

**Cover Sheet
2019-20**

Course Code	DV455
MSc programme (circle as applicable/add if your programme isn't listed)	E&D
Candidate Number (5 digit number from LSE For You - NOT from your ID card, NOT your Student number)	56163
Title	Individual Influencing Strategy - #WriteToFuel: Campaign to End Fuel Poverty in England
Seminar Leader	Duncan Green and Tom Kirk
Due Date	04.05.20
Word Count if applicable (<i>excluding</i> title, header, bibliography; <i>including</i> footnotes/endnotes and appendices)	2,000

Coursework must be submitted with a header in the following format:

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Page x of y

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Word limit: Exceeding the word limit will AUTOMATICALLY be penalised at the rate of 1 mark per 100 words (or part thereof).

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Introduction

Fuel poverty occurs when a household cannot afford to stay sufficiently warm due to low income, high fuel prices or inadequate energy efficiency. It can have adverse impacts on respiratory, cardiovascular and mental health and lead to excess winter deaths, particularly among the elderly and vulnerable (NEA, 2015c). Since the 1970s, fuel poverty has been the focus of several NGOs, such as National Energy Action (NEA), which have campaigned for progressive legislation to tackle the problem. These organisations have had some wins over the years (NEA, 2015a) yet as of 2017, 2.53 million households in England are still living in fuel poverty and we are on course to miss our 2020 and 2025 fuel poverty targets (Emden et al., 2018).

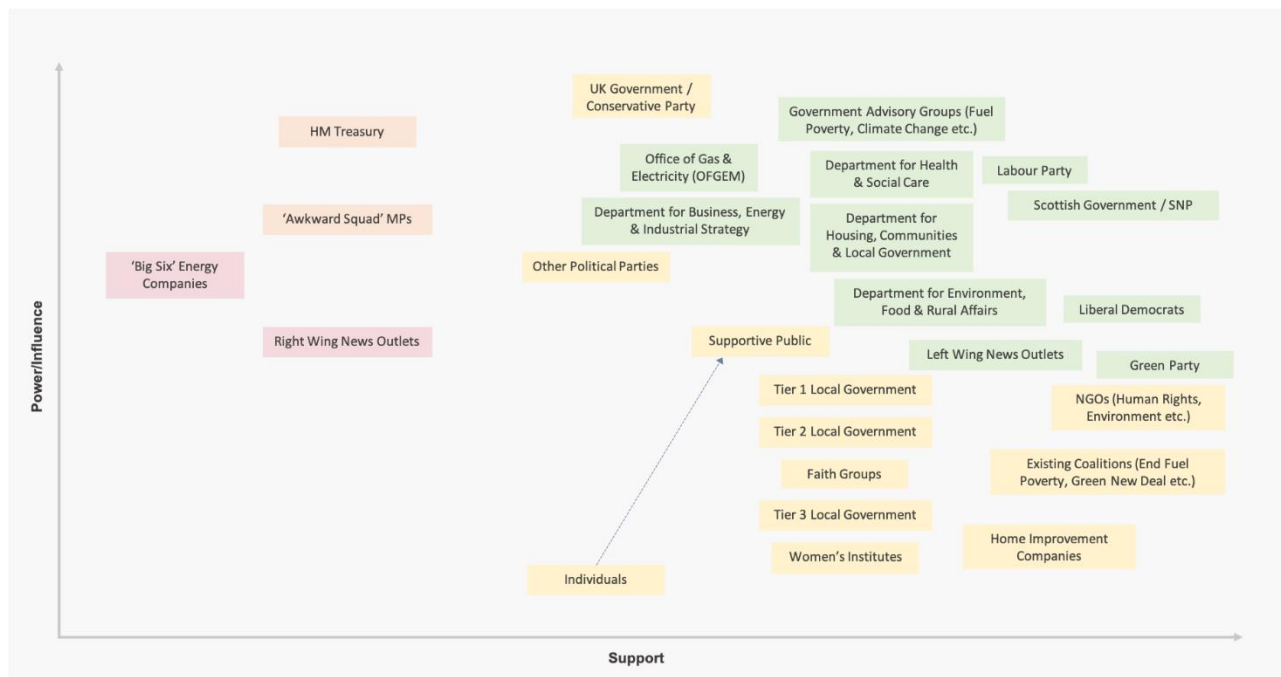
Context analysis

The Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act (2000) committed the UK government to eradicate fuel poverty in England by 2016 and for vulnerable groups by 2010. When it became apparent that these targets would not be met in 2008, Friends of the Earth and Help the Aged tried to take the UK government to court but their application was dismissed due to the Bill's caveat: "as far as is reasonably practicable" (NEA, 2015b). Since then, the UK government has implemented a number of schemes to help households with their fuel bills, although some were scrapped in the 2010s (NEA, 2015b). In any case, the number of fuel-poor households in England increased by 4% between 2003 and 2017 (UK Government, 2019), indicating that efforts to address the problem have been insufficient.

