



Public Affairs Board - ORCL

Roundtable meeting with Harry Rich (Registrar)

Monday, 3rd December, 2018

Fleishman Hillard Fishburn

Harry Rich	Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists
Paul Bristow CMPRCA	Chair, Public Affairs Board, PB Consulting
George McGregor MPRCA	Interel
Emma Petela MPRCA	Strategy
Emma Pointer MPRCA	Weber Shandwick
Tom Frakowiak MPRCA	Cicero Group
Tim Snowball MPRCA	Fleishman Hillard Fishburn (host)
Mike Blakeney MPRCA	H+K Strategies
Cameron Gray MPRCA	Hume Brophy
Chris Rogers MPRCA	In-House Comms
Sara Petela MPRCA	PB Consulting
Darren Caplan FPRCA	Railway Industry Association
Michael Burrell FPRCA	Riverside Comms
Sam Pettit MPRCA	Teneo
Simon Pugh MPRCA	Weber Shandwick
Nicholas Dunn-McAfee MPRCA	PRCA (Public Affairs Board)
Mary Shearer MPRCA	PRCA (Public Affairs Board)

The Chair thanked the Registrar for attending the meeting, noting that the Public Affairs Board (PAB) was the principal organisation representing ORCL registrants. The Chair said that the PAB's position was that lobbying was a force for good in democracy: any statutory regulatory regime should make it easy for lobbyists to abide by the law (cost, complexity) and easy for Ministers and other legislators.

The Registrar said that there was clearly a shared interest between ORCL and the PAB. He agreed in principle that lobbying was a good thing, as long as it was transparent. Looking ahead, the Registrar did not envisage any "great changes", not least because there was so little discretion in the Act. His role was to act independently of government, of business, and of pressure groups to enforce the Act in the public interest.

However, he was looking at ways of evolving a well-embedded system, such as: (1) reducing the number of reminders to registrants to file on time as most were now aware of the timings and made submissions punctually; (2) declaring ORCL meetings, such as this one, on the ORCL website; and (3) publishing Information Notices and Civil Penalties.

It would be helpful to have registrants' feedback on the updating of systems and strategies over the next year or so.

One concern he had was at lack of registration through unfamiliarity by consultant lobbyists who did not belong to an organisation such as the PAB. One member pointed out that the obligation to register in advance could cause problems for small firms who made direct communications rarely.

The Registrar then responded to members' questions:



Ministerial Diaries

ORCL would continue to scrutinise Ministerial diaries. The Registrar was alerted to a recently-launched website by Transparency International UK called Open Access, which allowed a search for meetings between Ministers and lobbyists.

Non-Traditional Lobbyists

Members expressed frustration that ORCL had not managed to register the lawyers, think tanks, and management consultancies that carried out lobbying activities. As with his predecessor, the Registrar said that he would follow-up any whistleblowing.

Education

Whilst ORCL could not promote the benefits of lobbying, the Registrar undertook to consider the possibility of educating legislators as to what ethical lobbying looked like.

ORCL Guidance

The Registrar considered that ORCL guidance was broadly correct, but would be reviewing it for clarity and straightforwardness, with a view to achieving a system that facilitated transparent lobbying and helped those being lobbied to understand ethical lobbying.

The Registrar said that, the ORCL register now being well embedded, he did not plan to continue his predecessor's general guidance meetings with registrants but would agree to a meeting on a specific issue. He would prefer that general issues be raised through the PAB and had agreed to continue the regular meetings held with APPC and PRCA officers.

ORCL Fees

Members felt that the fees contrasted badly with the free register in Scotland and – on their own terms – were problematic. The Registrar reiterated that the fees did not cover all ORCL costs. Yet, it felt “odd” for such a wide range of registrants to have to pay a flat fee, particularly as the point of the register was for the public benefit. However, a graduated fee could be complex and not cost-effective. As fees were set by the Cabinet Office, not ORCL, the PAB should raise any concerns with Ministers, noting that the Cabinet Office had fixed the current fee until 2020.

Labour Party Plans to Amend the Act

The Registrar said that he would be pleased to meet Labour Party representatives if they requested a meeting. This come after the Public Affairs Board also met with Labour's Andrew Dolan on Monday, 3rd December, 2018.