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## **Latest 'Essential Public Affairs' sees huge changes – by James Morrison**

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<http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2017/news/james-morrison-huge-changes-in-the-latest-essential-public-affairs-for-journalists/>

As the last prime minister to orchestrate a referendum on Britain's membership of the 'European club' once famously remarked, a week is certainly "a long time in politics". But what would the late Harold Wilson have made of the seven-day period commencing 20 June 2016 – when, in the spirit of today's manic 24/7 political culture, Britain voted out of the European Union; two party leaders (principal 'loser' David Cameron and 'victor' Nigel Farage) resigned; and Her Majesty's Opposition collapsed into mutinous fratricide?

In truth, for all the epochal significance of that particular seven-day period, it was just one of several such 'weeks' of febrile political drama that punctuated the two years separating editions four and five of Essential Public Affairs for Journalists.

As frustrated NCTJ tutors will have observed, an accident of publishing cycles saw the last edition helpfully land a month before the 2015 general election. This witnessed the demise of the Coalition – a defining fixture of the two preceding volumes – as the Tories edged a slim working majority; the Lib Dems collapsed into single figures; and Labour spectacularly 'lost' Scotland to an insurgent, tails-up Scottish National Party.

Then there was the week of Theresa May's coronation as Cameron's successor and Angela Eagle's (ultimately abortive) bid to unseat Jeremy Corbyn. Even as I write, Britons are enduring yet another momentous week: One that began with the Scottish Parliament demanding a second independence vote north of the border and is ending with the opening salvos in what threatens to be years of poker-faced Brexit 'negotiations', following the formal triggering of the (now fabled) 'Article 50' EU exit clause.

What then, amid this ongoing turmoil, can you expect from the 10th anniversary edition of Essential Public Affairs for Journalists? To say that edit 5.0 involved the biggest 'tweaks' since the book's inception is an understatement.

Several chapters, notably those on political parties and the NHS, needed top-to-bottom rewrites, while the text is now peppered with additional and expanded sections on the ever-widening policy and administrative gulfs between our devolved nations and regions.

Then, of course, there was the EU: a trumpeting elephant in the room I ignored until the very last weeks before deadline, to ensure its coverage was as up-to-date as could feasibly be expected in these most turbulent and unpredictable of times. While it was impossible to map out a clear trajectory for 'Brexit' (ministers and mandarins struggle, so what hope for a humble textbook author?), the political nerd in me came up with some 'educated guesses' – and I'd like to think these will provoke useful class discussions in the months (or years) ahead.

Beyond all this, the only deviation from business as usual was the small matter of engineering another hefty real-terms cut in the book's length (EPAFJ 4.0, believe it or not, was 20 per cent shorter than edit 3.0!) and aligning it even more closely to the NCTJ's programme of study. That I managed this – the book 'lost' a further 10,000 words and, with them, its stubbornly 'off-message' chapter on international relations – makes this fifth edition feel more than usually succinct and (dare I say it) fit for purpose.