

# Former Number 10 Policy Expert Shares Insights on Effective Policy Influence

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- An [interview with James Nation](#), former Deputy Director of the Number 10 Policy Unit and Special Advisor to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, provides a rare glimpse into the inner workings of British policymaking. As part of Cast fFrom Clay's [Policy Unstuck series](#), drawing on his extensive experience, Nation sheds light on how external organisations—businesses, advocacy groups, and others—can effectively influence government policy, offering practical advice grounded in his time at the heart of decision-making.



Nation stresses that policymakers are rarely swayed by headline-grabbing figures alone. “The big number itself doesn’t get me interested,” he remarks, dismissing glossy economic reports that tout vast GDP boosts. “The value in a big externality number is the media hook, but what gets an advisor interested is the methodology and how it fits into the way in which the Government will be assessing a problem.” For external groups, this means aligning proposals with government priorities, such as Labour’s mission-based framework, and backing them with robust data—like Treasury ready reckoner figures or Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts. “Then a Treasury advisor will listen to you,” he adds, “because you’re trying to empathise with how they’re confronting a problem.”

Time constraints in Number 10, Nation explains, often hinder meaningful engagement with outsiders. “It’s hard to understate just how time poor you are,” he admits, reflecting on the relentless pace of reactive crises—media storms, external events, or urgent trade-offs—that dominate the agenda. He values contributions that show an understanding of these pressures, noting, “The best kind of external engagement was when there was empathy for the situation that we were faced with.” Rather than generic pitches, he favours targeted expertise that addresses specific government goals.

For think tanks and campaigners, Nation advocates a “small is beautiful” approach. Grandiose reports calling for sweeping reforms, he argues, often feel too abstract to act upon. “I’m looking for specific ideas to implement,” he says. “What exactly do you mean? What do you want me to do?” By contrast, modest, well-timed interventions—backed by evidence and attuned to political realities—are far more likely to gain traction. He also warns against aggressive tactics that alienate politicians and policymakers. “The minute you try to impugn people’s motives in a

campaign and go aggressive, that closes the door,” he cautions, urging stakeholders to consider their opponents’ perspectives and bring facts to the table.

Turning to the current Labour government, Nation sees promise in its mission-driven structure, particularly with senior ministers like Pat McFadden wielding prime ministerial support. Yet he emphasises the critical role of “fixers” around the Prime Minister—policy unit staff who connect high-level strategy with practical delivery. “If you can get direct contact between people who are known to have the Prime Minister’s ear and delivery people, that really helps make things happen,” he explains. For systemic challenges, he notes, success hinges on sustained pressure from the centre and a clear link between authority and execution.

Nation also offers words of encouragement to Special Advisors. “You’re probably a thoughtful person in your particular area and you’ve got a lot to contribute,” he says. Despite the demands of government, he urges them to trust their instincts, engage with the outside world, and relish the privilege of shaping policy. “You’ve got that chance to shape things. Enjoy it.”

The full interview is available online at [Cast From Clay](https://castfromclay.co.uk/policy-unstuck/14-a-view-from-the-number-10-policy-unit/), offering a candid perspective on the art of policy influence in the UK: <https://castfromclay.co.uk/policy-unstuck/14-a-view-from-the-number-10-policy-unit/>.

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