



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Minister for the Cabinet Office  
The Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AS

11 April 2016

Dear Minister,

**RE: Exemption for universities and research institutes from new ‘anti-lobbying’ clause**

I am writing to ask the Government to create an exemption for grants for researchers in universities and research institutes from the new ‘anti-lobbying’ clause that you announced on Saturday 6 February 2016, and which is due to take effect from 1 May 2016.

Your announcement on the Cabinet Office website did not mention that the new regulation, which will forbid Government grants being used for “[p]ayments that support activity intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, government or political parties, or attempting to influence the awarding or renewal of contracts and grants, or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action”, did not make clear that it would apply to grants to universities from the research councils and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Nor did the campaign literature produced by the Institute of Economic Affairs, which you admit prompted you to take this action, provide any evidence that there has been, or is likely to be in the future, inappropriate use of Government grants by researchers in universities and research institutes. Indeed, successive Governments have been trying to incentivise publicly-funded researchers to engage more with decision-makers in the public and private sector in order to realise fully the broad potential economic and social benefits from their work.

It will not be in the public interest to prevent government grants for research in universities and research institutes from being used to influence policy-making. It will make it much more difficult, for instance, for researchers in receipt of Government funding to engage with Ministers like yourself, civil servants, Parliamentarians, local government officials, representatives of political parties, and regulators. It will create a significant barrier for researchers in receipt of Government funding to responding to Government consultations and Parliamentary inquiries, and even letters from Ministers. It will severely reduce the evidence base on which policy decisions would be made, and will cut off a hugely valuable source of independent expert advice for policy-makers. In short, it will be bad for policy-making, bad for the public interest and bad for democracy.

The failure of the Cabinet Office to be upfront about the application of this draconian new regulation to grants to researchers in universities and research institutes means that many of those who will be affected have not yet realised the full implications. However, an official petition that I launched calling for an exemption for universities and research institutes has now gained more than 10,000 signatures, and requires a response from the Government (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/122957>). In addition, I know that many organisations, such as Universities UK and Research Councils UK, which were not originally consulted about the potential impacts of the new clause, have been making the case for an exemption. In addition, Jo Johnson, the Minister for Universities and Science, told the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on 8 March:

“We are in discussions with stakeholders to determine exactly how this might apply to the research base, knowing, as we do, that the research base, scientists and academics make a tremendous contribution to the development of evidence-based policy. We want to put in place an exemption that continues to allow that to be possible within the framework of tight management of public money.”

Hence there is widespread support, among those who are aware of the issue, for an exemption. Given that there is now less than a month until it is due to take effect, I urge you to announce, without delay, that universities and research institutes will be exempt from the new ‘anti-lobbying’ clause. I understand from recent media reports that the Government may seek to use the purdah ahead of the local elections, which begins on 14 April, as an excuse not to make a statement on this issue. However, I hope you will appreciate the importance of the exemption being announced before the clause is due to take effect.

I am copying this letter to Jo Johnson to whom I wrote about this issue on 2 March but have not yet received a reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.E.J. Ward". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letters being larger and more prominent.

Bob Ward

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