handed shares equivalent to more than 1% of the total issued by the broadcaster².

The Legatum network as a whole therefore appears to operate in the UK with many of the traits we have observed in other opaque think tanks: strong links to a network of libertarian or Conservative Party donors and politicians, coupled with an opaque corporate structure and international funding that aims to influence the wider UK public debate as much as influencing lawmakers directly.

The Adam Smith Institute (ASI) is another libertarian think tank. We have awarded it a medium rating for influence and an 'E' rating – our lowest – for financial transparency. It too appears to benefit from a network of opaque international corporate entities, and there is no UK-registered corporate entity that we could find called the Adam Smith Institute.

Donations from members of the public that are received through the Adam Smith Institute website are routed to a UK charity, the Adam Smith Research Trust. For the purposes of this report, it is the income figure reported by this charity to the Charity Commission that we use for the ASI.

However the ASI also has a spun-out and now managerially separate trading company with a number of international affiliates and government contracts. It has a far larger turnover, and has been described in the House of Lords as the “consulting arm”³ of the think tank.

openDemocracy research in 2022 found that the ASI, IEA, Legatum Institute and Policy Exchange had all received more than 10% of their total UK funding from affiliated US-based non-profit fundraising entities. We also found that the GWPF had received 45% of its total income from US donors between 2017 and 2022 via its own US affiliate.

Often these affiliate organisations were found to have donors associated with funding climate-denial causes or financial interests linked to fossil fuels.

- 1 **Lord Frost register of interests. Houses of Parliament website. Accessed November 2023.** <https://members.parliament.uk/member/4879/registeredinterests>
- 2 **GB News Shareholders: Nigel Farage and Dan Wooten top staff awards. Bron Maher, Press Gazette November 13.** <https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/broadcast/gb-news-shareholders-farage-wootton/>
- 3 **Lords Debates, January 2014. Spectator Magazine via Web Archive. Accessed on November 2023.** <https://web.archive.org/web/20130507040119/http://yourdemocracy.newstatesman.com/parliament/adam-smith-institute-dfid-contracts/HAN11255383#main-content>

What has changed?

Many of the think tanks included in this report have been audited by Who Funds You? for the first time. This expanded coverage gives us a much better overview of the extent of the funding available to the UK-based think tank sector as a whole.

For the first time we have identified that more than £101m is raised by UK think tanks each year to influence public policy. Of our 2023 cohort, we found 17 opaque think tanks that do not publish an annual income figure at all. Therefore, it is likely this £101m figure is still an underestimate of the overall amount of money raised by the sector.

There is some indication that more money is being raised overall. Between them, the think tanks we audited last year raised £4.7m more this year than the year before.

Organisation	Transparency	Change
Institute for Fiscal Studies	B	Less transparent
Institute of Economic Affairs	D	More transparent
Chatham House	B	More transparent
Centre for Social Justice	D	More transparent
Centre for Policy Studies	D	More transparent
Bright Blue	D	Less transparent
Demos	B	Less transparent
Centre for Cross Border Studies	A	More transparent
Pivotal	C	More transparent
These Islands	C	More transparent

Two think tanks in particular accounted for much of this funding boost. The Resolution Foundation, whom we have rated with an 'A' grade for transparency and also as highly influential, saw its income rise by £1.2m between our 2022 and 2023 audits. Chatham House, whose transparency rating improved from a 'C' to a 'B' this year, saw its income grow by £1.8m.

The Tax Justice Network saw the biggest drop in annual income, with a £477,438 fall.

Seven think tanks became more transparent, with three becoming less so. Three think tanks that were previously awarded our lowest 'E' grade were awarded a 'D' this year, as they have all named some of their funders.

Both Northern-Irish-focussed think tanks in our audit – the Centre for Cross Border Studies and Pivotal – have taken significant steps to improve their transparency ratings during 2023.

Case study

Opaque and 'embarrassingly wrong'

For a further example of an opaque UK-based think tank producing misleading 'research', meet 'E'-rated Civitas, another organisation resident at 55 Tufton Street, that earned a medium rating for influence.

It produced a report, dubbed "embarrassingly wrong" by one expert, in which it claimed to be able to estimate the "true cost" of net-zero policies. It suggested that the costs were far higher than had previously been estimated by other independent bodies, such as the Committee on Climate Change.

Despite the criticism, the Civitas report received positive coverage across the media, often from authors working for other think tanks based in Tufton Street, before the report itself was withdrawn.

Having achieved this positive media coverage, not all the media outlets that covered the report published a retraction or correction.

At the time this Who Funds You? research was put together, the Civitas website entry for the 'Net Zero' report reads: "This report has been taken down from the website because it was found to contain factual errors."

The Civitas 'Net Zero' report provides an instructive case study into the brand risk media organisations – and indeed lawmakers – must consider before citing 'research' published by opaque think tanks, even if this is through opinion pieces by authors who may present as experts representing a different organisation.

