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The role of think tanks

context, impact and relationship with academia

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June 9th 2010

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Key functions of think tanks

- Identify policy problems and conduct research to better understand them, their key drivers and implications
- Transform ideas into a policy agenda, research conclusions into practical policies (costed, feasible but radical, tested against public opinion)
- To provide a forum for public debate and discussion

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Types of think tank

- Universities without students
e.g. *Brookings, IFS*
- Contract research organisations
e.g. *Institute of Employment Studies, NIESR*
- Advocacy tanks
e.g. *Adam Smith Institute, Institute for Economic Affairs, Centre for American Progress, Fabians*

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A brief history of think-tanks

1950s

- Hayek organises Mont Pelerin Society (1947)
- Institute for Economic Affairs (1955 Advocacy group against Keynes and 'post war consensus')
- Big picture thinking, integral to rise of radical 'neoliberal' right

1970s

- Term 'think tank' first applied to Central Policy Review Staff (1970/1 in Cabinet Office under Heath – survived till 1983)
- Much narrower role of policy planning and research within government

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Brief history of think-tanks

Late 80s/1990s

- Move to more partisan/advocacy based think tanks...ippr, Demos, SMF
- Changing approach to policy and evidence within government post 1997... 'craft of government has become a bit more like science' (Mulgan)

Current landscape

- Growth of think tanks and specialisms (plural knowledge bases)
- 'Think and do tanks' e.g. Young Foundation
- Charity Commission - focus on public interest
- Competition for funding (academic bodies, corporate and government contracts, charitable trusts, individual donors)

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The three ages of ippr...



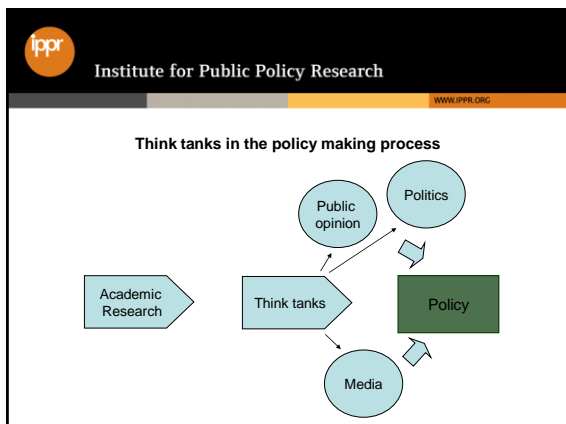
The early years
set up to provide the intellectual space for Labour to move centre-left



The teenage years
a policy pipeline to New Labour in early years

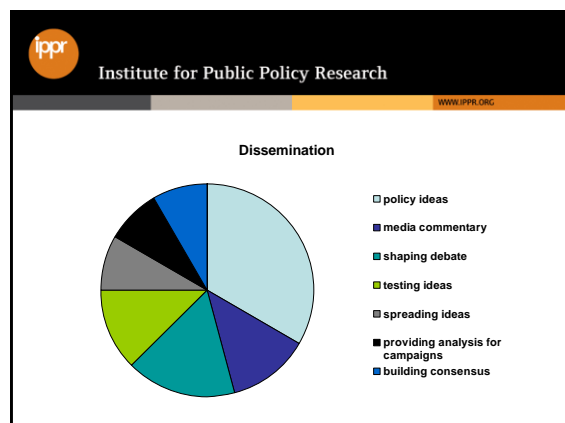


Maturity
An independent value-based think tank speaking to a wider audience and using a wide range of methods to influence change



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- How think-tanks influence policy**
- The creative bit**
- Bridge between academia and policymakers
 - Primary research (qual and quant)
 - Secondary research (govt data) and lit reviews/case studies
 - Identify proposals (test, cost, pros and cons, bigger picture)
- Dissemination**
- Media
 - Events (conferences, seminars, roundtable discussions, learning trips)
 - Publications (short, exec summaries, targeted audience)
 - Briefing decision makers
 - Public engagement

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- Differences with academia**
- Aim of research (difference between policy *relevant* research; researching policy; and creating policy proposals)
 - Dissemination (effort and mode)
 - Staff training/background
 - Depth v breadth
 - Type of publication (length, language, content)
 - Wider policy context
 - Audience



- Institute for Public Policy Research**
- How ippr work with academics**
- Research Associates
 - Direct collaboration on projects
 - Publish one-off papers
 - Policy Advisory Council
 - Journal *Public Policy Research*
 - Speaking at events
 - Interviews, sharing publications, informal contacts
- Formal
-
- Informal

