



In relation to one of the many 'consultations' by government departments and local authorities, I heard it said that 'if we can give them the true facts they will come to the right decision'. What was really meant by the remark? It's a bit twisted but I suspect that the speaker wanted the consultee's to be given THEIR 'true facts' or perhaps THEIR interpretation of the 'facts' as providing THEIR 'truth' to inform what they considered to be the 'right' decision.

German philosopher Nietzsche is quoted as saying 'there are no facts, only interpretations' but his intentions, often controversial in order to stimulate debate, may also need interpretation. I think that truth can be found in the facts but they are not always necessarily the same thing.

Facts are objective, verifiable and permanent data about reality (as opposed to the perception of reality). Whereas truth often involves interpretation, context or meaning applied to those facts and thereby the truth or part of it may be lost. Is it not true to say that the facts are the generally accepted, recorded or directly observed occurrences, such as the classic 'it's raining'? Whereas truth interprets the significance of the facts with context or meaning like 'the rain is good for the crops' or 'the rain ruined my picnic'? Facts exist independent of an observer while truth can be subjective



depending on a person's perspective, experience or belief system. It seems to follow that facts can be used for manipulation, to construct a false story by selection, leaving out what may be relevant facts, but truth generally aims for a complete, honest picture.

Truth should correspond to the facts so that a statement is surely true if it matches the facts of the world. But conversely facts can be without the truth, you can present a fact which is 100% accurate but use it to present a false conclusion. Some truths from personal experience or emotions are true to the person but cannot be measured or proven to others. Some facts may be temporary and change as better data is found so that our understanding of truth is often an ongoing, adaptive process.

We can conclude that truth is often found through facts, but it requires careful interpretation and context for understanding and to recognise that it's likely to be temporary – eternal truths are rare.

My opening referred to the context of public consultations and there are certain guiding principles. The Gunning Principles are four legal standards for fair public consultations established in 1985, often used in judicial reviews to assess legitimacy. They require that :

1. Consultation occurs at a formative stage, proposals are still flexible, not after a final decision has been predetermined.
2. Sufficient reasons are provided for the proposals, information provided is enough for understanding of the issues, to provide intelligent consideration for an informed response.
3. Adequate time is given to analyse the information and respond, which may vary depending on complexity of the proposal.
4. Decision makers must demonstrate that they have given it 'conscientious consideration' and have thoroughly analyzed the Feedback from the consultation before finalizing any decisions.

In relation to comments about truth and facts I believe that, too frequently, the information provided for the consultation is selective to the point of suggesting the required or preferred answers. I also believe that low or very low responses should not determine the outcomes. I have seen that extensive analysis of less than 1% responses are statistically incoherent and defy reason as they cannot be seen as representative. Such results can only be seen as a flaw in the consultation process itself, either in its presentation or its spread across the population.

As usual, these are just 'informed' comments, opinions and some research. If you have any comments, they will be welcomed at [windlesham.life](http://windlesham.life)