This table is ordered from high to low influence

Organisation	Income	Change	Influence Rating	2023 Rating
Institute for Fiscal Studies	£9,175,531	Less transparent	High	B
Institute of Economic Affairs	£2,565,000	More transparent	High	D
Resolution Foundation	£3,285,540	No change	High	A
Policy Exchange	£3,951,594	No change	High	E
The Royal United Services Institute	£15,367,601	New	High	C
Chatham House	£20,009,000	More transparent	High	B
Institute for Government	£5,399,417	No Change	High	B
TaxPayers' Alliance	Not disclosed	No Change	High	E
Centre for Social Justice	£2,990,422	More transparent	High	D
Reform Scotland	£186,594	No Change	High	E
Institute for Public Policy Research	£2,741,065	No Change	High	A
Migration Watch	Not disclosed	New	High	E
Centre for Policy Studies	£2,158,626	More transparent	High	D
Global Warming Policy Foundation	£390,632	New	High	E
Business for Scotland	£267,743	No Change	Medium	A
Green Alliance	£2,753,944	New	Medium	B
Unlock Democracy	£365,299	No Change	Medium	A
Adam Smith Institute	£180,248	No Change	Medium	E
Social Market Foundation	£857,605	No Change	Medium	B
The Bruges Group	Not disclosed	New	Medium	E
Onward	Not disclosed	New	Medium	C
Centre for Cities	£1,751,747	No Change	Medium	B
New Economics Foundation	£3,134,397	No Change	Medium	A
The Bevan Foundation	£350,134	No Change	Medium	A
Runnymede Trust	£1,934,632	New	Medium	A
The Foreign Policy Centre	Not disclosed	New	Medium	D
E3G	£6,913,771	New	Medium	D
Legatum Institute	£4,175,671	No Change	Medium	E
Institute of Welsh Affairs	£340,935	No Change	Medium	A
Tax Justice Network	£2,445,137	No Change	Medium	A
Bright Blue	Not disclosed	Less transparent	Medium	D
Fabian Society	£811,381	No Change	Medium	A

Organisation	Income	Change	Influence Rating	2023 Rating
Common Weal	£142,684	No Change	Medium	A
These Islands	£27,465	More transparent	Medium	C
Compass	£426,654	No Change	Medium	A
New Local	Not disclosed	New	Medium	D
Civitas	£605,251	No Change	Medium	E
Conservative Way Forward	Not disclosed	New	Medium	E
Orthodox Conservatives	Not disclosed	New	Medium	E
Centre for London	£1,047,279	No Change	Low	B
Our Scottish Future	Not disclosed	No Change	Low	E
Labour Together	£702,500	New	Low	A
ResPublica	£74,259	No Change	Low	E
Public Policy Projects	Not disclosed	New	Low	D
Demos	£1,425,138	Less transparent	Low	B
Migration Policy Scotland	£75,282	No Change	Low	A
British Future	£649,117	New	Low	D
Centre for Health and the Public Interest	£146,988	New	Low	A
Reform	£393,565	No Change	Low	B
Centre for the Union	Not disclosed	New	Low	E
The Bow Group	Not disclosed	New	Low	E
High Pay Centre	£160,250	No Change	Low	A
Scottish Business UK	Not disclosed	No Change	Low	E
Centre	£771	New	Low	A
The Entrepreneurs Network	Not disclosed	New	Low	D
Centre for Cross Border Studies	£480,777	More transparent	Low	A
Jimmy Reid Foundation	£31,000	No Change	Low	D
Scottish Independence Convention	Not disclosed	No Change	Low	E
Scotland Futures Forum	£135,321	No Change	Low	A
Pivotal	£86,525	More transparent	Low	C
Social and Environmental Justice	Not disclosed	No change	Low	E
The Centre for Enterprise, Markets & Ethics	Not disclosed	New	Low	E
New Social Covenant Unit	£360,498	New	Low	E
IPPR Scotland	£360,498	Unknown	Low	A

Recommendations

Based on our research, the **Who Funds You?** project makes a series of recommendations for different stakeholders that will help to promote more transparency and accountability in public life.

Media

- Media organisations should be wary of platforming think tanks with low transparency ratings without making it clear to their audience that they do not disclose their funders.
- Media organisations should be aware of the reputational risk associated with uncritically publishing the views and research findings produced by opaque think tanks.
- Journalists should check the financial disclosure pages of think tanks. Where think tanks have declared funders – or been found to have been funded by donors that have a material financial interest in the policy debate at hand – this should always be disclosed to media audiences.

Think tanks

- All think tanks in the UK should strive to achieve a grade 'A' in the Who Funds You? ranking.
- Think tanks that support the aims of the Who Funds You? project may choose to promote the project by prominently displaying their transparency rating on their website and linking to the project website at <https://whofundyou.org>
- Think tanks should take particular care to disclose international funders.

