

# The secret to good political reporting: patience

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Report by Polis Summer School student Rayhan Uddin

Walking the corridors of Parliament, brushing shoulders with politicians and hacks, coffees and lunches with highly influential people, receiving inside information from anonymous sources to earn yourself the political scoop of the day. It's the stuff of aspiring journalists' dreams. However, as Isabel Hardman explained in her lecture to the LSE Polis Summer School, being a successful lobby journalist doesn't happen overnight. The trade requires great patience: both in the journey to becoming a political hack, and having made it.



Isabel Hardman, Assistant Editor, The Spectator

## Learning to report

Hardman began her journalism career at *Inside Housing*, a niche weekly magazine that specialises in the UK social housing sector. Though not the most glamorous of jobs, she said the experience was invaluable in teaching her the necessary skills to report well. Hardman learnt how to interpret and make stories out of technical data and government documents, a skill which is very useful to her now at the Spectator. Indeed when asked about breaking into journalism, Hardman suggested that it's best to search for jobs and internships in trade magazines or local publications, instead of diving straight into the large national newspapers (where interns or novices may simply get lost in the scale of things and end up making the coffee).

Should aspiring journalists be opinionated on the blogosphere and social media? Hardman expressed caution. It is tempting as a young 'digital native' to take to Twitter to berate journalists and publications we dislike, and give our two cents on anything and everything going on in the world. Ceding to such temptations may not be the best answer to honing journalistic skills. Instead Hardman emphasised that it's best to aim to become good reporters first, learning how to go out and find information, before thinking about passing grand judgements. Starting out, one is unlikely to have enough experience or knowledge to consistently produce sound political opinions or analysis. Even if one is completely set on becoming an opinion writer, the best columnists, as Hardman points out, are those who give the reader new information whilst simultaneously offering their views.

## Earning trust

Having made it into the parliamentary lobbies, the need for patience and building a good reputation does not end there. Rather it intensifies. Hardman explained how the vast majority of her job as a lobby journalist consists of meeting with political figures, often for hours on end. The ability to have an easy going conversation and make the person at the other side of the table feel relaxed and comfortable, is essential.

Anyone who has seen *House of Cards* would think political journalism exciting. The Parliamentary lobby seems like a fascinating and eventful arena to operate in. Hearing Isabel Hardman's first hand experiences is an apt reminder that excelling in political journalism requires hard work in developing essential skills, and in waiting for the right moments.

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