Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee Inquiry into Lobbying
Response from Camlas

Who we are

Camlas is an open, transparent, responsible and ethical public affairs company in Wales. Our aim is to help clients navigate the complex world of politics and government in Wales. We currently provide public affairs support to over 70 organisations across the public, private and third sectors and our work spans all devolved policy areas. 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.

Regulation

All Camlas staff are members of Public Affairs Cymru (PAC), the professional body for public affairs professionals in Wales, which was founded in 2006 and Camlas Managing Partner, Naomi Williams is the current Chair of PAC. Camlas is also a member organisation of PAC and we align ourselves with the evidence submitted by PAC to this inquiry.

Following the previous Senedd inquiry into lobbying, the PAC Code of Conduct for its members was strengthened and all members must now sign and adhere to the Code when joining, which we welcome.

We are also full members of the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) (Previously the Association of Professional Political Consultants). The PRCA is a trade association for the public relations sector in the UK. Camlas abides by the PRCA Code, including publishing quarterly returns listing staff and clients. Our PRCA entry can be found here.

We would however highlight that PAC membership is only a partial register of lobbyists as those working in public affairs in Wales are not required to join PAC or sign up to its Code of Conduct. In addition, we would also highlight that there are commercial companies in Wales who provide services which we would class as public affairs services, such as political monitoring, who do not declare their clients with the PRCA and neither are they members of

PAC. We feel this should be addressed to ensure that the ethics and transparency of the sector in Wales is not brought into question.

What is your understanding about the role that Cross-Party Groups play in relation to lobbying in the Senedd, and do you have any comments/concerns?

Whilst Camlas does not currently provide secretariat support to any Cross Party Group in the Senedd, we have done so in the past and many of our clients undertake that role. We would emphasise the importance of CPGs as a vital part of Senedd engagement. They provide an additional forum for specific policy areas to be discussed and explored and for external organisations to share expert opinions with Members of the Senedd, outside of the formal Committee system.

We would however note the inconsistency between how active and open the CPGs are. Whilst many are extremely proactive, meet regularly and are open to a wide group of stakeholders, some do not meet regularly or consistently and risk devaluing the importance of CPGs as a whole. In addition, we would welcome measures to ensure that despite the secretariat, be they external organisations or MS support staff, all CPGs are open to all and are not closed, invite-only groups.

Have you encountered any problems with the provisions in the Code and the guidance on lobbying and access to Members of the Senedd (agreed 2013)?

The perception of lobbying by politicians is 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 what 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. Whilst we recognise the guidance on lobbying and access to Members of the Senedd, we would question the extent to which this is implemented and understood by MSs.