



Business Plan
2016-2017

March 2016

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Introduction

As Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, this is my second business plan and covers the second full year of operation from April 2016-March 2017, setting out how I intend to fulfil my statutory obligations. My role is independent of both Government and the lobbying sector, and I am required to account for my performance in implementing the provisions of the Act in public, to Parliament.

My role as Registrar is set out in the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (2014). During the past year, I have established the Register, and worked with stakeholders to interpret the legislation so that the process of registration has been made more accessible for users. It is not the role of the Registrar to call for amendment to the content of the legislation or the scale of fees charged: these are matters for Ministers.

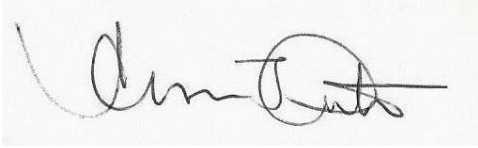
Prior to the opening of the Register, the industry predicted around 75-100 registrations; a forecast substantiated by expressions of interest which I invited as part of my pre-planning work. At the end of 2015, there were 115 registrants, including not only public relations organisations, but also accountants and lawyers. Significant time and effort has been invested in engaging with such organisations to carefully explain why and when registration is required, to optimise registration as far as possible.

The establishment and operation of the Register has been a learning process for many registrants. Ensuring that initial registration and quarterly information returns are correct has involved substantial administrative effort to check and correct information provided. I have taken a generous view in my definition of administrative errors, but I do wish to signal that repeated errors cannot be tolerated indefinitely.

There are times when it is necessary for me to exercise my statutory powers to ensure compliance. I have therefore consulted on and established clear processes which define the circumstances in which I will use my enforcement powers. While I have so far rarely had to use the range of civil and criminal powers which I can call upon, as and when I identify situations of serious non-compliance, I will not hesitate to use my powers appropriately. It is critical to the integrity and credibility of the Register that the information it contains is accurate.

I intend to continue to operate a professional, efficient and cost effective service so that both registrants and other stakeholders can have confidence that the Register represents value for money. I anticipate the need for further modest investment in the technical development of the Register (based on user feedback and my own observations about what is needed), and for additional guidance and clarification to be provided as our experience of operation continues. I intend to continue my programme of positive engagement with consultant lobbyists, whether from the lobbying, or from other, sectors such as accountancy, law or management consultancy, where their interaction on behalf of clients brings them within the parameters of the legislation.

An important part of my work will be ensuring that the wider public and other interested users are able to access the available information in a straightforward and simple manner.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Alison J White'.

Alison J White

Registrar

About us

Role of Registrar

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (2014) (“The Act”) establishes the requirement to create an online statutory register of organisations that conduct the business of consultant lobbying as defined in Part 1, Section 2 of the Act. The Government’s intention behind the introduction of a Register was to enhance the transparency of those who seek to influence decision-makers and to allow the public to scrutinise the clients who are paying for representation.

The Registrar is an independent statutory office and has a duty to monitor compliance with the requirement to register and a power to undertake enforcement action in instances of non-compliance.

Under the Act, the Registrar is required to:

- establish and manage the UK Register of Consultant Lobbyists;
- develop and publish detailed guidance for consultant lobbyists on their duties under the Act;
- monitor and enforce compliance with the Act’s legal requirements; and
- publish an annual statement of accounts.

It is the role of Ministers to set the charges for the Register and to seek to ensure that the total paid in charges is sufficient to offset the total of the costs. It has been previously decided that staffing and shared services costs will be paid for by Cabinet Office budgets. It is the role of the Registrar to

collect and account for all fees and pay them into the Consolidated Fund.

Objectives for 2016-17

At its heart, the role of the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists is about ensuring there is transparency about the work of consultant lobbyists and their engagement with Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and their equivalents on behalf of clients. For this to happen it is important that the public can access information in a clear and easily understandable way.

In line with my statutory obligations, I have set the following objectives for 2016-17:

- a) Administer an accessible, up-to-date and accurate Register of Consultant Lobbyists;
- b) Ensure that all those who are required to register do so, by making potential registrants aware of their obligations under the Act;
- c) Provide clear accessible guidance on the requirements for registration and compliance;
- d) Monitor and enforce compliance with the Act’s legal requirements; and
- e) Operate the Register and the Office in a way that demonstrates good governance through delivery of my statutory obligations in a cost effective and accountable manner.

Work programme for 2016-2017

In order to deliver my objectives, I plan to undertake the following programme of work:

Activity 1 – Continue to operate an accessible, cost effective Register

Over the last year, the Register has been developed technically to improve its standard of robustness and searchability, commensurate with the requirements of the legislation. There is an on-going requirement to ensure that data in the Register is accurate and the registration and quarterly update information is processed effectively. This has required a significant amount of information verification, and I expect this to continue.

