



Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015: *What you need to know*

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Coimisiún um Chaighdeán in Oifigí Poiblí
Standards in Public Office Commission

Presentation topics

- Overview of *Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015*
 - The Three-Step Test
 - Registration and return requirements
 - Contraventions and enforcement
- How to prepare for compliance
- Avoiding common pitfalls
- Code of Conduct
- Questions



Regulation of Lobbying: Overview of Act

- Independent lobbying registrar – Standards Commission
- Registration of lobbyists (wide ranging scope)
- Regular submission of returns (3 x/year)
- Web-based public registry (lobbyist, lobbied, subject, intended result)
- Post-employment restrictions for **some** public officials
- Investigation and enforcement provisions (compliance focus)
- Legislative review mechanism

What is lobbying? The Three-Step Test

- Communication must meet the “three step test” to be considered lobbying - communication by:
 1. Persons within the scope of the Act
 2. With Designated Public Officials
 3. On relevant matters
- Act makes no distinction regarding method, venue or formality of communication
 - Mail, telephone, in-person, electronic, social media
 - Office, social setting, casual encounter, other

Step 1: Are you within scope of the Act?

- Persons with **more than 10 employees**
- **Representative or advocacy bodies** with at least 1 employee
- **Third parties** paid to lobby on a client's behalf
- Anyone lobbying **about development or zoning** of land



But even if you meet these criteria you need to register only if the communications are with Designated Public Officials (DPOs) and relate to “relevant matters”

Step 2: Are you communicating with a DPO?

- Ministers, Ministers of State
- Members of Dáil Éireann, Seanad Éireann
- Irish Members of the European Parliament
- Members of Local Authorities
- Special Advisors
- Senior Civil and Public Servants
 - Civil service: Secretaries General, Assistant Secretaries, Director grades and equivalent
 - Local authorities: Chief Executives , Directors of Service, Heads of Finance, Head of HR (Dublin City Council)
 - The Minister may expand group in future (public bodies or levels)



Step 3: Is it about a relevant matter?

- The initiation, development or modification of any public policy or of any public programme
- The preparation of an enactment
- The award of any grant, loan or other financial support, contract or other agreement, or of any licence or other authorisation involving public funds.

Not a relevant matter: Matters relating only to the **implementation** of any such policy, programme, enactment or award or **matters of a technical nature**

Exemptions (section 5(5))

Several types of communications are exempt from the requirement to register:

- Private affairs
- Principal private residence
- Diplomatic context
- Between public officials
- Strictly factual information
- Trade union negotiations
- Threat to life or safety
- Security of the State
- Shareholder of State body
- Within proceedings of Oireachtas Committee
- Information requested and published by public body (Consultations)
- Groups established by Public Body where Transparency Code applies (Task forces. Working groups)

Registration requirements

- Register after first communication with DPO
- Create an account on Lobbying.ie
- Include in registration:
 - Organisation Name - option to include “trading as” name if different from legal name.
 - Business address and contact details
 - Main business activities
 - Identify person with primary responsibility for lobbying
 - Company Registration Office Number or Charitable Registration Number

Return requirements

- 3 Returns periods per year with mandatory deadlines
 - 1 September–31 December: returns due 21 January
 - 1 January–30 April: returns due 21 May
 - 1 May–31 August: returns due 21 September
- Nil returns are also required
- One return per subject - include following information:
 - Who was lobbied
 - Subject matter/intended results
 - Type and extent of activity
 - Current/former DPOs lobbying for you
 - Client information (if relevant; lobbyist)

Contraventions and Enforcement

- **Contraventions of Act:**
 - Lobbying without registering
 - Failure to submit return by deadline (including nil return)
 - Providing inaccurate/misleading information
 - Failing to comply with an investigation
 - Obstructing an investigation
- **Consequences of non-compliance**
 - Fixed payment notices for late returns: €200
 - Investigation and prosecution of contraventions
 - If convicted: higher fines and/or imprisonment



Preparations for Compliance

- Review your organisation's arrangements for recording relevant communications
- Identify individual(s) responsible for registration and compilation of returns.
 - Data can be entered on the register on an ongoing basis by more than one employee and saved in draft form (on a private area of the register) prior to its formal submission.
- Nominate compliance officer
 - Single person responsible for reviewing all final returns for completeness, accuracy and consistency
 - Person can submit final return at the end of each reporting period
 - Make sure that person has a backup!

