

April 2025

The monthly summary of
consultation matters by
Consultation Guru –

Rhion Jones

Consultation Catch-up



In the wake of Trump's tariffs, the UK Government has launched a 4-week consultation on how best to respond, illustrating three of the reasons why it can sometimes be the right approach. One: it demonstrates that the issue is being taken seriously. Two: It 'buys time'. Three: it genuinely offers key stakeholders the opportunity to contribute their ideas. Note, however, they don't call it a consultation; it is a '*call for input*'! If Ministers think this ruse makes the Gunning principles inapplicable, they will be disappointed!

(Photo in Bratislava in March and with Lucas Wijntjes of *Site Podium* as it re-brands to *Publiq*)

Best of the Blogs

[Dear Wes Streeting, I'm worried about patient and public involvement](#) (Blog 96) [Probably the most widely- read Blog I have published in 2 years!]



There is a danger that Ministers are about to make a big mistake. In their drive to streamline the NHS, they are threatening to **weaken patient and public involvement in England!** In defence of the great work being done by dedicated people who engage with local communities on a daily basis, this Blog champions the cause. Someone has to make the case. This is not just for public engagement specialists - but for all NHS staff, Councils and communities everywhere who need a better NHS & Care service.

[Rachel Reeves and the push for Regulators to back economic growth](#) (Blog 95)



It was always likely that Regulators would be doing a lot of the heavy lifting for the Government's change agenda. But now Rachel Reeves needs them to **go for growth** as well.

If the PM hadn't changed his mind about Quangos, I'd be expecting OFGROW any moment!

This Blog will save you the trouble of reading the **Chancellor's Action Plan** that will re-direct the work of 100+ Regulators. Or will it?. It emerges that the previous Government was already pursuing this approach. But then they didn't have Trump's tariffs to worry about!

[Starmer's 'streamlining': An attack on consultation? Or an overdue correction to excessive bureaucracy?](#) (Blog 94)



Reflections on the PM's new mission to streamline the State. Does it mean curbing consultation and imposing change on unheard stakeholders? Or has he spotted that protracted consultations are often ineffective? On the week when NHS England was abolished, and the **Planning & Infrastructure Bill** finally emerged, it

might be wise to resist knee-jerk reactions, and consider again whether the problem is not too much consultation ... but poor consultation!

[On Page 2](#) this month, a reflection on the High Court challenge to VAT on school fees, some thoughts on the Plan for Neighbourhoods, and a review of [both](#) recent books on Labour's 2024 election success.

Instant insights

- The [Independent Schools Council](#) has just been to the High Court to challenge Ministers for levying VAT on school fees. Press reports ahead of the case complained that there had not been sufficient consultation, but as it was a clear Manifesto commitment, this was a weak argument and lawyers ultimately chose to focus on [breaches of Human Rights to education](#) and discrimination against pupils not otherwise catered for well in the state sector. A touch ironic, since some of the public schools' foremost backers are prominent in seeking to abandon our adherence to the European Convention on Human Rights. *C'est la vie!*
- A Month ago, the UK-wide [Plan for Neighbourhoods](#) was launched to a largely positive welcome. It promises investment of £1.5bn over ten years - up to £20m for each of 75 selected neighbourhoods. They are now setting up **Neighbourhood Boards** in a hurry, and there are rather a lot of unanswered questions. For a great preliminary critique, look at Reading University's [Just Neighbourhoods](#) project. As with the last Government's controversial **Towns Fund**, a key issue for me is the extent and nature of local engagement and consultation that will influence how the money is spent. What therefore to make of this sentence that appeared in the Government's announcement?

"We are providing the time, space and funding to avoid under-resourced and generic consultation, to ensure Neighbourhood Boards hear from everybody, and include those from marginalised or deprived communities who typically may struggle to make their voices heard."

I had to read it several times! Is it that someone in Whitehall has finally discovered that there are different ways to undertake consultation – and they don't all have to be long and formal?

- With the Football Governance Bill almost on the statute book, we are now shortly taking bookings for the Seminar/Workshop **on fan engagement/consultation**. Lots of interesting issues - not just for the football clubs but also local Councils and the communities they serve.

Part of the GROWTH agenda ??????

Life with Football Regulation ...

Preparing for meaningful fan engagement and consultation

Wednesday 14 May 2025

Marble Arch, London **Tickets £159**

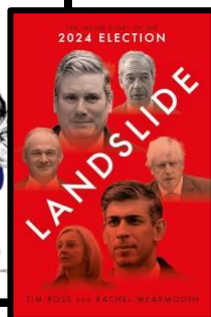
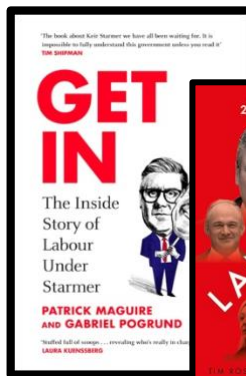
10.30am – 3.30pm

Speakers include Rhion Jones, Consultation GuRU
Kevin Rye, Think Fan Engagement
David Millar of LCD & case studies/insights from
Everton FC, Man Utd and Chelsea Supporters Trusts

Full details from
<https://fanengagement.net>
Bookings open 7 April

Coming soon

The Reading List



Two accounts of the same story? McGuire and Pogrud's '[Get In](#)' charts the long march of Starmer's rehabilitation of Labour, and Ross and

Wearmouth's '[Landslide](#)' tells the story of the 2024 Election. Being contemporary journalism rather than historical research, both rely heavily on willing informants – and it shows. Starmer's progress is much influenced by the ever-present Morgan McSweeney who seems blessed with a permanent halo. It is also laced with criticisms of the Labour leader. The media has already enjoyed repeating Angela Rayner's alleged comment that Starmer was incapable of running a bath, and others' claims that he was more of a HR

Manager than a Leader. The Election story, in contrast, emerges as a trouble-free procession of the boringly competent towards power – relinquished by an accident-prone but well-meaning Conservative party doomed to failure from the outset. 'Landslide' is stronger on analysis/reflection than on the narrative itself and its concluding pages acknowledges the role of luck in politics! Nigel Farage helped considerably! **Both books are worth reading** – if only to understand better how the Labour Government of today sees the world and addresses its challenges.

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