



## **ASLEF Response to the Consultation on Introducing a Statutory Register of Lobbyists**

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 18,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF agrees with the consultation document that those with money and power are able to buy power and influence with increased access to ministers, special advisors and officials. At the same time ordinary people, whether workers or consumers are without this access and are often overlooked.
3. There will always be a role for professional lobbyists in politics. Organisations will often require assistance from experts in getting their message across correctly and to the right people. There is however a fine line between this and receiving superior access due to connections and contacts.
4. This leaves any democracy with the question of how to stop those with the financial means from having an advantage over those without when making their arguments. Democracy needs everybody to have the same opportunities to make their case to decision makers.
5. For this reason, ASLEF supports a greater degree of transparency with regard to the operation's of lobbyists. However the idea that simply creating a creating a register will deal with this issue is short sighted.
6. Many organisations would not be considered lobbyists and will therefore not be covered by the regulation but still cause concern with regard to excessive

influence. For this reason, ASLEF would support the idea of decision makers being the people who report who has sought to influence them. This would prevent lobbyists seeking loopholes in legislation. Whilst ASLEF recognises that formal meetings of ministers and officials are covered by Freedom of Information requests, private or social contacts are not. This is therefore a large loophole which will be exploited to get around new legislation and therefore must be closed.

7. The proposals would help deal with professional lobbying companies. However, very often, the concerns that the public have over preferential access relates to campaign organisations or think-tanks. These groups would not be covered by the register and fall short of the regulation that covers trade unions and charities. Often the sources of their income are unknown and the way they operate can be secretive.
8. ASLEF believes that it would be a mistake for trade unions to join such a register. Trade Unions are already one of the most regulated types of organisation in the United Kingdom. The activity of trade unions is open and clear. Defining at what point “lobbying” is taking place however is less clear and therefore the onus should be on the officials or ministers who receive representations.
9. Unions have to make annual returns to the Certification Officer as well as create a special political fund for campaigning work. This has to be agreed to by a ballot of members which is repeated every ten years. Members then have the option to opt out of this fund. This fund once again is returned to the Certification Officer. The activities of trade unions are therefore already heavily registered and transparent. The same is the case for charities. It is therefore campaign organisations and think-tanks that appear to slip under the radar.
10. These groups may not directly work for a client, but do often work on campaigns that benefit their supporters. It therefore makes sense to write legislation that requires them to publish details of any donors and to publish

their accounts. This could mirror the disclosure requirements imposed on political parties.

11. Whilst many of these campaign groups already exist, the creation of a statutory register may lead to even more being set up to act as third party groups representing the views of donors.
12. ASLEF is in favour of the declaration of income from clients and agree with doing this in bands as suggested.
13. ASLEF favours any measures which seek to prevent those with financial means being able to gain greater access to decision makers. However the Union is keen to express the limited effect of just registering professional lobbyists. There needs to be a clearer examination of other bodies. Only then will the situation be resolved. The regulation of Unions is already extremely thorough. It is about times that the secretive action of campaign groups and think tanks are also examined equally.

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