

15/2020

JUNE 2020
WWW.RSOG.COM.MY

RSOG INSIGHT

MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

With the COVID-19 impacting countries at various stages, everyone is trying to understand what is required to protect themselves and their communities.

We spoke to some of our friends around the world on how it has affected them and their views of the situation.

ABOUT OUR GUEST

Vivien Lowndes is Professor of Public Policy at the University of Birmingham. She undertakes research, teaching and knowledge transfer on local governance, political institutions, citizen participation, gender and migration. Professor Lowndes is Chair of the Politics and International Studies Sub-Panel for REF 2021, the UK's periodic assessment of research quality. She previously worked at the Universities of Essex and Nottingham, and at the De Montfort University where she was Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research. Before coming into academia, she worked in local government and the voluntary sector. Vivien Lowndes works with practitioners and policymakers on local governance issues. She has been an adviser to the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, the Lyons Inquiry on Local Government, the Council of Europe's investigation into the future of democracy, IPPR Commissions on Partnership and Devolution, LGIU Devolution Network. She is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.

VIEWS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

In this edition, we spoke to Professor Vivien Lowndes, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Birmingham. She spoke at Razak School of Government in 2011 on a topic entitled "Should Policy-Makers Intervene to Build Social Capital" and again in 2012 on "Effective Public Engagement".

RSOG: How has the pandemic affected your daily life?

Professor Vivien Lowndes: I am Professor of Public Policy at the School of Government, University of Birmingham (UK). The pandemic has had a massive impact on my daily life. The University campus is closed and we are teaching our students online instead of face-to-face. The plan is for this to continue when our new academic year starts in September 2020, so we are busy moving that teaching into an online format too. It is hard for students to adjust to this, especially if they are international students with some language challenges. From a professor's viewpoint, the work is not as satisfying as usual – and I miss mixing with my students and colleagues. My work with policymakers is also impacted, with no workshops or conferences permitted to go ahead. I am getting used to the webinar format, but it can be very tiring to be interacting on a screen all day long. And we miss the creative opportunities that come from informal networking over refreshments. I am planning new research projects that focus on the impact of the pandemic – one on the impact on cities and local government, and the other on the gender dimensions of the crisis and government responses.

Personally, I have a long-term health condition and take immune-suppressive medication, so it is hard to anticipate when I will be able to get 'out and about' again, even as restrictions are cautiously lifted for other people.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in the article are of their own and do not reflect the opinion of Razak School of Government.



RSOG: In your opinion what kind of engagement is required to encourage people to embrace the new normal?

Professor Vivien Lowndes: We need very good digital interfaces and support from experts on the best forms of online learning. It won't be enough just to record what we normally do on campus. We need to develop interactive learning online with a rich variety of case studies, group work, discussion boards and simulations. Both students and professors also need to feel safe, once they are permitted to go back on campus. So the university will need to pay a great deal of attention to promoting social hygiene and social distancing and rearranging facilities accordingly, together with scrupulous cleaning. We will need to consider not just the educational needs of our students but also the mental health impact of being isolated when studying online. This is particularly pressing for international students who are a long way from home and don't have access to support networks. Here in the UK, we also need much clearer and more consistent messaging from our government on the state of the pandemic and the measures and policies that are being pursued – and how they are underpinned by science. The government also needs to involve local authorities much more and adopt a less centralised approach to managing the pandemic. Cities need to be empowered (and given resources) to test, track and trace cases and impose locally-specific restrictions where needed. We have a lot to learn from the South East and East Asian countries about how to promote healthy social norms and regard for the health of society as a whole. This means challenging the individualism within UK culture.

RSOG: Any messages you would like to share with our alumni and everyone involved whether directly and indirectly in curbing the COVID-19?

Professor Vivien Lowndes: Trying to build trust between the government and society is very important and we need to provide clear and consistent public health messaging. We need to promote a concern for society as a whole, even if that means restricting the freedoms of individuals. Local government and civil society organisations can play a bigger role too.

RSOG INSIGHT MCO EDITION 2020

PAST EDITIONS

