UK Government Anti-Lobbying Clause

Press Release from The Royal Society of Edinburgh

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) has made a call that urges the UK Government to suspend the introduction of the new “anti-lobbying” clause and enter into an open consultation on the issue.

Imposing a restrictive ‘catch all’ anti-lobbying clause as a standard condition of all UK Government grants is a disproportionate and excessive reaction to a very few questionable instances of organisations using public funds inappropriately for lobbying. The clause is a ‘sledgehammer to crack a nut’.

As the Scottish Government has indicated it will not introduce similar measures, the RSE is not directly affected by this clause, but it could affect cross border charities and Scottish Universities and Research Institutes that receive funding from the UK Research Councils.

The RSE is concerned that the introduction of this clause will constrain researchers throughout the UK from providing evidence to inform the policy development process and will be of detriment to well-informed policy making.

The clause was announced by the Cabinet Office in February, following a series of reports in recent years by the Institute of Economic Affairs calling for a restriction of this type. The academic and charitable sectors were not consulted in advance of the announcement, nor it seems was Parliament.

Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, the astrophysicist and President of the RSE commented, “. This clause inhibits freedom of speech and open dialogue and suggests the Government does not acknowledge that there is expertise outside Westminster which it could and should use. Sheltering behind such an undemocratic device destroys confidence in the UK Government, making it look weak and fearful.”

Good decision making in Government and Parliament depends crucially on having access to objective and proven evidence. There are many valuable
sources of such information outwith the UK Government offered by a wide range of organisations on a non-partisan basis. Some receive part of their funding from public sources.

Parliament and the Select Committees in particular need to be engaged in considering how this proposed change would impact on the effectiveness of their work.

ENDS.

Notes to Editors

The Royal Society of Edinburgh

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is Scotland’s National Academy, established in 1783 by Royal Charter and is also a Scottish Charity. As part of its Royal Charter, the RSE is committed to the Advancement of Learning and Useful Knowledge. The RSE seeks to fulfil this Charter requirement in many ways, including providing advice on public policy issues to: the Scottish Government and Parliament; the UK Government and Parliament; and to the European Commission and Parliament. This advice is always offered on a non-partisan basis and is based on the expertise and knowledge of our diverse Fellowship.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh is not directly affected by this policy decision, as it is not one of the national academies funded by the UK Government.

Further Information

A copy of the full submission is enclosed as an attachment. For any further information please contact: Hannah Smith, PR and Marketing Officer on 0131 240 2792 hsmith@royalsoced.org.uk, or Bristow Muldoon, Head of Policy Advice on 0131 240 2787 bmuldoon@royalsoced.org.uk.