

# Revealed: how Charles got Blair to alter health policy

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The Prince of Wales secretly and successfully lobbied Tony Blair to change health policy to loosen controls on alternative medicine.

The extent of the prince's influence over the government was finally disclosed after [27 letters between him and ministers](#) were released under the Freedom of Information Act on the orders of the Supreme Court.

They showed that, at the height of the controversy over the Iraq war, the prince called for the defence budget to be increased to provide new aircraft for the armed forces involved in the military occupation.

The "black spider" memos — so-called because of the prince's scrawled handwriting — also reveal that he persistently lobbied on a range of issues, from his urging of a badger cull in which he called opponents "intellectually dishonest", to the mistreatment of farmers by supermarkets and the state of meals in schools.

Several prominent members of Mr Blair's government, including the prime minister himself, wrote letters back to the prince enthusiastically accepting his suggestions. In one letter Mr Blair pledged to help him by removing "any blockages" in Whitehall.

The most stunning policy victory achieved by the prince was the delaying by several years of the introduction into Britain of European regulations on complementary medicine designed to protect the sick and vulnerable from dangerous "remedies".

John Reid, the health secretary, sent the prince in 2005 an advance copy of a paper about statutory regulation of herbal medicine and acupuncture, the correspondence discloses.

Within weeks, the prince met Mr Blair to complain that a Brussels directive requiring herbal medicines to be licensed was having a "deleterious effect on the complementary medicine sector . . . I think we both agreed this was using a sledgehammer to crack a nut".

The prince recommended his preferred experts to speak to Mr Blair's advisers. The prime minister wrote back, praising the input of the prince's contacts, and promising to weaken the impact of the new rules, including delaying their introduction until the latest possible date in March 2011.

"The implementation as it is currently planned is crazy," Mr Blair wrote. "We can do quite a lot here: we will delay implementation for all existing products." As a result, herbal medicine practitioners gained years to respond to the change in the law by getting their ingredients licensed.

Simon Singh, a campaigner for evidence-based medicine, said last night: “For him this is ideological and he is on the wrong side of science. I think ministers should be listening to medical researchers, not to someone just because their mother happens to be Queen.”

The prince won other notable policy victories during the eight months for which letters have been disclosed. He had written to the head of English Heritage asking to save Smithfield Market in London from being partly cleared to make way for an office development. Out of the blue, Tessa Jowell wrote to the prince to say that she had agreed to “list” a key building, preventing its demolition.

The prince was praised in some quarters, particularly the military. Field Marshal Lord Guthrie, who stepped down as head of the armed forces in 2001, said: “I rather admire him for it. It is all our duty to help when people are putting their lives on the line.”

Others were critical. Paul Flynn, a Labour MP, said: “Prince Charles is Britain’s most powerful, most influential lobbyist. As heir to the throne, he’s imperilling the future of the institution. The head of state must be impartial and he’s betrayed that principle.”

Clarence House strongly defended the prince’s correspondence.

A statement said: “Over the past 40 years in his role as heir to the throne, the Prince of Wales has visited countless places and met numerous people from every walk of life. This gives him a unique perspective, which has often led to him identifying issues which he believes he, or his charities, or his other connections, can help address.