

Office of the Registrar

of Consultant Lobbyists

Business Plan
2020 - 2021

April 2020

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Introduction

This business plan sets out how I intend to fulfil my statutory obligations in the year from April 2020. This is the sixth annual plan for the Office of the Registrar.

My role as Registrar is set out in the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 ('the Act'). The Registrar is independent of Government and the public affairs sector and I account to Parliament for implementation of the provisions of the Act.

In my view, transparent, ethical lobbying can be an important part of effective public policy formation. The work of the Registrar supports that process by putting the activities of consultant lobbyists into the public domain. To complement this, policy-makers have a responsibility to consider a variety of policy inputs, not only those from the most organised or well-funded parties.

Last year I fundamentally reviewed and updated all of the guidance that I issue to consultant lobbyists in relation to their statutory obligations. I also made changes to our processes and systems to support compliance, ease of use and the effectiveness of my Office.

During the year ahead, I will continue to develop our user-facing systems for registration and Quarterly Information Returns and our website. I will carry out a consultation looking at the operation of my guidance and how it might be improved.

Alongside improving ease of use and support for users, I will enforce the requirements of the Act with clarity, making use of statutory penalties where necessary and investigate where there is reasonable information suggesting non-compliance.

Harry Rich
Registrar
April 2020

The Registrar

The Registrar is an independent statutory office holder appointed under the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 ('the Act').

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.

The Act sets out two key obligations on consultant lobbyists as defined by the Act:

- register before conducting any consultant lobbying activity;
- submit details of clients they have lobbied for or been paid to lobby for each quarter.

The Registrar collects and accounts for all fees and pays them into the Consolidated Fund. More information about how the Registrar's budget is spent is available in the published Statement of Accounts.

Ministers set the fees for the Register and seek to ensure that the total paid in charges is sufficient to offset the total of the costs. The Cabinet Office meets the cost of seconded staff and shared services.

Review of 2019 - 2020

This brief review of the year to 31 March 2020 is set against the five objectives that I published for the Office of the Registrar in the 2019 - 2020 business plan.

At 31 March 2020 the Register had 143 registrants, compared to 140 at the end of March 2019. The overall number of registrants has been relatively stable over the years, but there is a degree of churn, with some registrants leaving and new ones joining.

The overwhelming majority of consultant lobbyists continued to recognise the importance of transparency in their work and complied with the requirements of the Act professionally and fully.

Soon after my appointment I notified registrants that as the system was now well established I would expect Quarterly Information Returns to be submitted on time, with fewer reminders from my Office. Similarly, I reminded registrants of their duty to keep their business information up to date on the Register. As a result of this and issuing civil penalties for non-compliance, the Register is up to date more speedily at the start of each quarter.

During the year I reviewed all formal guidance for clarity, content and ease of use. I published revised guidance on compliance, offences and penalties in June 2019. In the latter part of 2019 I conducted a formal consultation on a number of proposed significant changes to my guidance. Following this, revised guidance on registration and QIRs, including specialist guidance for think tanks and support service providers to APPGs was published in January 2020.

Objective 1 – Operate an accurate and accessible Register

Maintain the accuracy and timeliness of information contained in the Register and ensure that systems meet user needs.

Registration information: New registrants supported and registration information checked. Registrants reminded of duty to update register information. QIRs submitted more speedily as a result of increased rigour in office processes.

Review online register and processes: Reviewed and plan for implementation in 2020-2021 to increase ease of use, accuracy and resilience.

Review and update website: Structure updated and improved within constraints of technical framework.

Objective 2 – Provide clear, accessible guidance

Keep published registration and compliance guidance under review and respond to registrant feedback where there is ambiguity about the requirements.

Review and refine registration and compliance guidance: All reviewed for clarity, content and ease of use. Published during year.

Seek feedback from stakeholders on other areas of guidance: To follow in 2020 - 2021.

Objective 3 – Communicate and engage with stakeholders

Proactive engagement programme of education and communication with registrants and those not on the Register but whose work might bring them under the requirements of the Act.

Engage with public affairs organisations and representative bodies: Met, briefed and consulted practitioners, CIPR and PRCA. Consultation on revision of guidance.

Engage with lawyers, accountants, management consultants: Representative bodies for lawyers and accountants did not respond to invitation to input to consultation.

Disseminate information: Information and updates provided directly to registrants and via PRCA and CIPR.

Training and communication: Registrar participated in PRCA's Public Affairs Board conference, ran briefing sessions with registrants and provided briefing on revised guidance.

Objective 4 – Ensure compliance

Ensure that all those who ought to register, do so and that the Register is complete and accurate. Apply statutory penalties where necessary.

Ensure Register entries are accurate: New registrants supported and information checked. Registrants reminded of duty to update register information.

Review published diaries of Ministers and Permanent Secretaries: Ministers' diaries reviewed and enquiries made where necessary. Working with Cabinet Office Propriety & Ethics Team to streamline process.

Formal investigations into non-compliance: Registrar conducted four investigations and published summaries of findings.

Enforce compliance: 10 notices of intention to issue civil penalty (previous year: five),

penalty issued in most cases. Two information notices (previous year: one).

Objective 5 – Ensure administrative effectiveness and transparency

Effective and transparent operation of the Office to deliver against statutory purposes, serving all stakeholders and achieving value for money.

Proportionate risk management and corporate governance: Registrar reviews strategic risk and takes responsibility for corporate governance.

Fulfil data protection and freedom of information obligations: Freedom of information and GDPR duties complied with.

Publish details of Registrar's correspondence, meetings, statutory notices and investigations: All on website.

Update Ministers: Registrar met Cabinet Office officials to update them and updated the Minister in writing.