Avoiding common pitfalls

- 1) Should you register? Do the **three-step test**
- 2) **Register** once you commence lobbying
- 3) Track your lobbying activity with an eye to returns
 - **One return per subject**, not for every communication
- 4) Meet the deadlines
 - 21 January, 21 May, 21 September: **mandatory deadlines**
 - **Nil returns** are also expected
 - Have organisational backups
- 5) Make returns **meaningful**
- 6) Indicate if you have **ceased lobbying**

Code of Conduct

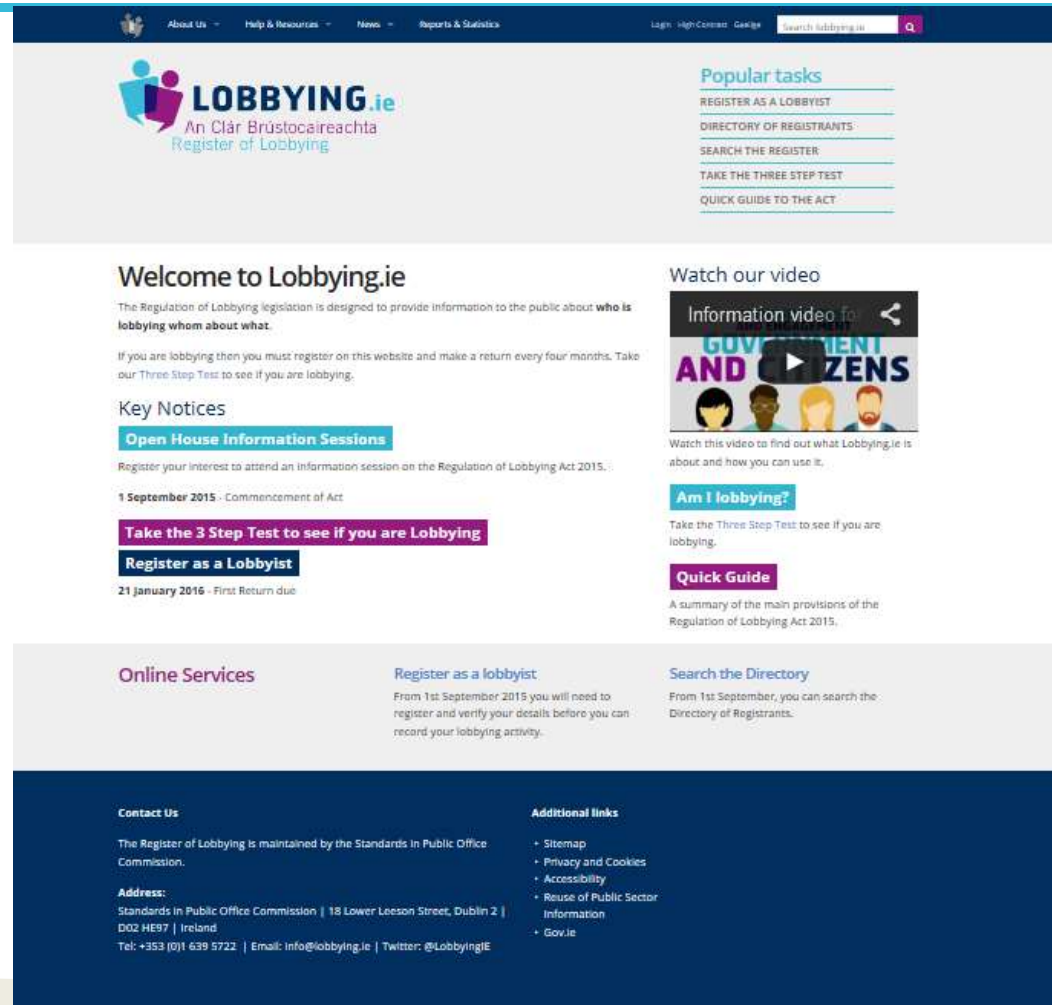
- *Came into effect 1 January 2019*
- *Purpose to govern behaviour – ensure lobbying ethical*
- *Sets out 8 key principles*
- *Persons lobbying should have regard to Code*

Eight Principles of Code:

- 1) Demonstrate respect for public bodies
- 2) Act with honesty & integrity
- 3) Ensure accuracy of Information
- 4) Disclose identity and purpose
- 5) Preserve confidentiality
- 6) Avoid improper influence
- 7) Observe provisions of Act
- 8) Observe provisions of code

Thank you/Questions?

Visit our website:
www.LOBBYING.ie



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Register of Lobbying website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for 'About Us', 'Help & Resources', 'News', and 'Reports & Statistics'. A search bar is located on the right side of the header. Below the navigation, the main content area features the website logo and a 'Popular tasks' section with links to 'REGISTER AS A LOBBYIST', 'DIRECTORY OF REGISTRANTS', 'SEARCH THE REGISTER', 'TAKE THE THREE STEP TEST', and 'QUICK GUIDE TO THE ACT'. The main body of the page is titled 'Welcome to Lobbying.ie' and includes a brief introduction to the legislation, a 'Key Notices' section with links to 'Open House Information Sessions', 'Take the 3 Step Test to see if you are Lobbying', and 'Register as a Lobbyist', and a 'Watch our video' section with a video player for 'Information video for GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENS'. At the bottom, there are sections for 'Online Services' (Register as a lobbyist, Search the Directory), 'Contact Us', and 'Additional links' (Sitemap, Privacy and Cookies, Accessibility, Reuse of Public Sector Information, Gov.ie).