

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Safonau Ymddygiad / Standards of Conduct Committee
Ymchwiliad i Lobïo / Inquiry into Lobbying
Ymateb gan Invicta Public Affairs / Evidence from Invicta Public Affairs

Current lobbying arrangements have been in place in Wales since 2013. The Committee's inquiry intends to establish whether it is clear what the citizen wants to know with regards to lobbying and if so, whether the arrangements in Wales at present provide enough information, accessibility and transparency?

This response sets out our views on whether the Assembly's current arrangements relating to lobbying are sufficiently robust and fit-for-purpose for the Fifth Assembly.

1. Is there a need for change?

Invicta Public Affairs is supportive of this inquiry. As a company, we do not consider there to be a problem with the lobbying industry in Wales. The profession has not experienced the same issues at the Welsh Assembly as it has in Westminster. However, we are in favour of normalising and formalising the lobbying profession in Wales through the introduction of a register. Increased transparency within the industry will help to improve the standard of engagement, as well as the quality of service provided to our clients.

Invicta Public Affairs is already included within the UK Register of Lobbyists and, as such, our activities in engaging UK Ministers have been made transparent and are available for the public to view with regard. This transparency is welcome as it helps us to improve our operating practices more effectively.

However, we believe that any register introduced in Wales should be brought into line with the UK Register of Lobbyists, and restricted to consultant lobbyists only. We do not see the case for extending the register to others who are engaged in lobbying activity, such as charitable organisations,

equalities groups, trade unions and trade bodies. It is unclear to what extent these organisations engage in lobbying, as it will be part of a range of services offered and will not necessarily be undertaken on a formal and continuous basis. However, we would welcome it being limited to organisations and not extended to individual employees.

2. What do you understand by the term lobbying?

Lobbying is the act of attempting to influence the actions, policies, or decisions of government, most often legislators or members of regulatory agencies. Lobbying is done by many types of people, associations and organised groups, including individuals in the private sector, corporations, fellow legislators or government officials, or interest groups. Although it often has negative connotations lobbying can help to strengthen a Government or National Assembly by bringing expertise and knowledge to a particular area of policy or legislation. This is particularly so in Wales where we have a small Assembly of just 60 Members and a small Government.

3. How is lobbying regulated at the moment?

There is a UK Register of Lobbyists of which we are included. We also have our own code of ethics as a company whereby we ensure that we operate in a clear and transparent way.

4. Do you consider yourself a lobbyist? How is lobbying regulated within your sector at the moment? E.g. if you are a private business, third sector, professional organisation.

As a public affairs company we are referred to as consultant lobbyists representing our client's interests. Many of these clients are private sector businesses who want to understand the role of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government or who are interested in investing and developing their business in Wales.

5. Have you encountered any problems with the current arrangements?

We do not consider there to be any problems with the lobbying industry in Wales and haven't encountered any problem with the current arrangements.

6. Are there any areas you consider to be unregulated in this area which pose a risk to the accountability and reputation of governance in Wales?

We believe that if a code of conduct is introduced it should be restricted to consultant lobbyists. It is not possible to compare the practices of a company like Invicta Public Affairs, whose purpose it is to engage in lobbying activity, and those organisations / employees who do so as part of a much larger remit. As such, it would be difficult to apply the same code of conduct across the broad membership currently proposed in the Bill.

However, voluntary registration should be offered for those individuals, organisations and groups who partake in lobbying activity but are not paid a specific fee for this particular service. This will allow for transparency while recognising the difference between those who are paid to lobby and those who do so on their own behalf or as part of a larger remit / job role.

7. What would you consider to be the impact of introducing a new regime to deal with lobbying?

We are supportive of a move to establish a statutory register of consultant lobbyists in Wales. However we are of the view that it would not be good business practice to publish individual client lists. In our opinion this would lead to a race to the bottom on cost and duty of care for each client. We are very happy instead to publish engagement on a client by client basis as is the case with Scottish and UK registers.