NGOs claim that the most effective way to address fuel poverty is through energy efficiency upgrades for affected households (End Fuel Poverty, 2014). The UK government's advisory bodies are in agreement: the Committee on Fuel Poverty (2018) has recommended that HM Treasury should allocate billions in funding to boost household energy efficiency and meet England's 2020 and 2025 fuel poverty targets; and the Committee on Climate Change (2019) has stressed that retrofitting homes should be a national infrastructure priority. Currently, the UK government is significantly off track in meeting its 2035 energy efficiency targets for England (House of Commons, 2019).

In 2019, the Scottish Parliament passed a world-leading Fuel Poverty Bill (FPB) which "enshrines in law the Scottish government's commitment to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty". Through the adoption of specific targets, a new fuel poverty definition and clear strategy and reporting requirements, the Bill seeks to ensure that fuel-poor Scottish homes are transformed to become warm and energy efficient (Scottish Government, 2019). Following the example set by Scotland, the goal of the #WriteToFuel campaign is to introduce an FPB for England and have it made law. Crucially, the Bill will have specific, binding targets to ensure the government can be held to account.

Figure 1: UK Fuel Poverty Stakeholder Map



Stakeholder mapping and power analysis

This analysis draws from Rowlands' (1997) Four Powers Model. As the governing party with a significant majority, the Conservative Party holds 'power over' as they can introduce Public Bills in Parliament and rally enough support to have them passed (UK Parliament, 2020b, 2020c). Their 2019 manifesto pledged billions of pounds to improve the energy efficiency of homes, hospitals and schools (The Conservative Party, 2019), indicating support for an FPB in principle.

David Amess MP, a backbench MP who supports fuel poverty measures (Courtenay, 2018), will be approached to introduce the FPB in Parliament as a Presentation Bill (although the ultimate aim is to see the government pass the FPB as a Public Bill, once a critical mass of support has been reached). Around 80 Conservative MPs are committed to driving the green agenda in Westminster who will likely support the FPB (Conservative Environment Network, 2018). On the other hand, the 'awkward squad' of Conservative MPs, known for rebelling against their party whip and voting down Bills in Parliament, could act as blockers (Doré, 2015).

HM Treasury is responsible for public spending and the delivery of infrastructure projects. They are perhaps the most important stakeholder to gain support from, although this could be challenging given their priorities include "achieving strong and sustainable growth" and "reducing the deficit and rebalancing the economy" (UK Government, 2020a). It will be necessary to convince HM Treasury that energy efficiency provides high value for money (Downy et al., 2015). Other government departments, particularly those pertaining to social welfare and the environment, possess significant 'power to' as they can influence the government's agenda and the budget administered by HM Treasury. They will likely be supportive of the FPB as it is consistent with their aims.

The opposition parties hold 'power to' as they can introduce Private Members' Bills in Parliament, however a minority of these Bills become law since they are allocated less time than Public Bills (UK

Parliament, 2020a) and can be blocked by opposition tactics such as filibustering (Stone, 2016). With commitments to end austerity and a range of ambitious fuel poverty targets (Labour, 2019; Liberal Democrats, 2019; SNP, 2019), the main opposition parties will likely have strong support for fuel poverty measures – especially SNP which tabled Scotland’s FPB (Scottish Government, 2019).

NGOs, faith groups and other organisations hold strong ‘power with’ and together they can mobilise their existing coalition members and thousands of supporters to lobby MPs, thereby exerting ‘power to’. Fuel poverty is a cross-cutting issue and support will likely be high among many organisations, particularly those which represent the elderly (e.g. Age UK), BAME communities (e.g. ROTA), women (e.g. Women’s Institutes) and the disabled (e.g. Disability Rights UK) – i.e. groups that are affected most by fuel poverty (NEA, 2015d; UK Government, 2019; Women’s Budget Group, 2018).

In the UK construction industry, hundreds of thousands of people are employed (Statista, 2020) and there is likely to be particular support from home improvement companies, which stand to benefit from new retrofitting contracts. On the other hand, the ‘Big Six’ energy companies possess significant lobbying power and may oppose the FPB in case it impacts their profits, although their trade association appears to be campaigning for a low-carbon transition at present (Energy UK, 2019).

Local authorities hold strong ‘power to’ on regional scales but do not have significant influence when it comes to national law (UK Government, 2020b). Nonetheless, they are responsible for the welfare of people in their communities and will likely be supportive of fuel poverty measures, especially those that face severe funding gaps (Local Government Association, 2018) and those that have declared climate emergencies (Campaign Against Climate Change, 2019).

Strategy

Policy research

A series of home retrofitting case studies from across England will be researched and published to demonstrate the social and economic benefits that the FPB would bring to fuel-poor households. A cost-benefit analysis of the FPB will also be commissioned to calculate carbon emissions reductions, job creation and the rate of return on investment. This research is necessary to persuade HM Treasury that domestic energy efficiency is a sensible investment that can contribute towards economic growth. It will be important to approach a credible and trusted intermediary, such as the Committee on Fuel Poverty, to relay the findings and recommendations.