We have received positive feedback from stakeholders about the usability and technical robustness of the Register and the way data is presented in it. Technical budgets have been set on the assumption of no changes to primary or secondary legislation

Why this work matters:

Data integrity is important for the credibility of the Register: stakeholders must have confidence that information is correct and up to date.

We will:

- Quality assure the registration and quarterly return information to ensure consistency and accuracy in the way we present data to the public; Ensure that data is displayed in the most transparent format that allows the public to effectively interrogate the registration of consultant lobbyists;
- Regularly review and update the website to ensure it supports stakeholder engagement with the Register;
- Ensure the minimum administrative burden is involved in registration and quarterly updates; and
- Manage the payments for registration robustly and securely.

We will measure success by:

- Quality assuring data on the Register and making public within four days of receipt (as per our statutory obligations);
- User feedback from the public on the searchability of the Register.

Activity 2 – Communication and engagement with stakeholders

Throughout the last year, I have continued to actively communicate and engage with those that carry out lobbying activities about the requirements for registration. This has included not only professional lobbying organisations, but also lawyers, accountants, Think Tanks and transparency groups. I recognise that building understanding is a process, rather than an event, and an important part of my work in the year ahead will be reviewing and refreshing guidance, providing specialist support where required, and a programme of meetings and presentations to continue to build understanding.

Why this work matters:

It is a statutory obligation for those that undertake relevant consultant lobbying to be registered. I will work with the industry and relevant stakeholders to provide information and promote awareness, so that potential registrants are aware of their obligations and know how to register.

We will:

- Continue to engage with lobbyists and their representative bodies to ensure the registration process is understood;
- Continue to communicate with lawyers, accountants, management consultants and others to explain the requirement to register;
- Find cost-effective ways to disseminate information about the Register to as wide an audience as possible; and
- Build user expertise and compliance through training and communication.

We will measure success by:

- Communicating with potential registrants to assess whether they are aware of the Register and how they should engage with it.
- A programme of enforcement activity which assures compliance.

Activity 3 – Providing clear, accessible guidance

During 2015-16, I held a consultation, and subsequently issued guidance, on how I intend to approach issues of non-compliance. I also refreshed the guidance on the requirements for registration to take into account answers to the queries received by the Office since the Register went live. I issued specialist advice for Think Tanks. I also consulted on and created new guidance on information publication and retention.

In 2016-17, I will review all guidance issued so far in the light of learning from continued operations, and refresh and update where necessary. I will also consult and issue guidance on what constitutes a relevant code of conduct. I will keep under review where there is a need to publish specialist advice and address this when required.

Why this work matters:

It is a statutory obligation for those that undertake relevant consultant lobbying to be registered. However, without clear guidance on the requirements for registration, registrants do not know what is expected of them and therefore would find it hard to comply.

We will:

- Review and refine our guidance (specifically on compliance) and frequently asked questions to continue to provide the level of clarity needed to support registrants; and
- Consult on what ‘a relevant code of conduct’ means in relation to the Register.

We will measure success by:

- Feedback on the guidance which indicates that users find it easy to use and clear.

Activity 4 – Ensuring compliance

Under the Act, I am required to ensure that all those who ought to register, do so. This work involves quality assuring the accuracy of the content of the Register; carrying out investigative work and engaging with Ministerial private offices, representative bodies and consultant lobbyists themselves to ensure that all those who should be, are on the Register. Enforcement and the sanctions available to me are the last stages in a process, which begins with dialogue, discussion and engagement.

Why this work matters:

The credibility of the Register depends on the public having confidence that all those that should be registered are, and that the information that is provided is accurate and up to date.

We will:

- Quality assure the information on the Register to ensure that entries are accurate;
- Monitor and review information about organisations who engage with Ministers and Permanent Secretaries who are not on the Register to ascertain if they need to be; and
- Where appropriate, undertake formal investigations into, and enforcement activities with, organisations suspected of non-compliance, in line with my compliance guidance.

We will measure success by:

- Feedback from stakeholders that the Register is accurate and up-to-date; and
- Dealing with any instances of non-compliance in line with our compliance policy.

Activity 5 – Effective governance arrangements

I have sought to minimise the administrative costs of my Office by sharing services with the Cabinet Office where possible, including financial processing, facilities and accommodation. I am constantly mindful of my independent status and the requirement for an appropriate level of resource to carry out my statutory responsibilities. This includes proportionate budgets for communication and enforcement. I will make public any attempt to arbitrarily reduce my budget below the level I judge is required for effective implementation of the legislation.

Why this work matters:

I expect to be held publicly accountable for the effective management of resources, and demonstrating value for money.

