

Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP
Houses of Parliament
London
SW1A 0AA

Cc: Andrew Lansley CBE MP (Leader of the House of Commons), Francis Maude MP (Minister for the Cabinet Office), Chloe Smith MP (Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform), Graham Allen MP (Chair of Political and Constitutional Reform Committee)

6th September 2013

Dear Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned, strongly urge government to pause and redraft the proposed Lobbying Bill so that it will provide citizens with a genuine opportunity to scrutinise the activities of lobbyists in the UK.

The current version of the lobbyist register would only cover a small fraction of active lobbyists, leaving the public in the dark about the rest of the UK's £2 billion lobbying industry.¹ It will also not reveal any meaningful information on their activities.

We think a decent lobbyist register - which says who is lobbying whom, what they are lobbying for and how much they are spending - should be an essential part of the UK government's openness agenda, and a key measure to ensure that lobbying is transparent and effectively regulated.

Crucially it should not just be restricted to consultant lobbyists, but should also include in-house lobbyists, big consultancies who offer a range of services, and other entities which offer lobbying services such as think tanks.

Furthermore we think it is essential the UK's lobbyist register is published as machine-readable open data so that its contents can be analysed, connected with other information sources, and republished.

The UK has been a pioneer in opening up its public data and has a major opportunity to be a world leader in government openness at the Open Government Partnership Summit in the UK this autumn, following on from its success in putting open data at the top of the agenda at the G8 with the Open Data Charter.

¹ As estimated in "Friend or Foe? Lobbying in British Democracy: A discussion paper" by Philip Parvin, Hansard Society, 2007.

However, if the Lobbying Bill goes ahead as it is without further changes, then it will be a significant missed opportunity for government openness in the UK, and a major blow to the government's aspiration to be - in the words of the Prime Minister - "the most open and transparent government in the world".

Signed,

Helen Darbishire, Executive Director, Access Info
Maurice Frankel, Director, Campaign for Freedom of Information
Fredrik Galtung, CEO and Trustee, Integrity Action
Simon Burall, Director, Involve
Tom Steinberg, Founder and Director, mySociety
Chris Taggart, Co-Founder and CEO, OpenCorporates
Gavin Starks, CEO, Open Data Institute
Dr Rufus Pollock, Founder and CEO, Open Knowledge Foundation
Jim Killock, Executive Director, Open Rights Group
Tim Davies, Director, Practical Participation
Francis Irving, CEO, ScraperWiki
Ellen Miller, Executive Director, Sunlight Foundation
John Christensen, Director, Tax Justice Network
Robert Barrington, Executive Director, Transparency International UK
Alexandra Runswick, Director, Unlock Democracy