Report to Parliament as required: Annual report and accounts to 31 March 2019 laid before Parliament on 22 July 2019.

Memorandum of Understanding with Cabinet Office refreshed and adhered to: Refreshed 24 January 2019, remains current and adhered to.

Review financial management systems to ensure proportionality, accuracy, effectiveness and value for money: Worked with Cabinet Office finance team to improve financial processes. Minimise costs and optimise value for money, whilst delivering statutory duties.

Purpose and 2020 – 2021 objectives

The purpose of the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists is to ensure that there is transparency in the engagement of consultant lobbyists with Ministers and Permanent Secretaries (and equivalents) on behalf of their clients, in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

In line with my statutory obligations, I have set these objectives for 2020-21:

1. Operate an accurate and accessible Register
2. Provide clear, accessible guidance
3. Communicate and engage with stakeholders
4. Ensure compliance
5. Ensure administrative effectiveness and transparency

The activities that will deliver against these objectives are set out on the following pages.

Activity 2020 - 2021

Objective 1 – Operate an accurate and accessible Register

Maintain the accuracy and timeliness of information contained in the Register and ensure that systems meet user needs.

Why this matters:

Data integrity is vital for the credibility of the Registration system: stakeholders must have confidence that information is accurate and must be able to access and engage with it easily.

We will:

- Support new registrants and check data to ensure accurate and timely registration and compliance.
- Support and enforce the timely submission of Quarterly Information Returns and updating of registration and code of conduct data by registrants.
- Implement changes to the online Register, registration process, information updating and Quarterly Information Returns, to improve accuracy, user experience, ease of access to data, and minimise the administrative burden.
- Review and update the structure and content of the website to enhance clarity, transparency and understanding of the function and operation of the Registrar and Office.

Objective 2 – Provide clear, accessible guidance

Keep published guidance under review and take account of feedback from registrants and other stakeholders.

Why this matters:

Clear guidance on the requirements of the Act helps registrants to understand their legal

obligations and to comply more easily and helps other stakeholders to understand and support the registration system.

We will:

- Review and update guidance as necessary to provide clarity for registrants and others.
- Consult stakeholders to seek feedback on the published guidance and to identify any other areas where the publication of guidance might be helpful.
- Provide guidance to the Private Offices of Ministers and Permanent Secretaries (and equivalents) to aid their understanding of the statutory obligations on consultant lobbyists they engage with.

Objective 3 – Communicate and engage with stakeholders

Undertake a programme of communication and training with registrants, potential registrants, representative bodies and other stakeholders.

Why this matters:

Good engagement, communication and information supports compliance by registrants and awareness and understanding by all stakeholders.

We will:

- Work with public affairs businesses and their representative bodies to develop user expertise, understanding and compliance through training and communication.
- Engage with the representative bodies for lawyers, accountants, management consultants and others to explain the requirement to register.

- Disseminate information about the Register cost-effectively to relevant audiences.

Objective 4 – Ensure compliance

Ensure that all those who ought to register do so and that the Register is complete and accurate.

Why this matters:

The credibility of the registration system depends on the public and industry having confidence that all those that should be registered are and that the published information is accurate.

We will:

- Enforce compliance, making use of statutory penalties where appropriate.
- Review the published diaries of Ministers and Permanent Secretaries against declarations on the Register.
- Undertake formal investigations into organisations for which there is reasonable information suggesting non-compliance.
- Publish details of the Registrar's compliance activity, in particular correspondence, statutory notices and investigations.

Objective 5 – Ensure administrative effectiveness and transparency

Operate the Office effectively and transparently to deliver against statutory purposes, serving all stakeholders and achieving value for money.

Why this matters:

Our administrative arrangements must support effective delivery of the Registrar's

statutory duties with proper levels of transparency and accountability, whilst keeping the administrative and financial cost to registrants as low as possible.

We will:

- Deliver a proportionate risk management approach and corporate governance arrangements to ensure effective administration of the Office.
- Fulfil statutory and legal obligations in relation to data protection and freedom of information.
- Publish details of the Registrar's formal correspondence and meetings, statutory information notices, notices of intention to impose penalties (and their conclusion) and summaries of investigations.
- Update Ministers on the work of the Office through business planning and financial reporting systems.
- Report to Parliament as required.
- Ensure the Memorandum of Understanding with the Cabinet Office is up to date and adhered to.
- Monitor the Office's financial management systems (including those operated for us by the Cabinet Office), to ensure proportionality, accuracy, effectiveness and value for money.

Budget 2020 – 2021

Resource	2020-21 budget	2019-20 budget
Registrar's fees and expenses	£18,300	£18,180
Register and website	£85,000	£59,000
Other costs (legal and enforcement, communication, travel, training)	£40,700	£39,200
Audit fee	£9,000	£9,000
Programme costs	£153,000	£125,380
Seconded staff payroll costs	£98,000	£96,447
Cabinet Office shared services (including finance, IT & accommodation)	£54,000	£54,000
Resource expenditure financed by Grant in Aid from the Cabinet Office	£305,000	£275,827

Notes

Programme costs are offset by income from registration fees, estimated to be £137,000.

In accordance with the Act and the Memorandum of Understanding, payroll cost of staff seconded to the Office and shared services costs are absorbed by the Cabinet Office.

Increase in Register and website costs is to implement enhancements to the online functionality of registration and QIR completion.

Shared services and audit costs are determined by Cabinet Office and NAO respectively.

Registration fees

Registration fees are set by Ministers and in 2016 they announced that the fee of £1000 per annum would be held for the spending review period to 2020. I would expect a review of the fee rate to be undertaken by the Cabinet Office by Autumn 2020, in time for implementation of any change for 2021 fees.

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