MPs, politicians and government

- Elected representatives and civil servants should not use research produced by think tanks which are opaque about their funding.
- When presented with evidence from think tanks which are opaque about their funding in formal situations like committees or inquiries, elected representatives should challenge think tanks to reveal who funds them
- MPs and government should scrutinise the foreign income of influential think tanks which do not declare their funding
- The law should be changed to make think tanks register as lobbyists if they receive more than a certain amount from a single source (we suggest £85,000) and promote policy ideas beneficial to that source to government ministers or officials.

Charity regulators

- The Charity Commission should rigorously enforce regulations around charitable status where legitimate concerns are raised about the political activities of think tanks.

Who Funds You?

The UK campaign for think tank transparency

Methodology

Transparency

Using the original methodology developed by Who Funds You?, openDemocracy looked at organisations' own websites, or annual accounts where a link was provided by the think tank website. Ratings are based on accessibility of information. To meet each relevant rating, organisations must meet all the criteria listed.

To be eligible for an A, B or C rating, organisations should also publish their annual income.

A

- Names all funders who gave £5,000 or more in the last reported year.*
- Declares exact amount given by each funder.

B

- Names at least 85% of funders (by value) who gave £5,000 or more in the last reported year.
- Groups funders into precise funding bands.**
- (Organisations that use broad funding bands may be eligible for a B rating as long as they name all funders.)

C

- Names at least 50% of funders (by value) who gave £5,000 or more in the last reported year.
- Groups funders into precise or broad funding bands.
- (Organisations that omit funding bands may be eligible for a C rating as long as they name all funders.)

D

- Names some funders (but only a minority, or not in a systematic way).

E

- No or negligible relevant information provided.

* During 2023, the earliest reported year we will accept is 2021.

** Precise funding bands should be no broader than £10,000 for amounts up to £50,000, no broader than £20,000 for amounts between £50,000 and £200,000, and no broader than £50,000 for amounts above that.

Transparency

In addition to auditing think tanks' financial transparency, this year we sought to rate the influence of these organisations too. We recognise that there is no single, objective measure of policy influence – particularly for organisations like ours with limited budgets.

The method we came up with sorts think tanks into three bands: high, medium and low influence.

It is based upon two measures. The first measure is social media engagements. This was based on social media engagements on content produced by the think tank on Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Pinterest and YouTube. We used social media monitoring tools called Buzzsumo and Socialblade to gather this data. We used that data to calculate a social influence score of 0-4, with 0 being the lowest and 4 being the highest.

In addition, through the PolicyMogul platform we identified how many mentions each think tank had received in British parliaments between October 2022 and September 2023. We then gave them a score of 0-6, with 0 being the rating for least influential and 6 the highest.

We then added those two scores together to make a combined influence score out of 10.

Lastly we used these scores to put the think tanks into the three bands, with the condition that none could be rated as highly influential without significant scores for both policy influence and social-media influence.

When we shared the data with think tanks as part of the research process a number of them flagged up limitations of this methodology which we acknowledge and would urge readers to bear in mind:

- It prioritises public debate and controversy, and so may not capture policy-influencing activities of think tanks that operate at a local level, or that target civil servants instead of elected politicians.
- It does not directly take account of mainstream media mentions or appearances.
- It may not include activities where a think tank has operated as part of a coalition or supported a particular project – where the coalition or project is more high-profile than the think tank.
- It does not capture actual policy changes implemented as a consequence of think tank activity.

But who funds openDemocracy?

PolicyMogul

PolicyMogul is an all-in-one political monitoring, campaigning and analysis platform used by think tanks, public affairs professionals, policymakers, charity leaders and strategists. Features of the service include:

- Comprehensive UK political monitoring
- Policymaker sentiment analysis on any issue
- Full political CRM including email tracking
- Lobbying platform to connect with policymakers
- Political analytics on any issue
- Fully customisable dashboards, alerts and integrations

openDemocracy is not a think tank and it is for others to assess our own transparency efforts. Nevertheless, we are proud to disclose all the funders who give us more than £5,000 per year, along with the purpose of each of these donations. In addition, we are grateful for the support of thousands of individual donors who choose to invest in our work. You can find out more at opendemocracy.net/en/supporters

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Who Funds You?

The UK campaign for think tank transparency

Written and produced by:

Alistair Tibbitt (Alastair.tibbitt@opendemocracy.net)

Carla Abreu (Carla.abreu@opendemocracy.net)

James Battershill (James.battershill@opendemocracy.net)

Stewart Kirkpatrick (Stewart.kirkpatrick@opendemocracy.net)

Cover illustration by:

James Battershill (James.battershill@opendemocracy.net)

**18-22 Ashwin Street
London E8 3DL**

opendemocracy.net