

Transparency of funding – a note from SMF Director, Theo Bertram

Since I started as Director of the Social Market Foundation in May, the three most common questions I get asked are ‘are you enjoying it?’, ‘what do think tanks actually do?’, and ‘where does your money come from?’.

The answer to the first one is easy: yes. To spend your working time studying, developing and discussing with a talented group of researchers how to make Britain work better is hugely enjoyable and a great privilege. I’ve worked in politics and in the corporate sector for most of my career and this is the first time that there is no ‘line to take’. Our independence is important to us: every piece of work we publish is our own. Our analysis and our conclusions are ours and ours alone. So, about the latter two questions...

What does a think tank actually do?

We research, write reports and make policy recommendations on public policy, primarily in the UK. This can involve:

- desktop research, such as literature reviews or data analysis, analysis of international comparisons and case studies,
- primary investigation, for example through submission of Freedom of Information requests,
- expert interviews,
- survey work, through focus groups or opinion polling.

We also host events, such as expert roundtables or panel discussions, and disseminate our research and reports through media and social media. We look for every opportunity to bang on about our ideas.

All of this requires a team of researchers, events and communications professionals. And all of that needs to be funded.

Who funds us?

We are a charity and we rely on sponsorship and donations.

These come from a range of sources: businesses, charities, academic institutions, and individual donors. The full list and how much they have given is set out below.

If you don’t see a sponsor declared on a piece of research, that’s because it is unsponsored – which we occasionally are able to undertake, because of the money we raise from sponsored work and donations. For example, the briefing on international comparisons that we provided to MPs in the debate on [assisted](#)

[dying](#) was completely unsponsored. As was the set of essays we put together on [Labour's economic plans](#).

We are transparent about all of our sponsors and donors: anyone that gives us money to support our work will be publicly identified.

Where funding is related to a particular project, any publication or event related to that project will clearly highlight that funding. We think that's the right thing to do, not least because the SMF is a registered charity.

We set clear expectations regarding the independence of our research. We do not lobby or write reports on anyone else's behalf. While we work with sponsors to identify areas of public policy that need attention, it is not our role to pursue their organisation's interest. Instead we are focused on providing objective research and pragmatic policy recommendations. Research, reports and recommendations are always therefore our own, not those of the sponsor.

We do not sell access. When we host events, we always seek to engage policymakers (of all sorts and parties) at the highest level, to ensure our work has the greatest possible impact but we do not accept funding that is in any way contingent on or related to contact with such policymakers. Any funder who supports an event where politicians or other public figures attend signs a contract that states clearly that the SMF cannot and will not guarantee the attendance of politicians or public figures at that event.

We are grateful to all of our sponsors for their support for the SMF.

List of sponsors 01 January 2024 – 05 December 2024

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- Derek Webb
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£60,001 - £70,000

- Visa

£70,001 - £80,000

- European Climate Foundation

£110,001-£120,000

- Santander UK plc (comprising of two separate projects)

If you require more information about how the SMF is funded, please contact director@smf.co.uk