



Business Plan

2018 - 2019

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Introduction

As Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, this is my fourth business plan and covers the period from April 2018 to March 2019, setting out how I intend to fulfil my statutory obligations. My role as Registrar is set out in the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (2014), “The Act” and is independent of both Government and the public affairs sector. I am required to account for my performance in implementing the provisions of the Act in public, to Parliament.

The Register opened on 26 March 2015, and by the end of the following financial year had 115 registrants. By the end of 2017, the number of registrants had grown to 136, a reflection of fluctuations due to industry changes; some changes in the nature of services provided by consultant lobbyists for their clients in the context of EU Exit and the outcome of my compliance activities.

The nature of the definition of “consultant lobbying” (in summary, direct communications with Ministers or Permanent Secretaries about government business in return for payment) has brought lawyers, accountants, management consultants and think tanks onto the Register, alongside public affairs organisations.

As we enter the fourth full year of operation of the Register, and in an environment where further legislative changes seem unlikely, I anticipate another year of business as usual, although past experience has been that that means continued attention to detail, rigorous compliance activity and a focus on provision of a professional service to ensure that confidence in the Register and in value for money, can remain at a high level.

During the year ahead, I anticipate the need to refresh my registration guidance; for further investment in the technical development of the Register and website, including enhancing security and resilience; and to continue my programme of education and communication. Where necessary, I will use the enforcement powers available to me where I identify situations of serious non-compliance.

Alison J White

Registrar

April 2018

A reflection on the past year

Before looking forward, I have set out a brief review of the year just passed, in the context of the objectives I set for my Office.

Administer an accessible, up-to-date and accurate Register

My experience is that generally speaking, consultant lobbyists approach the need for registration in a professional manner and try their hardest to comply properly and in a timely fashion. Where the Office finds inaccuracies, it identifies the changes made on the face of the Register in a transparent manner. We have worked very hard to maintain the accuracy of the Register, with a particular focus on removing any over-declaration of clients. A review of the Register was carried out during the year, and minor errors were corrected.

Ensuring that all those that need to register do so

During the past year, I have used information provided to me by whistle-blowing and other sources to satisfy myself that evidence of unregistered consultant lobbying taking place is rare. I use the mechanism of Information Notices where necessary to obtain information to support my enquiries, and conduct regular reviews of information from ministerial diaries. My investigations identified a number of serving parliamentarians who are shareholders, partners or directors of consultant lobbyist organisations (and hence appear on the Register), but no evidence that they were personally conducting relevant ministerial communications.

Providing clear, accessible, guidance

I updated my guidance regarding relevance of codes of conduct to governance of the business of consultant lobbying and removed a number of codes that were not considered to be relevant. I also refreshed my guidance on information publication and retention.

I continued to work with registrants and stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the requirements for registration and client declaration, including presenting at a number of registrants' offices, and to groups of compliance officers, and this continued to have a positive effect on the quality and accuracy of the information in the Register.

Monitoring and enforcing compliance

Generally speaking, registrants approach their statutory obligations with professionalism. Throughout the year, there have been minor breaches identified which include late payments, late submissions and inaccurate declarations. I deal with most of these as administrative errors, though there have been some rare instances of serious non-compliance where I have used the mechanism of civil penalties available to me.

Good governance and cost effectiveness

The back-office challenges I identified last year associated with staff continuity and financial reporting services have continued. Additionally, this year problems have emerged with technical resilience of the website and Register. My team has worked very hard to minimise costs and optimise value for money and to achieve all the targets set out in the legislation for operational processing, as well as laying unqualified accounts before Parliament.

About Us

Role of Registrar

The Registrar is an independent statutory office holder 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. The arrangements continue that staffing and shared services costs are 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. More information about how my budget is spent is available each year in my published Statement of Accounts.

Objectives for 2018-19

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 2018-19:

- 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 2018-19

In order to deliver my objectives, I plan to undertake the following programme of work which represents a continuation of the key priorities of the last 12 months:

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

My intention is to continue to work hard to maintain the accuracy and timeliness of information contained in the Register. Assuming no changes to legislation are required, I anticipate the need for further investment in both the Register and website to keep them refreshed and responsive to user requirements, and to improve resilience and cyber security.

