

# Bevan Foundation review

ISSUE 13 WINTER 2009 £10



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# Lobbying improves Government decision making

*Robbie MacDuff, chairman of the Association of Professional Political Consultants, makes the case for lobbying in politics.*

Lobbying is legitimate and legal. It actually leads to better government, because the decisions made by government and by civil servants are significantly enhanced by vested interests outside the political sphere that are able to engage with government in well-informed dialogue.

What happens in this country is not comparable to what goes on in the US, which is allegedly well-regulated. We don't have the payments regime they have, the donations to parties' fighting funds. We have a completely different system, one that is far more transparent than they have in the States.

When it comes to hospitality, the sensitivity on the part of the public is down to the politicians of the day. It is not down to lobbying. It is up to Parliament to introduce policy and if the policy decides that Westminster committees cannot go abroad on fact-finding trips, then so be it.

There seems to be a view out there that all lobbyists do is wine and dine. The bulk of what we do is face-to-face, usually workmanlike meetings in Parliament that last just one hour. It's easy for the populist media to bandwagon-jump on all the criticism that there is of lobbying industry, particularly from Paul Flynn and PASC. But the code we adhere to specifically forbids extravagance.

The measure of focus on this small area of what we do seem to us to be disproportionate. Paul Flynn's view appears to be based on two things: that all lobbyists are there to make big bucks; and that there are people in lobbying who are inappropriate for that activity. Our view is that hiring us is rather like hiring a lawyer. We are of considerable use to big clients who don't have the time to understand the processes of government. In that instance, we are simply fulfilling our role as consultants.