

Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists

Summary of investigation

August - December 2020

Organisation or person investigated: Big Innovation Centre (BIC)

Matter(s) investigated: whether Big Innovation Centre (BIC) carries out activities that fall within the terms of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 ('the Act').

Registrar's decision: BIC's activities do not currently fall within the terms of the Act for consultant lobbying, based on assurances given by BIC.

Summary of rationale for decision: BIC provided initial assurances that their activities do not fall within the definition consultant lobbying in the Act. The Registrar required further and detailed explanation of BIC's work on behalf of All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). BIC gave explicit assurance that:

- BIC does not and has never communicated with a Government Minister or Permanent Secretary on behalf of either of the APPGs it provides services to (AI and Blockchain).
- BIC's work on behalf of both APPGs is restricted to back-office administration.
- Any APPG contact with Ministers is conducted by an officer of the APPG, not by BIC.

Chronology:

6/8/2020	Email from journalist, suggesting that the BIC appears to be in violation of the Act by conducting unregistered consultant lobbying for APPGs.
7/8/2020	Formal letter from Registrar setting out the requirements of Act and asking whether BIC has undertaken relevant communications within the scope of the Act. Written response requested by 21 August.
24/8/2020	Email from Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists (ORCL) requiring a response to the Registrar's letter by end Wednesday 26 August.
3/9/2020	Following no response, Statutory Information Notice issued requiring response within 30 days. Notice asks whether BIC has conducted any activity that would be considered consultant lobbying under the terms of the Act; and for information on dates of any such activity, and who BIC was representing.
21/9/2020	Letter from BIC stating they do not engage in lobbying.

30/9/2020	Questions for clarification, emailed to BIC for response by 6 October.
4/11/2020	Following no reply, further Information Notice issued for clarification of BIC's role regarding the Act: whether BIC communicates with Ministers on behalf of the APPGs it supports; the nature of APPG support; and more information on self representation.
20/11/2020	Response from Big Innovation Centre, answering clarification questions.
1/12/2020	Meeting between BIC and the Registrar to clarify whether APPG contact with Ministers is through BIC. Clarification on the Act given by the Registrar, and assurances given by BIC that they are not consultant lobbying.
2/12/2020	<p>Registrar writes to BIC seeking formal confirmation of matters discussed in meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIC does not and has never communicated with a Government Minister or Permanent Secretary on behalf of either of the APPGs BIC provides services to (AI and Blockchain). • BIC's work on behalf of both APPGs is restricted to back office administration. • Any APPG contact with Ministers is conducted by an officer of the APPG, not by BIC.
14/12/2020	Email from BIC confirming the points set out in the Registrar's letter of 2/12/2020.