Why this work matters:

Data integrity is important for the credibility of the Register: stakeholders must have confidence that information is accurate, and also must be able to access and engage with it in a straightforward manner.

We will:

- Quality assure registration information and Quarterly Information Returns to ensure consistency, accuracy and timeliness in line with statutory requirements;
- Conduct technical reviews and updates to improve resilience and the user experience of interaction with the Register;
- Regularly review and update the website and payment mechanisms to ensure they support stakeholder engagement with the Register;
- Minimise the administrative burden involved in registration and Quarterly Information Returns; and
- Manage the payments for registration robustly and securely.

We will measure success by:

- Quality assuring data on the Register and following compliance checks, publishing new registrants within four days of receipt (as per our statutory obligations);
- User feedback from stakeholders on the accessibility of the Register; and
- Using analytical tools to measure the performance of the website.

Activity 2 – Communication and engagement with stakeholders

I intend to continue a proactive engagement programme of education and communication with registrants as well as those not currently on the Register, but whose work for clients might bring them under the requirements of the Act.

Why this work matters:

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

We will:

- Continue to engage with public affairs organisations and their representative bodies to ensure the registration process is understood and implemented properly;
- Continue to engage with lawyers, accountants, management consultants and others to explain the requirement to register;
- Find cost-effective and appropriate ways to disseminate information about the Register to as wide an audience as possible; and
- Build user expertise and compliance through training and communication, and through an enhanced social media strategy.

We will measure success by:

- Ensuring a clear plan of stakeholder engagement and being responsive to feedback.
- A programme of enforcement activity which assures compliance.

Activity 3 – Providing clear, accessible guidance

I plan to fully refresh my registration and compliance guidance and continue to provide specialist updates and respond to registrant feedback where there is ambiguity about the requirements.

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 my registration and compliance guidance, to continue to provide the level of clarity needed to support registrants; and
- Seek feedback from stakeholders to identify other areas for which the publication of guidance might be helpful.

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 ensuring the completeness and 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 various sanctions available to me are the last stages in a process that 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.

We will:

- Quality assure the information on the Register to ensure that entries made 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;
- Where appropriate, undertake formal investigations into, and enforcement activities with, organisations suspected of non-compliance, in line with my compliance guidance;
- Ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

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 continue to seek 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.

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 for 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 2018-19 budget

Resource	Costs
*Registrar	£24,090
Staff costs	£120,656
*Website running costs	£2,000
*Register running costs	£ 44,425
*Other costs (legal, communication, travel)	£16,180
*Enforcement costs	£10,000
*Audit costs	£9,000
Subtotal	£226,351
Cabinet Office shared services (Including Finance, IT & accommodation)	£50,218
Resource expenditure fully financed by Grant in Aid from the Cabinet Office	£276,569

Notes

1. Staff remuneration has increased due to changes in staff in the Office.
2. Register running costs have increased due to necessary improvements in resilience and security.
3. The Registrar's term of office concludes in September 2018; the level of fee offered after that date is a matter for Ministers.
4. Savings have been identified in the notional costs of IT, Finance and accommodation provision.

Costs marked with * are those which form the programme (running) cost (£105,695), to be offset by fees for registration (estimated to be c.£130,000 in 2018-19).

Table 2. The breakdown of expenditure, which forms part of the Cabinet Office's calculation on the fee(s) charged to registrants

In 2016, it was announced by Ministers that the level of fee (£1000 per annum) would be held for the spending review period (i.e. till 2020).

	Totals
Forecast programme running costs for 2018/19	£105,695
Estimated income for 2018/19	£130,000

The Cabinet Office intends to recoup the initial set-up costs of the Register (£222,200) from any annual surpluses.

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;
- ***Managing the work of the Office within available budget*** – 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; reliable IT; taking relationships seriously; listening carefully and delivering on our promises.

