

Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Lobbying: Response from Positif

Who we are

1. Positif is one of the leading public affairs companies in Wales. Positif is a Welsh based company established in 2006 which specialises in public affairs, communications and consulting and have provided communications and public affairs services for more than 250 private, voluntary and public sector organisations. We are committed to working with public affairs and public relations professionals from other agencies and organisations, and with political and media stakeholders to raise awareness about the importance, validity and vitality of the public affairs and public relations professions in Wales.

How is lobbying regulated at the moment? 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.

2. Positif conduct is regulated or shaped in 4 ways:

- All Positif staff are members of [Public Affairs Cymru](#) (PAC), the professional body for public affairs professionals in Wales, which was founded in 2006. We welcome strengthening the Code of Conduct for PAC members, developing a system of regulation and the suggestion by PAC of partnership with the Standards Commissioner to enforce the Code.
- We have also been full members of the [Association of Professional Political Consultants \(APPC\)](#) since March 2007. The APPC is the representative and regulatory body for UK public affairs professionals in the consultancy sector, and our membership reflects our determination to abide by the highest standards of openness, transparency and ethical best practice. We abide by the APPC Code, including publishing quarterly returns listing staff and clients, signing the Code annually and ensuring that all staff attend training on the Code.
- UK law in relation to bribery and corruption.
- The provisions of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, though we are not registered with the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists because we do not fall within the registration requirements, our activity being targeted in Wales rather than at a UK Government level.
(<http://registrarofconsultantlobbyists.org.uk/guidance/foreword/requirements-to-register/>)

Have you encountered any problems with the current arrangements?

3. As a member of PAC, we align ourselves entirely with the evidence submitted by PAC to this inquiry but wish to take the opportunity to emphasise key points raised in their evidence as well as additional points which we strongly feel need to be taken into consideration by the Committee. We are also aware of the APPC response to the inquiry and would not disagree with the content of the submission as far as it goes, though it does appear to Positif to be implicitly accepting there are not current issues with lobbying in Wales.

4. The current system does need to be revisited both in terms of making the PAC Code of Conduct enforceable and more rigorous. We remain concerned that PAC membership is just a partial register of lobbyists because people working in public affairs do not have to join PAC or sign up to its Code of Conduct.

5. We support the publication of list of clients through PAC as we do so on APPC website already. There is a very uneven playing field when it comes to ethics and transparency in public affairs at the moment. We have always published our client list through the APPC but there are others offering public affairs services in Wales who do not do this. Indeed, in the past our transparency has been abused by competitors to target our clients when they do not disclose their own client lists.

6. We welcome the strengthening of the PAC Code to prevent members selling commercial public affairs services from speculatively attending events on the Assembly estate. We are aware of others selling public affairs services which have used the transparency of events listings to target events and therefore seek to use the National Assembly estate as a marketplace.

7. Wales is a small place. Lobbyists often play multiple roles in the public arena, including media appearances. Positif staff are always careful not to discuss client related matters as if we were impartial or independent commentators. The Committee may wish to consider the extent to which lobbyists accurately disclose their potential client conflicts in a range of scenarios and also how they choose to describe themselves when acting as commentators. For example, "Former special adviser" may be technically accurate when applied to some lobbyists when offering political commentary but the use of that description deliberately conveys a closeness to government which actually fuels distrust of lobbying and implies an improper relationship.

8. The perception of lobbying by politicians is also important. We are a profession which is open to abuse from within and from without. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with lobbying and it is important that both the lobbyist and the lobbied understand what lobbying actually is and who constitutes a lobbyist. There is a responsibility on both the lobbyist and the politician to be clear and fair in how issues of access and lobbying actually operate.