We will:

- Ensure the Memorandum of Understanding with the Cabinet Office is adhered to;
- Operate financial management systems that ensure clear accountability and value for money;
- Provide clear and effective communication with the public, registrants and the media about budgets, income and expenditure;
- Continue to deliver a proportionate risk management approach and corporate governance arrangements to ensure effective administration of the Office;
- Ensure I fulfil my statutory and legal obligations in relation to data protection and freedom of information;
- Report to Ministers on the work of the Office through business planning and financial reporting systems; and
- Report to Parliament in any way required by public scrutiny.

We will measure success by:

- Meeting Cabinet Office, Treasury and National Audit Office requirements in our financial management, including producing accurate and unqualified accounts;
- 90% of correspondence is dealt within 5 working days of receipt; and
- Meeting our statutory obligations for dealing with freedom of information and data protection requests.

Delivering our plan

Budget

Table 1. The proposed 2016-17 budget

Resource	Programme (running costs)
Registrar	£27,000
Staff costs	£93,500
Website running costs	£1,800
Register running costs	£35,900
Other costs (legal, communication, travel)	£19,000
Enforcement costs	£10,000
SSCL contracted financial services costs	£22,000
Audit costs	£10,000
Subtotal	£219,200.00
Notional cost	
Cabinet Office shared services	£46,000
Sub total	£46,000
Resource expenditure fully financed by Grant in Aid from the Cabinet Office	£265,200

The budget for 2015-16 was £320,000, so the budget for 2016/17 offers savings of almost £55,000, due to a combination of moving from a set up phase for the organisation and finding efficiencies in the way the organisation operates.

In last year's business plan, I said that in regard to the Cabinet Office's calculation on the fees charged to registrants, the total intended to be recouped in 2015/16 was £150,000 (£98,000 running costs and £52,000 set-up costs). The set-up costs for 2014/15 were at that time estimated to be £259,000, intended to be recouped over a five year period.

As a result of in-year savings during 2015/16, the level of set-up costs reduced to £222,200 (£159,900 declared in the annual report for 2014/15, and £62,300 estimated for 2015/16), and the level of running costs reduced by £15,000, due to in-year efficiencies. During 2015/16, the forecast income is expected to be £79,000.

The tables below set out the current position regarding income and recoupment. I note that Ministers intend to continue to review the scale and methodology of charging in order that the Register can continue to move towards a sustainable position in future.

Table 2. The estimated recoupment in 2015/16

	Admin (set up costs)£	Programme (running costs)£	Totals £
Forecast programme running costs for 2015/16		98,000	98,000
Cost reductions returned in-year to consolidated fund		(15,000)	(15,000)
Revised programme running costs for 2015/16		83,000	83,000
Estimated income for 2015/16 (includes penalty fees)		79,000	79,000
Deficit in income recouped for 2015/16		(4,000)	(4,000)
Set-up costs required to be written off over 5 years (£159,900 from annual report for 2014/15, and £62,300 estimated for 2015/16)	222,200		

Table 3. Potential amount to be recouped in 2016/17

	Admin (set up costs)£	Programme (running costs)£	Totals £
2016/17 budgeted running costs		103,700	103,700
Potential amount to be recouped in 2016/17 via the fee charged to registrants and surrendered to the HMT consolidated fund	44,440	103,700	148,140

Table 4. Estimated income for 2016/17

	Admin (set up costs)£	Programme (running costs)£	Totals £
Estimated income for 2016/17 (assuming current registrants and fee)			113,000

Table 5. The breakdown of expenditure, which will not form part of the Cabinet Office's calculation on the fee(s) charged to registrants.

Cost of Services provided by Cabinet Office under Schedule 2 paragraph 8 of the Act	
Total running costs 2016/17	£161,500

Budgeting assumptions

In line with Schedule 2 paragraph 8 of the Act and through our Memorandum of Understanding, the cost of resourcing the Office and the shared services costs of our accommodation, financial services, IT etc. will be absorbed by the Cabinet Office.

Governance

I will ensure a proportionate approach to corporate governance, including completion of accounting records in accordance with Schedule 2, Paragraph 9 of the Act and consistent with HMG guidance and instructions issued by the Cabinet Office and Treasury. I expect to be held accountable for the delivery of my statutory role in public by Parliament.

Risks

I am committed to a proportionate risk management approach and have identified our key risks as:

- ***Accuracy of data in the Register*** – we will manage this risk through effective data validation and compliance processes;
- ***Escalation in non-compliance*** – we will manage this risk through adherence to compliance policies, effective stakeholder relations and communication and engagement;
- ***Availability of proportionate budgets to implement legislation*** – we will manage this risk through ensuring cost effectiveness of operations, transparent financial processes and communicating requirements effectively to stakeholders;
- ***Retaining the confidence of stakeholders*** – we will manage this risk by having a robust stakeholder engagement plan; taking relationships seriously; listening carefully and delivering on our promises.