This research will also help to build ‘power to’ among supportive stakeholders, for example it could bolster the argument of a councillor trying to pass a motion in support of the Bill. Different statistics and case studies can be utilised depending on the audience, for example hard-line Conservative MPs might be more receptive to cost savings while civil servants (e.g. from the Department for Health and Social Care) and the general public might be more receptive to environmental and health benefits. Another purpose for this research will be to delegitimise powerful stakeholders who oppose the FPB and may seek to lobby against it (e.g. the ‘Big Six’ energy companies).

Coalition building

A diverse range of NGOs, private-sector companies, local authorities, existing coalitions and other organisations from across England will be invited to join a #WriteToFuel coalition and sign an open-letter asking the government to support the FPB. This will help to gain the attention of senior MPs within government and the major political parties. Coalition members will be consulted on the FPB

during the drafting process to ensure that it is consistent with their aims and the needs of the fuel poor people that they represent. For example, Fuel Poverty Action might want the government's COVID-19 agreement with energy suppliers to remain when the crisis is over (Fuel Poverty Action, 2020). By building solidarity and 'power with' among these stakeholders, they will feel more inclined to take action on our behalf, for example by writing to MPs or encouraging their supporters to join #WriteToFuel.

Public engagement

MPs and councillors have a duty to represent and further the interests of their constituency (House of Commons, 2007), therefore a core aspect of this campaign will be the mass sign-up and mobilisation of the general public. Certain constituencies will be prioritised to ensure that 'awkward squad' MPs, Ministers of the relevant government departments (see figure 1) and Rishi Sunak (Chancellor of the Exchequer) receive sufficient lobbying pressure from the public.

A paid social media campaign (figure 2) will be launched to raise awareness about the plight of fuel poor households, explain how the FPB offers a solution and generate sign-ups. Supporters will then be asked to lobby their MP to back the FPB, e.g. by writing a letter or attending MP surgeries. The hashtag '#WriteToFuel' will be used to incite an online trend, whereby supporters share a letter, postcard or tweet that they have written to their MP and nominate a friend to do the same. Shareable content will be created using 'killer facts' from the policy research and a petition asking Rishi Sunak MP to support the Bill will be circulated.

Figure 2: #WriteToFuel social media posts

The figure displays two social media posts for the #WriteToFuel campaign. The top post is a Facebook advertisement from the page #WriteToFuel, which is sponsored. The text of the post reads: "Millions of people across the UK can't afford to stay warm. If made law, the Fuel Poverty Bill would ensure free insulation for the most vulnerable households. Sign up to support our campaign today." Below the text is a photograph of an elderly man with glasses and a young child. Underneath the photo, it says "Join Write to Fuel today" and "Help people like Bill keep their home warm". A "Sign Up" button is visible, along with the website URL WRITETOFUEL.COM. The post shows 20 likes, 562 comments, and 311 shares. The bottom post is an Instagram advertisement from the account #WriteToFuel, also sponsored. The main text in large, bold, orange letters says: "FUEL POOR HOUSEHOLDS PAY £325 MORE PER YEAR TO STAY WARM". Below this, it says "#WriteToFuel" and "Source: End Fuel Poverty, 2020". There is a "Learn More" link with a right-pointing arrow. At the bottom, it shows "416 likes" and a caption: "#WriteToFuel Let's close the gap. Sign our petition to support the Fuel Poverty Bill."

Supporters and coalition members will also be provided with #WriteToFuel posters, leaflets and postcards which can be distributed among people in their local groups and surrounding area. These offline materials will help to generate support and encourage MP lobbying among those without internet access, particularly the elderly and low-income households represented by the campaign. Both online and offline communications will emphasise the efficacy of supporters' individual actions to build 'power within' and celebrate campaign successes to create a sense of community and build 'power with'.

Critical junctures

COVID-19

Billions of pounds are being spent to support the UK economy through the COVID-19 crisis and low-carbon investment is expected to fall off the agenda (Ambrose, 2020). This is evident in Scotland where the government has already delayed regulations to improve the energy efficiency of private rented housing (Scottish Housing News, 2020). The aims of #WriteToFuel must therefore be linked to the crisis in a compelling way to ensure that they stand out and remain salient among different stakeholders, particularly HM Treasury, in the aftermath of the crisis. Communications will highlight how the impacts of COVID-19 – i.e. job losses, increased energy bills, health impacts – are felt more acutely by fuel poor households. At the same time, the role of energy efficiency in building public resilience and saving money for future crises will be emphasised.

COP 26

The UK is widely recognised as a global leader on climate change (ECIU, 2019). Therefore, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow – now delayed till 2021 – will be an ideal moment to raise awareness about the UK government's failure to meet fuel poverty and emissions targets. A crowd funding campaign will run for several months before COP 26 to raise money for billboards around the conference venue and Glasgow airports, which compare the UK's fuel poverty performance with other countries' (figure 3). At the same time, prominent climate change and anti-poverty campaigners will be asked to submit opinion pieces on the FPB to news outlets such as the Guardian, which are UK-based but have a significant online readership around the world (Comscore, 2012). Under the international spotlight and with a reputation to uphold, the government may be more inclined to support the FPB.

Figure 3: #WriteToFuel billboard



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